



Media Release

20 August 2015

For immediate release

NSW to lose its International Students' Service after Redfern Legal Centre fails to secure funding.

Redfern Legal Centre (RLC) has announced that it will be forced to close its award winning International Students' legal advice service in September. RLC CEO, Jo Shulman today announced the free state-wide service would not be able to continue after the Centre was unable to secure recurrent funding.

"International students are a vulnerable group, but their unique experience in Australia is often overlooked," said Shulman. The free service was launched in 2011 after Redfern Legal Centre became aware of the lack of help available to international students in Australia. There are currently estimated to be at least 40,000 International Students in NSW who are not receiving assistance for legal issues.

RLC's flagship service provides a one-stop shop approach to integrated specialist legal services addressing commonly faced legal issues such as employment, tenancy, debt, discrimination, domestic violence and immigration. With pro bono support and access to free interpreters, RLC has been able to provide a unique and highly valued service for international students.

The Centre is particularly lauded for its free visa advice, often involving resolving disputes with education providers placing a student's visa status at risk. International students generate a huge \$6 billion economic benefit for NSW. Recent research found that assisting just three students to avoid unduly exiting the system as a result of losing their visa covers the cost of running the entire service. By contrast the service assisted 300 international students over the past 12 months.

"International students often don't have the same ability to navigate Australia's laws and don't know what help is out there for them when they do get in trouble," said International Students solicitor, Nicholas Ngai.

Case study: Our client*, an International Student, fell prey to a dodgy cleaning business proprietor who demanded he register as a contractor rather than as an employee when he was hired as a cleaner. The practice is commonly known as 'sham contracting'. After working for a number of months unpaid, our client was effectively fired without notice and was left with thousands of dollars in unpaid wages. Our client was not aware that he had been exploited under sham contracting until he visited RLC.

"International students are at heightened risk of exploitation due to a lack of knowledge about Australia's laws and protections and an inability through their circumstances, such as financial or language barriers, to access help," said Shulman.

"As a result, we see many international students preyed upon, such as being forced into unlawful employment practices, being paid well below the minimum wage or being forced to live in substandard and unsafe conditions."

"This is a service that advocates and educates. We're really worried about what will happen when this service closes."

***Client is available to be interviewed.**

####

Media Contact: Joanna Shulman, CEO, 9698 7277, 0401 933 789, joanna@rlc.org.au

Clients available for interview, contact Ella Semega-Janneh, Communications Manager, 9698 7277, ella@rlc.org.au