

# Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau

## A Brief History

The Dandenong Community Advisory Bureau (DCAB) first opened its doors in November 1969, known then as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, the organisation has been working with and assisting the Dandenong community for over 45 years. Initially situated at the old Town Hall, DCAB moved to its current location at the Tom Houlahan Centre on Foster Street East in 2001.

DCAB was "staffed by volunteer workers who were trained to conduct confidential interviews, provide information and referral to appropriate services". The number of volunteers at the Bureau varied from 25 to 30 individuals, these volunteers performed a range of roles within the centre putting in a combined 120 hours each week to the community.

In its first year of service the Dandenong Bureau received 1285 enquiries, by 2009 this figure had increased to over 17,000. DCAB has been administering Emergency Relief since 1983 on behalf of the Department of Social Security. The initial amount allocated to this relief was \$27,000 and by 2009 this amount had increased to \$121,000. During the early 90's the economic downturn saw a vast increase in the number of people seeking the Bureaus services. During this time the Bureau was able to provide over \$40,000 worth of vouchers and small cash payments, this rose to \$60,000 in 1993 that was distributed through Emergency Relief.

In 1986 DCAB with the assistance of local solicitors the bureau was able to offer a unique legal advice service to the Dandenong Community. In addition to providing these services, the Dandenong Bureau also witnessed an increasing need for assistance with completing forms and writing letters on behalf of clients. "This is both as a result of low literacy and English language skills. Volunteers continued to work in a diversity of roles apart from information provision including the Tax Help Program and many administrative functions" The growing migrant population in the area continued to influence the focus of the organisation with 150 different languages identified as being spoken by residents of the Dandenong community.

Mrs Carol Drummond was the dedicated Manager at DCAB for 30 years retiring in 2009 the same time the Bureau celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Carol was known for working in excess of her 20 paid hours each week and her involvement on numerous committees. During her time Carol witnessed that, "many of the people we have seen are in crisis situation...they may be homeless or in situations that are so precarious there is the possibility that they will become homeless, many have mental health issues, are victims of domestic violence, have unpaid bills and credit card debt, have alcohol or drug issues, be unemployed, retrenched, have gambling issues or are experiencing family breakdown". The volunteer staff, have to increasingly deal with these complex needs and respond appropriately with material aid or referral and Carol reminds them, "not to underestimate what each of you gives to the community. The respect and consideration that you give to people who visit the DCAB does make a positive difference in their lives".