**Summary of Achievements in 2015**

**Working groups**

**Prisoners Forum – Chair Richard Funston**

This year the Working Group has considered issues around:

* Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody
* Lawyer/Client Communications, particularly AVL and Telephone Facilities
* Work and Development Orders in Prisons
* Calls from Prisoners to Legal Services, particularly LawAccess and Legal Aid
* Amendment to the Migration Act’s good-character provisions and inmates are receiving letters from the Department of Immigration requiring visa-holders to respond within 28 days before their visa is revoked.
* Post-Release Transport Assistance in Regional and Remote New South Wales and the formation of a sub-group to address the issue of the lack of transport options for defendants/inmates released on bail by the court or released from prison.
* Prisoners Legal Information Portal including learning that the portal is not available in the GEO run gaols at Parklea and Taree. The Forum wrote to Peter Severin (Commissioner, Corrective Services) to request that Parklea and Taree gaols provide inmates access to the portal.
* Aboriginal Court Diversion Program.

**Fines and Traffic Law – Chair Andrew Taylor**

This year the Working Group has considered issues around:

* Work and Development Orders – particularly around the pilot by Victims Services regarding enforcement of Restitution Orders by SDR and the use of WDOs in Prisons
* The new mandatory alcohol interlock laws which commenced on 1 February 2015 and access to financial assistance for disadvantaged people.
* Drivers licence reforms in response to the Driver Licence Disqualification Reform Report
* Funding for disadvantaged people to access their Birth Certificates, particularly Indigenous people living in remote areas.

**Education Act Prosecutions – Chair Annmarie Lumsden**

This year the Working Group has been active in meeting with various stakeholder representatives involved in Education Act Prosecutions and sharing information amongst WG members of outcomes. Key achievements this year have included:

* A paper was prepared and circulated to the WG with details about the range of Commonwealth and State initiatives to address truancy and non-attendance at school.
* Statistics regarding Education Act Prosecutions are being mapped against the locations of Home School Liaison Officers (HSLOs) and Aboriginal School Liaison Officers (ASLOs) to determine whether HSLOs and other outreach services correlate with the number of EA/CSO applications.
* Legal Aid and panel practitioners have been informed that grants of aid are available for Education Act Prosecution matters
* Meetings with the Children’s Court and Local Court Executive Officers
* Meetings with Department of Education Legal team who now provide Legal Aid NSW with email notifications of upcoming EA and CSO court proceedings to a central mail box. Legal Aid then notifies relevant legal aid duty lawyers and panel practitioners to ensure parents and children are represented during court proceedings.
* Collecting case studies from lawyers and Magistrates to assist in identifying ongoing issues and addressing these with relevant stakeholders.

**Groups reporting to NLAF**

**Learning and Development Group – Alastair McEwin, CLCNSW**

As well as keeping members informed about internal learning and development opportunities happening across legal assistance services the Learning and Development Group considered two key issues – mental health in the workplace and what works when delivering workplace learning and development. Some highlights for members included:

* CLCNSW received additional funding under the NPA to support capacity building initiatives, including exploring administrative efficiencies for the sector;
* LawAccess has revamped its internal induction training for new staff and regularly runs in-house training sessions inviting in the range of services which may assist LawAccess staff with their referrals. Training sessions for staff working in the justice sector are also regularly held at their offices;
* Legal Aid has been focusing on developing internal ‘just in time’ training modules delivering information in small bites;
* LIAC has been focusing on training local Court staff throughout the state.

**Legal Information Referral Forum (LIRF) – Jane Kenny, Law and Justice Foundation**

At LIRF meetings this year members heard from the following speakers:

* Marissa Sandler, a lawyer with the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS), who spoke about issues and support services for parents with an intellectual disability in the care and protection system in NSW.
* Sophie Wiesner, Director and Teri Calder, Impact Producer, about the ‘Call me Dad’ documentary - a story about men who have perpetrated or are at risk of perpetrating family violence which was screened on ABC in November.
* Margaret Di Nicola, the Tenants Union (TU) Boarding Houses project officer, who provided an overview of the legal information and referral strategies that the TU has put in place to reach this group in the community, who experience many legal problems and are unlikely to access legal assistance on their own.
* LawAccess regarding their new website which is divided up into 4 key areas:
  + My legal problem is about…(replaces LawAccess online)
  + Representing yourself (replaces LawAssist)
  + LawPrompt (restricted resource for LawAccess staff and CLC and Legal Aid lawyers who are subscribed)
  + Corporate information
* Reaching communities – using community broadcasting to provide legal information. Three speakers provided information on this topic.
  + Emma Couch, Member Services Officer, Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) – Community Broadcasting and how you can use it.
  + Diana Bernard, Manager, Education, Promotion & Special Projects, The Aged Care Rights Service (TARS), “Borrowers Beware”
  + Jane Brock, Executive Officer, Immigrant Women’s Speakout Association (IWSA): Forced and Servile Marriages radio plays.

The LIRF has also been hosting the **Financial Hardship Working Group**in collaboration with the Legal Aid CLSD program. Membership is drawn from CLCs, programs within Legal Aid NSW, LawAccess NSW, many of the Ombudsman services and financial counsellors. From their meeting in May a letter was sent to ACMA outlining the barriers that people living in remote communities face in accessing, using and benefiting from the Do Not Call register, and suggesting some ways to remove those barriers.

**Co-operative Legal Services Delivery (CLSD) Program – Jenny Lovric, Legal Aid**

At the December meeting of the CLSD Program it was reported that the following identified legal needs/emerging and/or systemic issues had been raised across CLSD Program regions over the year:

* Housing: concern about anti-social behaviour amendments/3 strikes policy and disproportionate effect in remote areas where short time frames for appeals, and no easy access to advice. Comes into effect in January 2016 but Housing NSW already threatening “strikes”; Repairs, maintenance and arrears; Commonwealth rental rebates
* Care & protection: “informal” removals means lessened opportunity for Legal Aid assistance if not notified of Court proceedings, especially in remote areas where no ALS or Legal Aid in-house presence.
* Identity documents: note Pathfinders received funding under PM&C Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding to provide Birth Certificates in Aboriginal communities. However, the criteria is unclear and appears to be limited to education-related needs for young people. See http://www.pathfinders-aus.org/projects/aboriginal-birth-certificate-project/
* Ongoing demand for wills in Aboriginal communities.
* Consumer issues: training college scams, consumer leases, funeral insurance (note ASIC Report and media coverage), often targeting Aboriginal communities
* WDOs in prisons: push-back from Corrections across NSW to allow inmates to do in-prison activities on WDOs.
* LawAccess NSW statistics noted with concern, concern that people in remote areas cannot afford to call LawAccess from mobiles when longer wait times.
* Driver licensing offences: multiple offences, cost of Interlock devices

**Kerry Wright**

**NLAF Project Manager**

**December 2015**