

Report of the Management Committee of the Barristers' Benevolent Association

Every year there are barristers who encounter personal misfortune or require some form of assistance from the Benevolent Association in order to overcome a major problem. Sudden deaths, serious illness, accident, mental illness, cancers, suicides, HIV/AIDS, alcoholism, families of deceased members who have some need and serious financial misfortune are all problems which have been addressed by the Barristers' Benevolent Association over the last few years.

The association can respond to calls for assistance without formality and without delays. There are no formal applications, forms, waiting periods, means tests or other predetermined administrative requirements. There have been times when assistance has been provided on the same day as information about a problem became known.

The assistance given is generally financial, but it is not limited to money. Arrangements have been made for legal assistance, for independent psychiatric assessment, for negotiating housing, negotiating with banks, preparing financial position statements, or dealing with other aspects of members' financial problems and intervening with creditors where that becomes necessary.

Every aspect of the operation of the Benevolent Association, from the donations made to the association through notification that a member is in difficulty, assessing and providing assistance is an expression of the collegiate nature of the life of a group of independent individuals collectively operating as the Bar.

In the financial year 2005-2006 the Management Committee approved seven grants (totalling \$83,000). One new loan totalling \$8,000 was made. No loans were waived in 2005-2006.

Information that a member is in difficulty can come from any source. The most common source of information is from barristers who are aware that a floor member is in difficulty. Very often clerks will make contact, but sometimes family members will make an approach, either directly to a member of the Bar Council or to the executive director. This contact can take the form of a telephone call or letter to the executive director or a Bar councillor, and is treated with the utmost confidentiality.

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