

NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF - September 2014

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 14 August 2014. At that meeting, items on the agenda included:

- **Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody**

To date this project has provided casework assistance to 110 Aboriginal clients. The Forum will continue to engage with this project to assist in identifying and resolving systemic issues for Aboriginal women leaving custody.

- **Transport Issues for Aboriginal Defendants Returning Home After Release from Custody**

The Forum is currently addressing an issue regarding Aboriginal defendants who are often transported to courts that are located far from their homes and upon release from custody do not have access to transport to return them to their homes. The Forum is assisting Legal Aid NSW to collect case studies to address this issue.

- **Work and Development Orders (WDO)**

Corrective Services NSW provided the following statistics on the WDO scheme in Prisons:

- 280 inmates participated in the WDO scheme in 2013/14 financial year;
- To date, fine debt of \$800,000 has been 'worked off'.

- **Aboriginal Liaison Committee – Forensic Hospital, Malabar**

Legal Aid NSW's Mental Health Advocacy Service raised an issue around the lack of Aboriginal liaison workers at the Forensic Hospital, Malabar. The Forum resolved to add this issue to its agenda and invite Justice Health to future Forum meetings.

- **NSW Ombudsman**

A representative from the office of the NSW Ombudsman attended the Forum meeting and provided an overview of the work of the Custodial Services and Compliance Unit as follows:

- The Unit deals with complaints from within the custodial system;
 - Conducts visits to maximum security prisons at least twice per year, and other prisons on an 'as needs' basis under the 'Prisons Visiting Program'. The program takes verbal complaints from prisoner's, speaks with staff, resolves issues and observes prison conditions and routines;
 - Engages with prison inspectors to share knowledge from the Complaints Database.
- The Forum updated the NSW Ombudsman on current issues such as the work of the Prisoners Legal Information Team, impediments to access to legal representatives, and AVL issues at Dawn de Loas prison.

- **Calls from Prisoners to Legal Services**

LawAccess, Legal Aid NSW and CSNSW have met to discuss the ongoing issue regarding phone calls made by prisoners to Legal Aid NSW and LawAccess. They have jointly proposed a new protocol for telephone calls from prisoners:

- Prisoners can nominate 3 telephone numbers for calls to legal representatives on their phone card;
- Prisoners will be encouraged and guided to use their phone card to call their solicitor directly by including the phone number of their solicitor on their grant of legal aid; and
- Prisoners will have their solicitors phone number added to their phone card within 2-3 days.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 13 November 2014.

Richard Funston

Chair NLAF Prisoners Forum, 27 August 2014