

Twentieth Century Beginnings:

Adelaide's Community Legal and Mediation Services

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the beginnings of the community legal centre (CLC) movement in South Australia in 1976. The legal centres have always aimed to provide access to legal advice and representation for people who could not otherwise afford them and were not eligible for support from the various other legal aid agencies then in existence. They were, at least in their early history, responsible to community-based managed committees, often comprising representatives of local residents, community organisations, and law firms as well as relevant government agencies and staff. Often they were elected at annual general meetings.

The first community legal centre was arguably the Aboriginal Legal Rights Centre which started in Redfern Sydney in 1972. Part-time advisory services operated from the Melbourne Citizens Advice Bureau and Monash University in that year. However it is generally recognised that the first community legal centre offering services to the general public was Fitzroy Legal Service in Melbourne. It opened in the town hall basement after a public meeting in December 1972.

The Whitlam Government established the Australian Legal Aid Office in 1973 intending it to provide a network of shopfront law offices around the country. This model did not eventuate, however, and after the change of government in 1975 reliance was placed instead on state-based legal aid commissions. It was apparent that community legal centres were needed to 'fill the gaps' in service offered by commissions, particularly in low-income areas.

The first community-based legal advisory services in Adelaide were operated generally one-night-per-week by students, recent graduates and volunteer solicitors at community centres set up for other reasons in the western suburbs. The host centres had been made possible by funding from the Whitlam Government "Australian Assistance Plan" (AAP) which supported pilot community development projects in a number of regions around the country including the western suburbs of Adelaide. Collectively the legal advisory services became known as the "Western Adelaide Legal Aid Centres" and shared some volunteer and paperwork resources. The Western Adelaide Regional Council for Social Development, which implemented the AAP, and the South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) applied for funding for a full-time law centre in 1976 but without success.

In the year 1979, when Parks Legal Service was the first Adelaide CLC to receive funding through the newly-established state Legal Services Commission, the total amount of Commonwealth CLC funding was \$175,000, distributed amongst 23 centres nationally. In South Australia, as grants became available to other centres, the funding was administered by the Legal Services Commission which required extensive annual applications. Funding was allocated under Commonwealth guidelines since there were no state guidelines as such for the program as there were in some other states. A "summit" meeting was held between CLC, Legal Services Commission and Attorney-General's Department representatives in June 1984 to discuss a rationale for state funding. The need for the State to support administrative resources for the CLCs was accepted on the basis that most of the "administrative burden" fell under state law.

By 1991/92 the number of centres nationally had grown to around 75 and they attracted total funding of \$5,203,000. That year six of the seven generalist centres in SA received \$130,000 in annual funding and Kilburn, the newest \$75,000. Then in late 1995 a major increase of \$160m in federal funding for legal aid was announced by the Prime Minister to improve access to justice, resulting in some additional programs in the CLC sector such as the Women's Legal Service.

In the late-1990s, and particularly after the change in government at the Commonwealth level, government funding policy changed from funding legal centres to "purchasing" legal services. Funding for new centres was then directed primarily at regional areas of likely need.

Legal centres

Bowden Brompton

The Bowden Brompton Community Legal Service began in 1976 as a volunteer part-time legal advice service associated with the Bowden Brompton Community Group and community centre. Located in the inner north-western suburbs of Adelaide it took its name from two very small adjacent suburbs Bowden and Brompton which were within the municipality of Hindmarsh. Originally the suburb of Bowden comprised a large number of small cottages accommodating many of the people who worked for the residents of North Adelaide. Over the next hundred years or so clay mining and then industry had occupied a large proportion of available land. The decision to place the major intersection of the proposed metropolitan freeway system (the Metropolitan Adelaide Transport Scheme or MATS) in Brompton severely depressed property values making it an area of low-cost housing and attracting squatters.

