

NSW Legal Information and Referral Forum **Report to NLA**

LIRF met on 3 March at Legal Aid NSW.

The Forum heard from lawyers working on school lawyer projects in Lithgow and South West Sydney.

Rebecca Frost from the Elizabeth Evatt Community Legal Centre, and Chris Daniels and Christine Alkhamisi from Legal Aid NSW, spoke about their work as school lawyers at Lithgow High School and Fairfield High School.

Each project embeds a lawyer in the school for one day a week to provide information, advice, minor assistance, casework and community legal education for school students. Both projects are well supported by each of the schools and their staff are actively involved in referring and supporting students to connect safely with the lawyers.

The Lithgow project is integrated with Lithgow High School's Wellbeing Hub which was established in 2009 and offers a range of services for students. The need for the project was identified by the Central Tablelands CLSD Program partnership and is funded for 12 months by the Legal Aid NSW CLSD Program. Lithgow is a significantly disadvantaged community and does not have a dedicated youth service.

The Fairfield project was established less than one year ago following lengthy consultation with the school.

One of the challenges in providing this type of service is ensuring clear communication with the school around client confidentiality and the ethical obligations of lawyers. This has been addressed through training for school staff at the outset about the services offered by the legal services, how referrals can be made and the differences between the role of teachers and the lawyers providing services to the students.

Community legal education is an important component of each of the projects and topics for CLE are worked out collaboratively with teachers and other professionals at the schools.

Both projects are pilots and are being evaluated however, based on their experience so far, the service providers are keen to continue with providing comprehensive school based legal services. One lesson learnt which was shared by Rebecca Frost at the meeting is that the students she is working with experience the same level and complexity of legal problems experienced by disadvantaged adult clients.

Participants at the meeting also discussed potential gaps in legal services and resources for young people as well as new CLE resources that are available, or being developed, for young people. Participants agreed on the need to focus on legal information and education on family law issues for young people. Legal Aid NSW advised the Forum about a new post card for young people to promote the When can I resource and getting legal help from LawAccess and the Youth Hotline www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/whencani.

LIRF is co-covered by LIAC and the Legal Aid NSW

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Please contact Philippa to be added to the LIRF contact list.

The next LRF meeting will be held on Tuesday 7 July, Level 12 Legal Aid NSW Central office and will have the theme of legal information and referral for people with mental health issues.

LIRF meetings are held at Legal Aid NSW and can be attended remotely by telephone or computer via GoToMeeting.