

2 May 2014

MEDIA RELEASE

What will the Federal Budget's 'austerity measures' mean for much needed financial counseling services in our community?

The Federal Government may have put its funding for financial counseling in Australia on the chopping block and we are fearful that the Illawarra will be one of the regions to lose a vital and highly needed service if that happens.

Financial counseling representatives have been trying to reach Minister for Social Services Kevin Andrews about funding under this month's Budget. So far there has been no commitment to the programs and we are concerned that no news is bad news for a service that helps hundreds of people in crisis in the Illawarra.

We currently have four financial counselors, two of whom are employed pursuant to Commonwealth funding agreements. If the Commonwealth cuts its funding we would lose one and possibly both of those staff, including a new position dealing with problem gambling. ILC is the only community legal centre in Australia to have been funded under the 2013 problem gambling initiative, which created 50 positions around the country in high needs areas.

We have asked our local Federal MPs to represent our concerns to the Minister and all have pledged their support for the service.

Financial counseling intersects with a range of social, cultural and health issues for individuals and their families and we see lives derailed by massive debts. Our service gets lives back on track, dealing with the immediate and long-term issues. We negotiate with creditors for realistic repayment plans as well as educate clients on how to manage their finances so they can gain control of their lives.

We join with other financial counselling representatives by calling on Minister Kevin Andrews to safeguard funding for the much-needed financial counseling services in Australia.

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