Towards the end of the Vietnam War students from the Social Action group at the University of Adelaide became involved in developing educational and recreational opportunities, particularly for children in the area. The Hindmarsh Action Group was formed in November 1972 with the Hindmarsh Council, Community Welfare and Good Neighbour Council. In a couple of years and with local residents they set up a school holiday program, food co-op, women's shelter, housing service and tutoring scheme. The organisation became known as the Bowden Brompton Community Group. Law students discussed the possibility of "store-front" legal aid like Fitzroy in Melbourne. With the support of several volunteer lawyers the service commenced in 1976 as a one-night-a-week advisory service initially in premises at 76 West Street Brompton then in 1977 at 62 Gibson Street.

When the Parks service was funded in 1979 the Service applied for funding as well and was successful in attracting an initial grant of \$1,000. The next year \$4,000 was secured for a part-time staffed legal service and the following year this was increased to \$12,000. This would offer advice, representation and community legal education. The Group moved to Fifth Street and then to a former butcher shop building at 131 Coglein Street for what was to be a number of years. In late 1982 the management committee decided to offer the service full-time and apply for increased funding. The full-time service opened in March 1983 at 131 Coglein Street telephone 469394 and was immediately very much in demand. Initially, and for some years, advice and assistance was provided only for residents of the municipalities of Hindmarsh and Woodville. The Service became incorporated in May 1983.

The early casework of the Service was focussed to a large extent on the needs of youth in the area, leading to extensive appearances in the then Children's Court and Magistrates Courts. Community legal education programs were offered at a number of youth groups and schools. Classes in formal letter writing were popular with recent arrivals from non-English speaking countries. Developing resources such as the booklet "Cycling and the Law", launched by Transport Minister Gavin Kenneally in August 1988, became a feature of the Service. Staff also played a central role in organising the 1987 CLC National Conference in Hobart at a time when the National Association had no staff resources.

Due to cramped conditions in the Coglein Street community centre the Legal Service moved to more spacious offices in the Uniting Church Mission at 20 Third Street in July 1988. When in mid 1990 a new Bowden Brompton Community Centre was completed at 19 Green Street, Brompton, in renovated formerly industrial premises, the Legal Service moved into offices at the front of the building.

In 1992 the catchment area for the Service was broadened to include West Torrens, Thebarton and Henley and Grange council areas.

In April 1995 funding was provided for a 6-month pilot Children's Access Program for children whose parents were experiencing difficulty in managing handovers for contact visits. In January 1996 Commonwealth funding of \$100,000 was provided for a four-year pilot program offering court-ordered supervised contact as well. By June 1996 70 families were using the service for handovers and 10 for supervised visits. An interdisciplinary Advisory Board was established to guide management of the program, which operated from the premises of the former Hindmarsh Primary School. In the current century the Service has been continued by Relationships Australia.

With the re-structuring of the CLC sector in 2001 the Bowden Brompton service closed and Westside Lawyers moved into nearby offices in Hindmarsh to service the western suburbs.

Parks

The Whitlam Government made available large sums of money for expenditure on community facilities, especially in disadvantaged areas. The "Parks" area in the north-eastern of Adelaide had a high percentage of people born in non-English speaking countries and people on low incomes. It had the highest percentage of Housing Trust and private rentals in the state. With the collaboration of state and local government as well, a large complex was established in Angle Park to support residents in the fourteen suburbs roughly falling in the triangular area between Torrens Road, Port River Expressway and Churchill Road. It included a library, sports centre, high school and relevant government service branch offices.

The forerunner of the Parks Legal Service was a volunteer-based service at a drop-in centre for unemployed youth. The newly-created Legal Services Commission secured funds for the establishment of the Parks Legal Service in 1979. In 1981-2 funding support comprised \$23,000 from the State and \$12,000 from the Commonwealth. The Service was initially staffed by a solicitor, a paralegal and a secretary with offices within the Community Centre complex at Trafford Street Angle Park telephone 268 5666. It was incorporated in 1980 and has received Commonwealth Government funding ever since.

