

## NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF – March 2016

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 3 March 2016. Key issues discussed included:

- **Justice Health Corrections Program**

Stephan Ward provided information about this program which assists prisoners who are on Opioid Substitution Treatment or have a history of problematic drug use. Following referral a Clinical Support Worker visits the prisoner pre-release to undertake an assessment and design a program which links them with appropriate services in the community on release. Support is provided for four weeks and up to three months after release.

- **Audio-Visual Links to Prisons**

The AVL system is being re-designed by Department of Justice to accommodate the needs of all stakeholders. Legal Aid have a worker on secondment to the AVL project representing all legal services in the consultation and design processes. It was noted that recent statistics show that 64% of court appearances by prisoners in custody was through AVL and 52% of legal visits to prisoners were by AVL.

- **Calls from Prisoners to Legal Services**

Legal Aid and Law Access have been working together to develop a new strategy to assist in managing the number of calls being received from prisoners by both agencies. The proposed strategy is to streamline inmate calls including measures to:

- triage inmate calls effectively so that Legal Aid NSW only answers calls relating to its core business; and
- clarify communication with inmates about: the grants process, allocation of lawyers and expectations around client service and client contact.

This strategy is being taken to Corrective Services to discuss its implementation and communication within Correctional Centres to staff and prisoners to assist with a smooth transition to the new procedures.

- **Post Release Transport Options**

Legal Aid is working with Correctional Centres to determine procedures currently in place within each Centre to support prisoners with transport on release. These vary depending on their location within the State. Following this consultation process they will be developing an appropriate resource to assist in informing prisoners of their options.

- **WDOs in Prisons**

Corrective Services have revised their WDO operational guidelines which came into effect in March 2016. Training is being rolled out across the State. Data sharing protocols have also been negotiated enabling CS staff to access State Debt information about fines debt to assist in case managing prisoners to pay off their debt whilst in prison.

- **Prisoners Legal Information Team (PLIT)**

The PLIT is looking at redesigning the look of the Prisoners Legal Information Portal which is an intranet sites on the Department of Corrective Services website, making it identical to the internet version of the site. This will assist in discussions between professionals accessing the site via the internet and prisoners using the intranet version. The Forum is still concerned about access to the Portal by Prisoners.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 12 May 2016.

### **Richard Funston**

Director Criminal Law Legal Aid NSW

Chair NLAF Prisoners Forum, 3 March 2016