

- Staff and mediators of the Community Justice Centres, ladies and gentlemen, it's a pleasure to be here to enjoy morning tea with you.
- The Community Justice Centres, fully funded by the state government and **with its head office in Parramatta**, provides the people of NSW with an important service.
- By offering free mediation and dispute resolution to people with disputes, Community Justice Centres reduces the burden on the courts and helps to create more harmonious communities.
- Last year, the service brought itself even closer to its clients by opening this Community Justice Centres Shopfront on Level 1 of the **Parramatta Justice Precinct**.
- The area where we stand today is a counter service where members of the local community can come and speak face-to-face with experienced Community Justice Centre mediation advisors about their disputes. Disputing parties can get advice about the benefits of mediating with Community Justice Centres. If appropriate, a mediation advisor can begin to make arrangements for the mediation session. This important initiative has significantly improved access to justice and legal services for the local community.
- In addition, Community Justice Centres provides support for the University of Western Sydney's **Parramatta Community Justice Clinic**. It does this by meeting and greeting the Clinic's vulnerable clients who have come for free legal advice dispensed by UWS law

students under the close supervision of practising solicitors from law firms in the Parramatta region.

- I am very encouraged by the latest statistics about the Community Justice Centres service. They show that in the 2009 - 2010 year, Community Justice Centres opened files in relation to almost 5,000 disputes, which is up more than 60% from the previous year. This is a significant achievement.
- In the same year, almost 1800 mediations were conducted, which represents a 7% increase on the previous year.
- Of those mediations, 81% resulted in an agreement (compared to a 79% settlement rate last year). These figures indicate how well each of you have been performing in your various roles.
- With a view to improving things even further, yesterday I put before my Cabinet colleagues some proposed amendments to the *Community Justice Centres Act*. Some of these amendments are technical in nature and do not directly affect you, but others relate to aspects of the day-to-day operation of Community Justice Centres.
- One of the important amendments is about the enforceability of Community Justice Centre mediation agreements. As you know, currently Community Justice Centre mediation agreements are made in 'good faith'. There is a provision in the Act stating that they are not enforceable in court.

- While the terms of agreement are generally honoured by the parties, Community Justice Centres have reported an increasing demand from parties, particularly in court-ordered mediations, to make an agreement that could be enforced in court if necessary.
- The amendment will remove the current provision in the Act preventing the legal enforcement of agreements. I expect this amendment will broaden the appeal of the services provided by Community Justice Centres.
- Another proposed amendment will remove current limitations to the type of services that Community Justice Centres can offer. I am aware that you already perform pre-mediations and provide other conflict management services. Presently the Act limits somewhat the extent to which Community Justice Centres can do this. These limitations are being removed for the avoidance of doubt.
- Another notable amendment is brought in response to the National Mediator Accreditation System, which was introduced across Australia on 1 January 2008. As a Registered Mediator Accreditation Body, the ADR Directorate will be able to offer Community Justice Centres' Mediators the benefit of National Accreditation. This will be a pre-requisite to becoming a Community Justice Centres mediator.
- Rather than having to submit an expression of interest each year, mediators will be appointed to the Community Justice Centres' panel by the Director General on the recommendation of the Director for terms of up to **three** years. This new framework for appointing mediators will also provide an opportunity to review the pay and

conditions of Community Justice Centres mediators with a view to implementing improvements in response to concerns raised by current mediators.

- In closing I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of what you do and thank you for your contribution to the ongoing success of Community Justice Centres.