A large proportion of the work of the Service in the early days was in the area of criminal law. Staff prioritised cases where legal aid from the Legal Services Commission would not generally be available such as traffic and drink-driving cases. Although most matters likely to involve trials were referred out, some trials were undertaken by the staff solicitor to assist professional development. There was also high demand for family law but most matters requiring assistance were generally referred to private solicitors. An advice and referral service was provided by volunteer solicitors on Monday evenings and there were “Do It Yourself” divorce classes. Representatives from the Office of the Public Trustee attended once a month to prepare and advise on wills. The Service staff and volunteers also had a high level of involvement with various other services located at the Community Centre. From 1990 a specialist child support program was also offered.

The Parks Legal Service was one of the original members of the South Australian Council of Community Legal Services (SACCLS) and played a significant role in its development and project work thereafter. It applied jointly with Bowden Brompton CLS for initial funding for the Neighbourhood Dispute (later Western Mediation) Service in 1985. It developed the “Motor Vehicle Accident Kit” to assist people to handle their own claims for property damage. And it played a pivotal role in developing and distributing the South Australian version of the “Streetwise” comics about various legal issues for young people. First produced at Redfern Law Centre in Sydney these comics covered topics such as rights on arrest, drugs, sexual abuse, AIDS, STDs and social security. The first edition “Saturday Night” was launched by Hon. Barbara Wiese, Minister for Youth Affairs in September 1986. It caused a good deal of controversy as it was accused of depicting illegal and anti-social behaviour and was debated in Parliament.

In late 1995 funding was made available for a specialist litigation lawyer position within the law centres and was integrated into the Parks centre. The focus of the project was to be representation in contested debt, employment, tenancy and immigration matters.

In the mid-90s plans were underway for a significant redevelopment of the residential catchment area so as to create a much higher proportion of privately-owned housing stock. This was expected to reduce demand for services designed to support public tenants. The Parks Legal Service developed and supported a regional service in the upper Spencer Gulf region, based in Port Pirie. Known initially as the Iron Triangle Legal Service it had offices at 72 Ellen Street.

The Service changed its name to West Side Lawyers after the regionalisation of community legal centres. It then moved to the former Hindmarsh Post Office building at 212 Port Road and currently has an office on Commercial Road Port Adelaide.

Norwood

The CLC at Norwood was the creation of an organisation called SHAUN (Self Help for Adult Unemployed of Norwood). SHAUN began as a result of a public meeting called by then Premier and local MP Don Dunstan in August 1977 to gauge support for a scheme to support the ‘forgotten’ unemployed in the area – adults. Initially funded under the State Unemployment Relief Scheme (SURS), within a couple of years it had direct funding and an independent management committee. David Baker was employed as administrator and coordinator, though

the service was very dependent on volunteers. It offered classes in a range of skills such as photography, car and bicycle maintenance, welding, fitness and art, but there was an appreciable need for legal advice.

A legal advice service first called “Norwood Legal Service” was initiated on 14 October 1979 with volunteer advisors. Free legal advice was provided on Tuesday evenings in the SHAUN office at 260 The Parade Norwood phone 332 7827. A general meeting at SHAUN was held on 26 March 1980 to discuss future directions and inviting people interested in becoming members of a management committee for the Legal Service. It already had sufficient numbers of volunteer lawyers and law students to cover the roster. Publicity cards were printed featuring information about people’s rights if stopped by the police. The name was changed to “Norwood Community Legal Service”. An application was then made for funding for a full-time community lawyer and this proved successful.

The Service moved to 21 Charles Street Norwood telephone 42 2208 in the early 80s. Later it took up residence in the basement of the Norwood Library Building at 110 The Parade, in the middle of a major inner-eastern suburban shopping strip.

