

### Highlights Report March 2016

This newsletter summarises the activities of the NSW Legal Assistance Forum (NLAF) during the period January to March 2016 including reports to the NLAF Plenary meeting in March.

#### New NLAF Chair

The NLAF is pleased to announce the appointment of a new Chair, **Nassim Arrage** (pictured). Nassim is also Chair of Community Legal Centres NSW and Principal Solicitor of Central Coast Community Legal Centre. Nassim has been a member of the NLAF Executive and Plenary for a number of years alongside Alastair McEwin as the CLCNSW representatives. We thank Bill Grant (retiring Chair) for his years of leadership of the NLAF.



#### Website

The NLAF Project Manager has been busy revitalising the [NLAF website](#) with weekly news updates on issues affecting the legal assistance sector. The Website also contains quarterly reports tabled at NLAF Plenary meetings, links to relevant websites and useful resources relating to NLAF priorities.

#### Working Groups

The Prisoners Forum was informed about the Department of Justice (DoJ) AVL Project working with stakeholders to ensure the AVL system accommodates their needs and ongoing demands due to the current high prison population. A Legal Aid worker is on secondment to DoJ representing legal assistance services in the consultation and design processes associated with the Project. Legal Aid and Law Access are working together on a new strategy to manage the high volume of calls received daily from prisoners by both agencies. The Legal Aid strategy aims to build on changes to inmate calls implemented in 2014 to further streamline inmate communications through effective triage so that Legal Aid focuses on answering calls relating to its core business. Law Access now have a separate team answering prisoner calls to ensure calls from the general public are answered quicker. Corrective Services will be assisting in communicating new phone call procedures to prisoners, particularly on how best to contact their private lawyer.

The **Fines and Traffic Law Working Group** received an update on the introduction of the Mandatory Alcohol Interlock Program into NSW which commenced in February 2015, particularly the uptake of options for people who are financially disadvantaged. Guidelines for advising clients about the Interlock Program and financial assistance options are on the [RMS website](#). To access financial support an application needs to be made by the offender to the RMS, which is referred to the Salvation Army for a financial hardship assessment. These assessments are reviewed every three months. The Working Group was also informed about new Corrective Services Work and Development Order guidelines which will ensure all prisoners with fines debt are given the opportunity to work these off whilst in prison.

The **Education Act (EA) Prosecutions Working Group** has established systems with the Department of Education legal team so that EA matters are now notified to a central Legal Aid contact when listed. Legal Aid then advises the relevant lawyer to ensure parents and children are receiving legal assistance. In addition bulletins have been distributed to Duty List Coordinators to ensure lawyers are aware of the Legal Aid Grants policy guidelines for Education Act matters for both Compulsory Schooling Orders and Prosecutions.

**The NLAf was also informed about the work of the Sydney West Legal Services Group** established in 2008 and coordinates collaborative service planning and provision in Western Sydney. Members of the group include Legal Aid NSW, Mt Druitt and Area Community Legal Centre, Hawkesbury Nepean Community Legal Centre, LawAccess NSW, NSW Local Courts, Women's Domestic Violence Court Assistance Scheme, Ashurst, Penrith Disability Resource Centre and Salvos Legal. The group is currently reviewing its membership. The SWLSG meets on a quarterly basis with the next meeting scheduled for 6 April 2016. Matthew Greenaway from Penrith Legal Aid NSW coordinates the group and can be contacted on 4725 4604 or at [matthew.greenaway@legalaid.nsw.gov.au](mailto:matthew.greenaway@legalaid.nsw.gov.au).

## **Intersectoral groups reporting to NLAf**

### **1 Learning and Development Group – convened by CLCNSW**

Charmaine Mumbulla from Legal Aid NSW attended the March meeting and presented on the use of multimedia in professional development, particularly “pop-ups”, which she describes as the “poor man’s video” – that is, powerpoint presentations that use static images and music in a creative way to tell a story. They are primarily used as an internal communication tool, however, anyone can create this type of presentation for their training purposes. Although they are lower cost in terms of not requiring specialised equipment, they do require someone who knows what they are doing, from where to legally access music and images, and the time to put it all together to make an effective presentation that achieves the aim. Members reported on new training initiatives at their organisations, including:

- **CLCNSW:** Laurel Draffen is working in a new role that combines the previous sector development role with accreditation.
- **LawAccess NSW:** Continues to evolve a busy and informative training program for staff that covers legal topics, referral organisations and self-care.
- **LIAC:** Continues to provide training around NSW for both public library and NSW Courts staff on using the LIAC service.
- **PIAC:** Continues to offer both standard and customised training on public interest law and advocacy.

### **2 Legal Information and Referral Forum (LIRF) – convened by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW**

At the LIRF March meeting presentations were made by the **Financial Rights Legal Centre** regarding their new online self-help tool which generates sample letters for consumers experiencing disputes with financial service providers (<http://financialrights.org.au/sample-letters/>). Also the **State Library of NSW** regarding using social media to get out legal information to the broader community and the various social media platforms that LIAC uses to reach different audiences with legal information - Tumblr, Twitter, Pinterest and YouTube.

Newly produced legal information resources and initiatives were discussed including:

**Australian Pro Bono Centre** - new website, which can be found at <http://probonocentre.org.au/>.

- The link to legal assistance services contains a national guide. The intention is to provide a starting point and a pathway for those seeking legal assistance.
- There is also a page that links to self-help legal information resources.
- You can find the Centre’s publications, including the *The Australian Pro Bono Manual*, *Pro Bono Partnerships and Models: A Practical Guide to What Works* and the *National Law Firm Pro Bono Survey Reports* in the publications section.

