

Community Legal Education Training Conference

8 & 9 December 2011, Darwin

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The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC) collaborated to host a very successful two day community legal education (CLE) training conference in Darwin on 8 and 9 December 2011. Community based legal education is increasingly seen as an important part of increasing access to justice, particularly for disempowered communities. Despite the importance of good community based legal education, there is still a lack of training and a theoretical framework for practitioners involved in this type of work. The idea for a training conference focused specifically on CLE came about through discussions in the Northern Territory CLE Network meetings in early 2011.

The number of attendees and the quality of presentations exceeded expectations. The first day of the conference was hosted by NTLAC and had 35 participants. The second day was hosted by NAAJA and focused on issues specific to CLE with Indigenous communities. Over 30 participants were involved during the day. In particular NAAJA was pleased that colleagues from a number of other ATSILS travelled to Darwin to participate in the conference. Staff from CAALAS, VALS, ATSILS (QLD), ALS (NSW/ACT) attended, along with staff from a number of community legal centres in the Top End.

The aim of the conference was to bring CLE practitioners together to hear from experts in fields that underpin good CLE practice, and to generate discussion and practical application of these ideas. Over the two days experts shared their experiences and thoughts from the fields of:

- Linguistics
- Adult education
- Social media
- Anthropology
- Community development
- Cross-cultural learning

Aside from providing practical teaching about community based educational initiatives, these presentations helped participants identify areas where further training was needed. The conference also sparked discussion about the need for CLE practitioners to have an understanding of a diverse range of disciplines and to incorporate these fields into our CLE practice. A number of useful tools, such as a guide to plain English and social media strategy booklet were given to participants, along with recommendations for further reading.

John Jablonka, the CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) educator at NTLAC ran the participants through several very well received exercises aimed at helping participants understand



key principles of adult education and use these principles when designing CLE activities.

In keeping with good educational practice, a hands-on exercise was held at the end of the first day. Melanie Robinson hosted a session in which practitioners were divided into small groups, given a real life CLE scenario, and asked to design a CLE project and evaluation method.

The conference generated a lot of discussion about 'what is the purpose of CLE?' Much of the discussion centred on the link between community education and social change. Quotes from educators and social reformers were used to spark discussion. One such quote was;

'Education becomes the practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.'

Richard Shaull (1972)

Ben Grimes and Will Crawford from NAAJA presented NAAJA's



methodology for designing and delivering CLE projects in remote Aboriginal communities, giving examples from ongoing work in Lajamanu. A copy of the methodology document and related readings were given to participants.

The final session of the conference was a group discussion titled 'Towards a best practice model'. This was the start of an important and ongoing discussion about what good CLE initiatives look like, and how practitioners should design and implement projects that are as effective and beneficial as possible. Recurring themes were the need to involve adult education specialists in CLE initiatives, and the need to ensure communities design and drive CLE initiatives.

All participants agreed that there was a need for this discussion to continue and a need for similar training conferences in the future. For more details about the conference presentations, papers or future training opportunities please contact Ben Grimes (ben.grimes@naaja.org.au), Will Crawford (will.crawford@naaja.org.au) or Melanie Robinson (melanie.robinson@ntlac.nt.gov.au).

Legal Telephone Service Expanded

To meet needs of the NT community

The NT Legal Aid Commission has operated a legal information service for many years to people throughout the Northern Territory. The service has recently been restructured, expanded and rebranded to meet the growing needs of the Northern Territory community.

The Legal Aid Helpline is now operated from a dedicated call centre developed by the NT Legal Aid Commission at its Palmerston premises. Two staff operate the service on a full time basis and are available to take calls from 9am to 4pm Monday to Friday.

The service strives to offer a holistic resolution to problems faced by people by providing comprehensive information to callers, along with referrals to legal advice and other helpful services. Often issues are multifaceted and therefore information is provided along with appropriate referral to another helpful service.

The Helpline staff are able to arrange appointments for legal advice where required, and also provide valuable information to the caller prior to that appointment. This information can assist callers to have a greater understanding of their issue prior to the advice appointment which can result in a better use of the time spent with the legal adviser.

Often people are unsure of whether they have a legal problem or not. We encourage those people to call the Legal Aid Helpline. Our staff are experienced in identifying issues and the right people to help with them. ●



Cards with the Legal Aid Helpline details are available for practitioners to provide to clients. To obtain copies of the cards please email Melinda Schroeder of the NT Legal Aid Commission at melinda.schroeder@ntlac.nt.gov.au