The catchment area of the Service was not as well-defined as those of the other generalist CLCs and at times it assisted clients from the wider metropolitan region. Although its clientele was not limited to people on Centrelink benefits, it developed a special expertise in social security matters. In the mid-80s it set up a group of volunteer advocates to assist people with appeals to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. The Service also took a leading role in the development of an information booklet on strata titles and the law. In the decades since the booklet has been expanded and published by the Legal Services Commission. The work of a couple of specialist financial counsellors was another outstanding feature of the work of the Legal Service. Staff were also actively involved in the establishment of the Para Districts and Women’s Legal Services and the Welfare Rights Centre.

The Legal Service always enjoyed the active support of a number of high-profile lawyers which enabled it to take on significant matters. The first staff solicitor, for example, was supported to provide, in a private capacity, instructions to counsel for South Australian members of the Australian Nuclear Veterans' Association in the McClelland Royal Commission.

At the end of 1993 funding for a specialist disability discrimination legal service was announced. This arm of the Service was launched early in 1994 as a project of Norwood Community Legal Service. It was staffed by a legal and a lay advocate. Before long the Service was instrumental in bringing a highly significant and successful case against the State Government over the accessibility of new buses.

On 19 June 2000 the Service board formally decided to change the name to Roma Mitchell Legal Service in honour of the pioneering Supreme Court judge and later Governor.

Thebarton

The Thebarton Community Legal Service was a volunteer-based advisory service which became an original member of SACCLS in 1980. It closed about 1983. Later the manse of the St James

Anglican Church was converted into a “Neighbourhood House” in 1992 and a free legal advice became available there for a period.

Noarlunga

The Noarlunga Community Legal Service was initiated by a community lawyer from Melbourne who was visiting the area in 1981 and noticed the rapid development of public housing in the southern region. Also of interest was that the surrounding federal electorate was then apparently the most marginal in the country. At the time there was no Legal Services Commission office in the area and the nearest community legal centre was in Thebarton, some 30km away. Collaboration with staff at the Noarlunga Community Information Centre and with the Noarlunga Community Services Forum promoted interest in applying for funding from then Attorney-General Trevor Griffin. This was supported by the Legal Services Commission.

In late 1982 the Commonwealth announced that it was willing to provide \$20,000 for 1983, subject to additional funding being provided by the State. While in the smaller amount of \$7,000, this was soon forthcoming. By way of comparison, the total amount of Commonwealth funding for the four existing legal centres in South Australia in 1982 was \$42,000. The comparative lack of funding for these other centres was an issue at the National Community Legal Centres Conference at Mylor in September.

A public meeting was advertised in the “Southern Times” to elect a management committee. Several people from the Forum were elected to the Management Committee. It first met on the 6th October. The first AGM was held a fortnight later. The Service opened at the Dyson Road Community Centre 88 Dyson Road phone 384 9711 in early 1983.

Much of the work of the Centre was family and criminal law. The work of lawyers specialising in those areas was greatly extended with the addition of a child support worker and solicitor from the late eighties and the return of the Mediation Service in 1991. From 1990 a Child Support Program was offered with funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department and included an advocate and specialist lawyer. The catchment area of the Service was the southern Fleurieu region from the southern suburbs to Victor Harbor and Kangaroo Island.

The Service moved from its original location in Dyson Road to new premises in a shopping area at 40 Beach Road Christies Beach in early 1993 with an opening on 26 March. It was renamed Southern Community Justice Centre in 2002. Currently it operates from premises within the Colonnades Shopping Centre.

Marion

Following the commencement of the Noarlunga Community Legal Service in 1983 it became apparent that there was no community legal centre office between Christies Beach and Brompton as the Thebarton service had effectively closed by that time. There was appreciable demand for casework from other areas of the western suburbs to the south. In October 1984 representatives of the Mitchell Park “Voice” community newspaper consulted staff of the Bowden Brompton service about the possibility of setting up a new law centre in their community. Together they formulated an application for funding for a service in Marion which proved to be successful in attracting a \$30,000 initial grant in December 1985. Premises were

secured at the Marion Community House on the corner of Morphett and Oaklands Roads in Warradale phone 294 9268. The Service was opened at these offices on St Patrick's Day 17 March 1986 by June Appleby MP for Hayward and attended by Ralph Jacobi MHR representing the Commonwealth Government as the main funding body.