### **LIAC (State Library of NSW)**

- The Hot Topics issues of *You And Your Lawyer* and *Drugs And The Law* have been updated and can be downloaded from the Find Legal Answers website:  
[http://www.legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot\\_topics/index.html](http://www.legalanswers.sl.nsw.gov.au/hot_topics/index.html).

### **Diversity Services, NSW Department of Justice**

- *The Capacity Toolkit* is still current. You can download or order hard copies of it here:  
[http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/diversityservices/Pages/divserv/ds\\_capacity\\_tool/ds\\_capacity\\_tool.aspx](http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/diversityservices/Pages/divserv/ds_capacity_tool/ds_capacity_tool.aspx).

### **Law and Justice Foundation of NSW**

- Two grants recently approved by the Foundation's Board:
  - Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services will develop and implement an information referral and court peer support program for people with mental health problems. The program will link these clients to appropriate legal and mental health services and support them as they navigate the criminal justice system and housing tribunal systems at Taree Court. It is a partnership project of the Taree/Forster region of the Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) Program.
  - Community Media CHY, a community broadcaster in Coffs Harbour, will educate and improve the knowledge of young people with a disability, their parents and the general public about their legal rights, disability advocacy, disability discrimination and the law. It will also highlight support programs available, including the NDIS. This will be achieved by training local young people with a disability to conduct interviews with people with disabilities and practitioners, and produce radio programs for community radio which will be available via podcast.

### **Cooperative Legal Services Delivery (CLSD) program, Legal Aid NSW**

- The CLSD unit has had productive discussions with Gilbert+Tobin and the Law Society about providing training to lawyers in private law firms on preparing wills for Aboriginal people in regional and remote areas of NSW.
- CLSD is also collaborating with Legal Aid's Children's service to roll out CLE on sexting for young people in the regions.
- The annual outreach to Bourke and Brewarrina in Law Week is on again and currently in the planning stage.

### **Women's Legal Service NSW**

- An updated edition of "Our Dream...Stopping The Violence" has now been published, and is available to order from here: <http://www.wlsnsw.org.au/our-dream-stopping-the-violence/>.
- Ask Lois has fortnightly webinars. You can find the webinar calendar on the Ask Lois home page.

### **Justice Connect (Tori Edwards)**

- ✓ MOSAIC <http://www.justiceconnect.org.au/our-programs/mosaic> has developed a CLE program with Navitas, which provides training on legal problem spotting and referral at their services in Campsie, Fairfield and Liverpool and will shortly be commencing a telephone advice service for MOSAIC clients.
- ✓ The Not for Profit Information Hub continues to expand and is a useful resource for community organisations: <http://www.nfplaw.org.au/>.

### **3 Cooperative Legal Services Delivery Program – convened by Legal Aid NSW**

The identified legal needs, emerging and/or systemic issues raised across CLSD Program regions in the quarter January to March 2016 include:

- ✓ Service accessibility in regional & remote locations:
  - Very few detox and rehabilitation facilities in regional and remote NSW
  - Access to emergency accommodation/food (2 hour+ wait to get onto Salvation Army call centre)
  - LawAccess NSW wait times noted

- Centrelink limited access – closure of offices and services now via *myGov.com* (Albury pilot)
- ✓ Ice, alcohol and associated rise in aggravated offences, family breakdown, debt, etc
- ✓ AVOs
  - *It Stops Here Safer Pathways* sites: positive feedback from services
  - Inappropriate/over use of APVOs in schools by Department of Education against students or students against students. Community Justice Centres are interested in working with CLSD partners on diversions.
  - Link to ice use
  - AVOs and accommodation for victims and perpetrators
- ✓ Young people
  - Policing and “public order” issues, use of Suspect Target Management Program
  - Equitable access to education for young people with disabilities
  - APVOs being used as behaviour management tool
- ✓ Housing
  - Shortage of public and emergency housing, access to housing after prison
  - Heightening problems with state of Aboriginal housing and landlord/Land Council/tenant relationships
  - Concerns about new anti-social behaviour provisions of *Residential Tenancies Act*
- ✓ Care & protection
  - “informal” removals means legal assistance may not be sought; and if no Court filing by FACS, no notification of matter to Legal Aid and no assistance.
  - Working with Children Checks for grandparents
  - Compulsory schooling orders (being pursued through NLA Education Act Working Group)
- ✓ Disability issues:
  - Schools denying or limiting access (reducing school attendance hours) for young people with disability and refusing to make adjustments
  - concern about general roll out of NDIS
  - Reports of increase in people deemed no longer eligible for DSP
- ✓ Ongoing demand for wills in Aboriginal communities
- ✓ Need for easier access to and storage of identity documents ongoing
- ✓ Prisoners issues:
  - Money/bank account concerns. Cheques are no longer being issued by Centrelink: inmates who don't have accounts can't access crisis payments made by direct transfer.
  - Access to housing post-release
  - Access to WDOs in prison (being pursued through NLA Prisoners Working Group).

For more information about the NLA please see our website – [www.nlaf.org.au](http://www.nlaf.org.au) or I can be contacted on Wednesdays or Thursdays at [kwright@lawfoundation.net.au](mailto:kwright@lawfoundation.net.au).

**Kerry Wright, NLA Project Manager, March 2016**