

Civil law outreach to prisoners: what works?

Good working relationships are the key to success

- Develop relationships with staff at the prison:
 - Meet (regularly) with management, welfare and educational staff of the prison.
 - Offer to provide information sessions to education and welfare staff about your service.
 - Facilitate or offer to provide training and information to welfare and education staff about identifying legal problems of their prisoner clients.
- Develop relationships with prisoners (potential clients):
 - Visit prisons regularly to build trust and familiarity between the legal service and the prisoners.
 - Combine CLE and 'legal advice clinics' for prisoners. CLE sessions followed by 'advice clinics' are an effective and efficient way of engaging with prisoners.
 - Attend information days or pre release expos at the prison.

Work in partnership with other stakeholders

- Approach other local organisations about partnerships:
 - Consider public and private legal service providers.
 - Consider non legal service providers who may be able to assist prisoners e.g. financial counsellors.
 - Think outside the square – partnerships can take different forms:
 - alternate legal visits to prisons; or
 - one partner delivers CLE and provides advice and the other accepts warm referrals to take on case work.

Don't reinvent the wheel – share existing resources

- Consider ways to share and update resources with other legal services.
- Use existing CLE resources (e.g. 'Back on Track' DVD collection produced by Legal Aid NSW).
- Use existing sample letters / authorities to release information.

Acknowledgements

This 'tip sheet' was developed on the basis of the ideas raised during the service planning forum about civil law outreach to prisons that formed part of the Legal Aid NSW seminar on civil law issues and prisoners (25.310).

In 2009, the NLA Forum Prisoners Working Group (subgroup on legal needs of prisoners) undertook a survey of legal assistance providers for the purposes of mapping the provision of civil law services to prisoners. The information in the prison profiles is based on the results of that survey.

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