The Marion area was noted for its demographic with a larger-than-usual seniors component. The Legal Service casework reflected this to some degree, with a significant demand for family law, social security and wills. By the mid-90s the Service employed a full-time manager, one full-time and one part-time lawyer and a part-time administrative services officer. The Service also enjoyed the support of a quite large number of professional volunteers and students.

The Marion Service decided in the mid-90s to develop a family mediation service. It also took over the School Peer Mediation program from the Western Mediation Service in 1997 and developed a Peer Mediation Training Kit which was launched by Attorney-General Trevor Griffin on 21 November 1997 at Gilles Street Primary School.

The Service was to continue until the re-structuring of the sector in 2001. After this the new regional Southern Community Legal Centre, formerly Noarlunga Community Legal Service, operated a northern branch office from the same premises for some time.

Para Districts

In May 1985 a group called Self Help at Salisbury Inc. contacted the Legal Services Commission about establishing a CLC in their region in the near future. They proposed to conduct a survey of local residents at local shops, schools and other meeting places and interviewing relevant local services to assess the need for such a service. They were encouraged to contact SACCLS and the steering committee which then formed was supported by staff at Norwood Community Legal Service.

The Service was established in 1990 with State funding and in the following year was expanded with funding from the Commonwealth. The CLC operated from the Little Para House in Elizabeth Vale, generously provided by the Salisbury Council. Thereafter it moved to former bank premises at 26 John Street Salisbury.

By the mid-90s the Service employed a Coordinator (4 days a week), two part-time lawyers, two part-time secretarial workers and two part-time financial counsellors. The financial counselling program, a much-needed service, was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services from 1995. The Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement provided visiting services twice a week. The child support worker from the Parks Legal Service also provided a regular visiting service.

Following an extensive review from 1997 funding for the metropolitan centres was regionalised and reassigned in 2001, resulting in a significant increase in funding for the northern suburbs. The Service then changed its name to Northern Community Legal Service, as recommended in the review.

Kilburn

Early in the operation of the full-time service at Brompton there was noticeable demand for advice and assistance from people living in the inner northern suburbs. The Parks Legal Service

had a catchment area effectively bounded by the northern train line to the east and these people fell outside it. Dedicated Kilburn community activist Tony Ellmers was instrumental in bringing in clients from his neighbourhood. This was an area with a large proportion of public housing tenants and well-recognised legal needs. In these circumstances Bowden Brompton staff and board decided that it was important to help that community establish their own legal service. A local steering committee first met on 20 September 1984. They were assisted in preparing a series of annual funding submissions beginning in late 1984. The first submission was for \$36,000. It was not until some years later that they were finally successful in attracting funding.

Finally in 1992 the Commonwealth announced that this Service would receive funding of \$50,000. A public meeting was held at the Department of Families and Communities office on 12 August to discuss the setting up of a committee which first met a fortnight later. The Service was readily accepted as a member of SACCLS on 8 September. The Service was officially opened by Minister for Justice Senator Michael Tate on 5 February 1993 in its very small shopfront premises at 391a Prospect Road Blair Athol phone 2606474. It was then named Kilburn Enfield Prospect Legal Service.

An initial \$41,000 grant to employ a specialist youth lawyer was obtained in late 1995 with recurrent annual funding set at \$65,000. The Children's and Youth Legal Advocate service was to operate statewide and offer advice, representation and community legal education programs.

The Service moved for a time to Third Avenue Blair Athol, then to a house at 21 May Street Sefton Park. It has since operated from offices at 2/59 Main North Road, Medindie and finally 43 Franklin Street Adelaide.

