

Katherine Regional Legal Services Forum

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Introduction

Katherine Regional Legal Services held a combined workshop in Katherine on 22 October 2008. The Katherine Legal Services Network previously met on a monthly basis, however this forum had lost some momentum and services decided to meet together to explore opportunities to work better together.

With all the recent changes occurring in the region, in part through increased activities, resources and as a result of the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention (NTER), it was timely that the services meet and consider some collective strategies which could be developed.

Informing this workshop is the emergence of the Australian Legal Assistance Forum (ALAF). ALAF is a body comprised of the major legal aid client service deliverers in Australia. These organisations are:

1. National Legal Aid representing the Directors of all Legal Aid Commissions in Australia, and through them those Commissions.
2. The Law Council of Australia representing Australian lawyers and their State and Territory representative bodies.
3. Representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services.
4. The National Association of Community Legal Centres, representing community legal centres throughout Australia.

ALAF has been established to enable these organisations to consider and address Australian legal assistance issues in a co-operative way, and to make recommendations on those issues in a coordinated fashion.



The participants in the Katherine Regional Legal Services Forum

By linking with this new structure, the Katherine Regional Legal Services hope to be able to raise the profile of the issues that impact on the provision of legal services to its community.

Participants at the forum include representatives from the following organisations:

- Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission
- North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency
- Darwin Community Legal Service
- Katherine Women's Information & Legal Service Inc.
- Katherine Aboriginal Families' Support Unit

In all there were 18 participants in attendance for the day. The forum was facilitated by Sarah Blake, consultant for Greyspace: Strategic Engagement Solutions.

As a group, the representatives from each service considered the past and present impacts on the region and the future opportunities.

The participants identified many complexities faced by the Katherine Regional Legal Services. Given this group had only one day for the forum it was important to try and narrow down some specific outcomes. By doing this participants create meaningful dialogue, focused on solutions rather than just talking about issues.

Groups were asked to identify the critical issues of most importance to them. The group responses have been documented separately and listed below.

Critical Issues:

- Collaborate and lobby Government for funding to deliver culturally appropriate services.
- Collaborate and lobby Government for legislative reform and social and diversionary programs.
- Government directive over legal service programs without recognition of the specific and separate needs of diverse groups and communities.
- Community driven coordination of legal services which provides a pro-active voice.



Participants at the workshop

Katherine Region Legal Services poster



Legal Services to the Katherine region will present a united face to the Katherine Region through a new poster displaying the details and symbols of the services available to the public.

The poster was launched in Katherine on 22 October 2008. The poster includes contact details for the NT Legal Aid Commission; the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency; the Katherine Women's Information and Legal Services Inc, the Darwin Community Legal

Service and the Katherine Aboriginal Families' Support Unit.

The aim of the poster is to provide at-a-glance information to people in the region to assist them to understand the range of services available to them and to decide which service is best able to meet their needs.

The poster has been distributed to agencies across the region and is available by contacting Melinda Schroeder at the NT Legal Aid Commission on 8999 3000.

- Over-policing
- NT Aboriginal Justice Agreement
- Accountability – is part of good engagement processes.
- Community Legal Education network needs to have diverse linkages across government, business and community sectors.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were endorsed by the group as a whole, and provide both immediate and longer-term collective strategies for moving forward.

- 1- Coordination
- 2- Targeted 'Sales Pitch'
- 3- Collaboration
- 4- Community Policing Agreements
- 5- General support to make forum an annual event.

Conclusions

The forum was designed to encourage critical analysis of the issues that impact on the provision of legal services within the Katherine region. The question as to whether the Katherine Regional Legal Services could develop collective strategies to support the provision of responsive legal services to the community within the Katherine region was answered, with a resounding yes!

The services now have a mandate for collaboration which will be driven by specific strategies.