

of Aboriginal cases it deals with, little better than in the conscience pricking days of the mid-1990's.

Recently the lack of suitable interpreters has threatened to de-rail important cases. The cases arising from the sexual interference with a youth at Maningrida were under threat due to the lack of the capacity within the AIS to "back translate" a series of records of interview (of victim, witnesses and accused). A high profile alleged murder in Katherine is yet to go to trial but it can be said fairly that the interpreter called upon by the police to assist in the accused's record of interview was very inexperienced. I can say that the existence of the AIS has meant that there are more interpreters about to thicken the

vener of respectability of the criminal justice system. However, the continuing reality is that our criminal courts maintain the turnover of matters, with the significant bulk of Aboriginal participants, not well versed in English, truly understanding little or none of what is going on.

I nod my head when I'm asked by the bench to explain the order of the court, when I know I'm struggling to get across the full extent of what has been decided. I would dearly love to see the courts funded to employ relevant language speakers to enable Aboriginal people who do not have good English to understand what has gone on. But I try to "go along with it the best I can". It is not good enough.

The timing of this article is not random. The Federal Government (both recently departed and new) has decided to try and break the cycle of disadvantage here in the Northern Territory. Lots of money is being spent. It appears this effort is up for review at the moment. This is the time to for us all to make the pitch to the Federal and NT Governments that the "Intervention" and all that will flow from it (including, it seems, a mountain of additional criminal court cases involving Aboriginal people) will founder if people cannot communicate properly.

The time is now for a massive injection of funding into the AIS to enable the service to do its job properly.

Opening of NTLACs Palmerston Office

By Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC)

The NT Legal Aid Commission is excited to announce the opening of its new office premises in the Goyder Centre in Palmerston.

The Commission provides access to the law and legal assistance to people who cannot afford a private lawyer. Anyone in the community is entitled to seek legal information and advice from the Commission.

The Commission has always provided services to the Palmerston community through its head office in Darwin, and is pleased to now be able to provide this service through a presence in Palmerston, making it more convenient for members of Palmerston and surrounding rural communities.

Free weekly legal advice clinics are available for people in criminal law, family law and domestic violence matters. The Commission employs highly skilled legal practitioners who specialise in their particular area of law. All advice clinics are confidential. Indigenous and other non-English speaking clients can ask for an interpreter to assist them



The opening of Legal Aid's Palmerston office

if required.

The NT Legal Aid Commission is a registered Family Dispute Resolution provider. The new office includes purpose built family law conferencing facilities. Family law conferencing is a form of family dispute resolution which involves a meeting between the people in a family law dispute with the assistance of their lawyers. It aims to help people reach agreement without having to go to court.

The Commission also produces a range of brochures and publications on different topics, such as your

rights when dealing with the police, neighbourhood problems and the court process. Copies of these publications are available free of charge. The Commission can make staff available to give presentations and speak to community groups, schools, workplaces etc on Legal Aid or a specific legal topic.

A toll free legal information line is also available Territory-wide to enable people to obtain free legal information and referral. This service is accessible Monday to Friday, 9am to 4pm by telephoning 1800 019 343.