With an emphasis on assisting low -income people with family law and youth criminal law, this Service went from strength to strength in the ensuing years. To reflect the breadth of its catchment area the name was changed to Adelaide Inner Northern Community Legal Service. In the sector re-structure of 2001 it became, in partnership with the Adelaide Central Mission, the Central Community Legal Service with an inner-northern and eastern suburbs catchment. Today, as the Uniting Communities Law Centre in the city and with a staff of a dozen lawyers, it offers a wide range of specialist and generalist legal services.

Women's Legal Service

The Australian Law Reform Commission report number 69 released in 1994 examined the barriers facing women in gaining access to justice. It recommended that each state have a women's legal centre. A public meeting was held the following year and a committee set up to lobby for funding.

In May 1995 the long-awaited Justice Statement was delivered by the Prime Minister. There was to be a total funding allocation of \$160 million for legal centres nationally. Predominantly this was to be used to fund nine new generalist centres, and women's legal centres in several states including South Australia.

A steering committee was formed to guide the development of the new centre. The WLS was incorporated on 4 October 1995.

In November 1995 Peter Duncan the Parliamentary Secretary to the Commonwealth Attorney-General and a former SA Attorney-General, offered \$250,000 for the establishment of the Women's Legal Service. Ongoing funding would be \$270,000 annually. The grant was provided for under the National Women's Justice Strategy announced in the Justice Statement. The first instalment was paid in February 1996.

The first coordinator started work in April 1996 from an office at 135 Waymouth Street. The staff was to comprise a Coordinator, two solicitors, a community worker and an administrative officer. It developed a roster of volunteer lawyers and had a number of students assist with administrative and reception work as volunteers.

The WLS offered state-wide services. There was an 1800 telephone advice line and a TTY number for hearing-impaired callers. Areas of work covered included family and consumer law, equal opportunity and domestic violence. An indigenous women's domestic violence support service was also developed with the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council. Where possible the WLS used existing women's support networks to optimise the effective provision of casework and educational services.

In 2000 the Service's office moved to 19 Market Street.

Welfare Rights

The establishment of a Welfare Rights Centre specialising in social security law was suggested in a report by SACCLS project officer Francis Regan in March 1985.

Funding for the Welfare Rights Centre was announced in August 1992. For several years the Centre received State funding from the Department of Family and Community Services, but this was lost in 1996-7 leaving \$145,000 in CLC Program funding, representing an approximately 40% reduction in government support. This required some adjustments in the services offered. Staff then comprised a Coordinator, Senior Caseworker and Volunteer Coordinator. Volunteer support from about 40 lawyers and students was estimated at 117 hours per week in the mid-90s.

The Service operated from premises on the fifth floor of 97-99 Pirie Street phone 8223 1338. It also offered a 1800 line to make it accessible to people living in the country, estimated at 15-20% of the clientele. It also seemed to be the first South Australian CLC to use internet resources. Considerable expertise in social security and tenancy law was built by staff and volunteer lawyers and law students. Clients were invariably very vulnerable people who could be terminally ill, systemically abused or mentally impaired and trying to obtain the Disability Support Pension, or people needing financial support to escape domestic violence. Several outreaches were established in regional areas including Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands. A Housing Legal Clinic was also established for homeless people or those at risk. Client assistance typically included representation at the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and negotiation with relevant departmental officers.

The Centre was closed in 2017 after a further major rationalisation of legal centre funding.

Environmental Defenders Office

In August 1991 environmental lawyers interested in establishing a specialist service met with Bowden Brompton staff to discuss premises. In February 1992 the BBCLS Management Committee offered accommodation in their offices. The first meeting was held at the Conservation Centre on 3 April 1992. The Service was accepted as a member of SACCLS on 12 May and launched at Bowden Brompton CLS offices on 4 June 1992. It was initially to operate there each Thursday evening 6-8pm starting one week later. By that time there were already 27 lawyers who were prepared to volunteer their time for the advice roster.

The EDO management committee was elected by members at the Annual General Meeting. In the mid-1990s annual membership fees were \$10 for individuals and \$50 for corporations. There were then around 120 members.

