

NSW Legal Information and Referral Forum Report to NLA

LIRF met online on 27 July 2021

Naomi Cheetham, Manager Planning and Review, Legal Aid NSW

Naomi discussed a recent project that evaluated the role of CLE in a health justice partnership between Legal Aid NSW and WHOS. WHOS is a therapeutic program aimed at achieving recovery from drug and alcohol dependence.

Naomi provided an overview of the evaluation process noting the importance of evaluation to identify areas of improvement and to support planning management and learning.

Naomi shared details of the evaluation framework and outlined the following:

- Program Profile
- Program Theory and/or Program Logic
- Assumptions:
 - preconditions
 - connective assumptions
- resources, planned activities, outputs and outcomes
- Evaluation Matrix – what data will be needed
- Evaluation Plan

The method for data capture included three CLE sessions on different topics:

- Pre and post surveys to participants at the CLE sessions
- Focus groups with staff
- Interview with the Manager

The findings demonstrated that this partnership with WHOS was a success in meeting Legal Aid's CLE objectives to:

- target outreach to priority Legal Aid clients
- reduce barriers to accessing legal assistance
- build the capacity of residents and WHOS staff to recognise and address legal problems.

LIRF participants took the opportunity to discuss the project with Naomi and the following discussion points were noted:

- One critical element of the HJP is regular communication and discussion. WHOS and Legal Aid NSW meet quarterly to discuss what is working/not working and how to pivot accordingly. This is helped largely by the commitment of both parties to this model.
- *Did clients or staff receive CLE about court processes or comment on their experience of the court system?*

- CLE about the court system was not included in this evaluation, however many WHOS clients do have criminal proceedings. Some criminal law information is provided by the solicitors who deliver the CLE. CLE about the court system has not been specifically requested from staff or residents but may be useful to include in the CLE.
- *Is there scope to follow up with clients before leaving WHOS to see whether their knowledge increased?*
 - This is difficult to do because the length of stay at WHOS varies from 3-12 months and sometimes residents may choose to leave suddenly.
- *Did the evaluation look at the benefit of providing CLE to community workers, which has been a big focus recently, as opposed to providing CLE to community members directly?*
 - The evaluation didn't look at this question specifically, however we know that staff championing the legal service clinics and CLE is key to the success of this partnership. Staff often encourage residents to attend the CLE sessions and they play an integral role in referrals to legal advice.

The Evaluation Report on the Health Justice Partnership Outreach between Legal Aid NSW and We Help Ourselves (WHOs) Report is available from the Legal Aid NSW website: https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/42010/WHOS-Evaluation-Executive-Summary-October-2020.pdf

Janet Wagstaff, Director, LawAccess NSW

Janet provided a brief update of LawAccess NSW noting that from 1 July 2019 LawAccess NSW joined Legal Aid NSW. As a result there are a number of projects underway to streamline services.

Janet presented an overview of the webchat service that was launched in April this year.

Information Officers on webchat provide the following assistance including :

- Directing customers to online assistance such as guided pathways for low complexity matters
- Answering questions by directing customers to legal information sourcing materials available online
- Referring customers that need further assistance towards services like:
 - LawAccess NSW telephone service
 - Legal Aid NSW advice services
 - Community Legal Centres
 - Private Solicitors
 - Other government agencies or services such as Fair Trading

Janet noted that while convenient, webchat is not suitable for all customers. Customers that have an ability to self help, digital literacy and low complexity legal issues are ideal

customers to refer to webchat; webchat will allow them to access help online from an Information Officer in real time.

Legal advice is not available via webchat. Customers requiring legal advice will be referred to the LawAccess NSW telephone service to enable the issue to be discussed and an appropriate advice service offered.

As anticipated the most frequently asked about matters include debt, motor vehicle damage, fences/trees/animals and AVOs.

Data analysis for the three months to June demonstrate that the wait time and average call time is comparable between the telephone service and webchat.

Webchat has received excellent customer feedback with 85% stating they would use it again.

Promotion

Webchat has had a soft launch and the increase on demand has largely been organic with the main increase in demand being from promotion of the service on the LawAccess NSW website.

Webchat has been promoted internally within Legal Aid NSW and through legal sector newsletters. There are plans to increase promotion of the service to align with increased staffing at LawAccess to meet demand across both the phone and webchat services.

LawAccess *chatters* are trained specifically for this channel, they do not have legal qualifications and are not identified as lawyers.

LIRF participants took the opportunity to discuss the webchat with Janet and the following discussion points were noted:

- Currently webchat is only available in English
- Webchat can be delivered remotely by staff
- LawAccess made the decision to introduce webchat instead of a chatbot as they were best placed to provide a live service and had the technology in place for this. Webchat and chat-bots require very different software and a lot of acquired intelligence is needed for a chat-bot, which is resource intensive.
- LawAccess is using a platform called Genesis
- Chatters can mostly do 2 chats simultaneously. Some chatters from Victoria Legal Aid have worked up to operating 4 chats simultaneously.
- The webchat function has in-built safety functionality to close quickly and remove browser history and staff are trained to verify people's safety.

Both presentations are available on the [NLAF website](#).

LIRF is co-convened by LIAC and Legal Aid NSW.

- Philippa Scarf, philippa.scarf@sl.nsw.gov.au
- Kate Halliday, Kate.Halliday@legalaid.nsw.gov.au
- Winnecke Baker, Winnecke.Baker@legalaid.nsw.gov.au

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

The next LIRF meeting will be held online on 12 October 2021