PIAC scheme helps 50,000 people out of debt

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) has reported helping more than 50,000 homeless people to clear debts related to fines since 2011, through an innovative scheme helping disadvantaged Australians pay off fines through volunteer work and treatment programs.

The Work Development Order (WDO) Scheme was set up in response to PIAC’s 2006 report, Not Such a Fine Thing, as well as a follow-up submission in 2011, Still Not Such a Fine Thing, to the NSW Law Reform Commission Inquiry Into Penalty Notices. Those reports found that homeless people were more likely to receive multiple penalty notices but were less likely to be able to respond within the time limits imposed, leading to spiralling debt.

The WDO scheme enables homeless people to pay off this debt without cash – by instead taking part in education, drug and alcohol treatment, mentoring programs, or volunteer work.

“The Work Development Orders are a really important mechanism for many of our clients, and it has helped people facing homelessness to acquire skills, work experience and educational opportunities while reducing an otherwise crippling debt,” said Roslyn Cook, Managing Solicitor of the Homeless Persons’ Legal Service in Sydney.

“It has been wonderful to see the success of the scheme, thanks to the work of Legal Aid NSW and Revenue NSW in its implementation.”

More than 102,000 WDOs have been approved since the scheme began, resolving $124,756 million in fines, according to Legal Aid NSW. More than $35 million in fines cleared in the year up to March 2019.

Cross-examination
Test your legal knowledge ...

1. An agreement has been signed for Western Australia to join Victoria and NSW under the Legal Profession Uniform Law: true or false?
2. How many registered lawyers are there in NSW (to the nearest thousand)?
3. Who was the presiding judge in Cardinal George Pell’s “Cathedral trial”?
4. How many criminal charges was Cardinal Pell found guilty of in December 2018?
5. What is the name of a joint EU and UN initiative to combat domestic violence in the Pacific region?
6. In what year were women in NSW over the age of 21 allowed to vote?
7. Revelations that Victorian police used criminal defence lawyer Nicola Gobbo as an informant against her own clients came to light in 2018. What was she known as before her identity was revealed?
8. What controversial recommendation was made by a NSW Coroner, following an inquest into six drug-related deaths in March?
9. The marathon criminal trial of Leonard John Warwick, estimated to take six months, has been stayed. Why?
10. What is the name of the Suits character that Meghan Markle played before she became the Duchess of Sussex?

Answers on page 65