State funding was first provided in July 1994. In late 1995 the Service advertised for an environmental lawyer. Commonwealth funding became available in 1996, and the Service opened from new premises in Halifax Street, Adelaide. It was open five days a week and offered a weekly evening advice session. The staff complement was a full-time lawyer and part-time coordinator assisted by a good number of volunteer solicitors.

The South Australian EDO was part of a national network of comparable services. Its objects were to promote environmental law reform, public education and assisting groups and individuals to access the legal remedies available to them in this area. The Service produced a number of pamphlets which were widely circulated across the state.

Community Mediation Services

Although community mediation has arguably been around in various forms for centuries the modern movement began in the United States towards the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. In 1982 NSW Attorney-General Frank Walker visited the US and was inspired to introduce something similar in his state. A pilot project with three centres was a first step. Legislation then established the Community Justice Centres network which survived in NSW until being dismantled in 2024. A government-based Dispute Resolution Centre was set up in Victoria in 1986 and a similar program in Queensland in 1990. In South Australia, however, the services were to be community-based and part of the CLC network. In the twentieth century there were no restrictions on eligibility for mediation support.

In 1983 the **Norwood Community Legal Service** and SA Institute of Technology Social Work Department studied the feasibility of establishing a dispute resolution service in SA. Community Employment Program funding of \$30,000 was received in April 1984 for a new service. Its aim was to assist in the resolution of disputes between people in ongoing relationships as amicably as possible and without resort to litigation. The Service was strongly supported by local MP Greg Crafter, the Minister for Community Welfare. The two initially-employed mediators were soon assisted by a panel of volunteer mediators. The Service operated from the office at 21 Charles Street and then 110 The Parade.

In the western suburbs the **Neighbourhood Dispute Service** was set up as a collaboration between the Parks Legal Service and the Bowden Brompton Legal Service in May 1986. The original office was at 24 Goodenough Street, Thebarton. The initial staff were employed under the Commonwealth Employment Program until December. After this the casework officer

generously continued in a voluntary capacity while he could afford to do so. In that first year the Service opened over 150 files and responded to over 400 enquiries. On-going funding became available after an evaluation report in 1991 and two staff were employed. The Service changed its name to **Western Mediation Service** in 1995.

Noarlunga Community Mediation Service began in late 1986 with volunteer support as part of the community legal service. The following year it secured Commonwealth employment Program funding for 24 weeks as a pilot service. SA Government funding was granted in 1988 and in 1989 it became separately incorporated as Southern Community Mediation Service.

These three Services formed the South Australian Forum on Mediation (SAFROM) and were joined by the Willunga District Community Mediation Service.

As a result of an Evaluation Report to the State Government by the Community Disputes Resolution Committee in 1991 the three services were then funded under the auspices of the three community legal services at Norwood, Noarlunga and Bowden Brompton. Each Service was to receive annual funding, initially \$56,000. An additional \$45,000 was provided for them to employ a joint Training and Development Officer whose role included mediator training, staff casework support, service development and promotion. This role was supported by a Steering Committee comprising representatives of the three legal centres, though without decision-making authority.

The first joint training for volunteer mediators concluded in July 1992 with 16 participants completing the week-long course. Several other courses followed, including one specifically for country-based volunteers. As a result the Services gained the support of as many as several dozen volunteer sessional mediators across the state

The Community Mediation Services promoted mediation in a number of different ways. They sought to ensure that printed legal information on relevant subject areas such as neighbour, strata title and shared household disputes encouraged people to consider mediation as an alternative to litigation. The current format of “Fences and the Law” and the original of the “Trees and the Law” booklets were originally written by the Training and Development Officer. Numerous radio interviews and several newspaper articles described the work of the Services. The “Sorting Out” school peer mediation program, which began as a project in Mansfield Park in early 1994, was introduced to a large number of schools over the next few years including five high schools. It involved trained students facilitating lunch hour meetings to settle disputes between other students. A part-time trainer was employed at Western Mediation Service for the program. The Mediation Services also hired out equipment to help people do the work to resolve problems themselves: this included extension tree loppers, vacuum/blower devices and anti-barking dog collars.

Casework statistics generally indicated that about one third of matters involved human behaviour, one quarter fences and boundary issues and one sixth tree problems. In 1995/96 the three services dealt with 2,488 ‘new enquiries’ and opened a total of 696 case files – where they had contact with both parties. These resulted in 239 successful or partly successful negotiations and 111 successful or partly successful mediations). In that financial year the total funding for the three Services was \$220,000.

With the restructuring of the CLC sector in 2001 mediation services were to be offered only from a single Community Mediation Service managed by the continuing Noarlunga centre.

SACCLS now CLCSA

The South Australian Council of Community Legal Services (SACCLS) was formed in June 1980 with original members Bowden Brompton, Parks, Norwood and Thebarton. The Council comprised delegates from each of the member CLCs. Spokesperson David Baker said at the time its aim was to attract more government support. At the time the SA centres received less than \$40,000 in total. This was contrasted to the \$50m of government funds being spent on the new High Court building at the time. New CLCs were accepted into membership soon after they started. The constitution was updated in May 1995 to reflect the expanded membership.

From 1983 SACCLS meetings were usually held on a monthly basis. The Council in the twentieth century only had staff for a brief period 1984-5 when Francis Regan was employed part-time as a project officer. Among other things he prepared a report on the feasibility of establishing a SACCLS secretariat, recommending instead support for a new specialist centre. As can be gathered from the above accounts of the early days of the movement in South Australia, staff of the first established centres provided generous hands-on support for the development of new centres in areas of need.

In 1986 a SACCLS sub-committee of CLC lawyers made a submission for funding for a family mediation centre to the Community Employment Program. It was unsuccessful due to there being no suitable participants within the Program.

In mid-1990 a special meeting was held to decide on SACCLS response to the new Social and Community Services (SACS) Award given its expected impact on staffing costs. Opinion was equally divided on whether an exemption should be sought.

Lawyers from two CLCs made extensive submissions to the Senate Cost of Justice hearings on behalf of SACCLS when they were held at Parliament House in Adelaide on 25 and 26 October 1991. A range of interesting proposals were made such as legalising possession for personal use of some prohibited drugs and early localised intervention programs to address domestic violence. SACCLS played a significant role in lobbying for funding support for the CLCs. When the Federal Opposition proposed a \$3.6 cut in CLC funding and \$7.6m cut to legal aid commissions in 1993 SACCLS issued a highly critical press release.

Legal staff from several CLCs collaborated in adapting various editions of "Streetwise" comics and some of the legal information booklets such as "Shared Households and the Law". For several years they offered legal advice in different types of stands at the Royal Show. In late 1994 SACCLS decided to develop a "handbook" with general information about each of its member services. The booklet was printed in 1998 with support from the Law Foundation.

NACLS

At the first national meeting of independent law centres held at Jindabyne in 1979 it was proposed that a national association be set up. Only 14 centres were represented at that

meeting. A National Association to deal with policy issues was soon formed in 1982 as a result of a resolution at the National Conference held at Mylor in SA. State representatives began meeting regularly by telephone link-up from 1984. Several models were proposed for the organisation at the national conference near Canberra that year. The next national conference at Brisbane in 1985 decided to request funds for a secretariat from the Commonwealth. This was declined then, and again when requested after the 1988 conference as well. Centres were then considering levies as a form of funding. Rules for the Association were decided at the Deakin University conference in 1990. The Association eventually incorporated in 1991. Keith Williams from QAILS was appointed as the Association project worker. CLCs were asked to forego a 1.4% levy at source to fund the project. The following April Chris Butler, the Coordinator of the Norwood Legal Service, was appointed as National Representative.