



Specialist training for the Northern Territory context:

Custom Community Legal Education Professional Development for the Northern Territory

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THE NORTHERN TERRITORY PRIDES ITSELF ON BEING DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. SOMETIMES THE DIFFERENCE IS EXAGGERATED; SOMETIMES IT'S NOT, BUT THE PRIDE IS MISPLACED. HOWEVER, WHEN IT COMES TO DELIVERING COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION THE DIFFERENCES IN DEMOGRAPHICS ARE REAL, AND WORTH LOOKING INTO. THAT'S WHY THE NORTHERN TERRITORY COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION NETWORK DECIDED TO HOLD A COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION (CLE) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP FOR LAWYERS AND EDUCATORS WORKING IN THE TERRITORY.

The importance of increasing the capacity of the Northern Territory legal sector to deliver high quality CLE cannot be overstated. CLE increases Territorians' understanding of the legal system, ensuring increased

access to justice, and aiming to reduce contact with the criminal justice system. It also helps people deal with civil legal matters early, and reduce the chance that they will escalate.

Due to the unique cultural diversity, geography, limited access to services, and vulnerable populations of the Northern Territory, CLE practitioners need tailored professional development that enables them to prepare and



deliver quality CLE to Territorians.

Over two days in May 2014, forty lawyers and educators from across the Territory got just that. Participants travelled from Alice Springs, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Palmerston to join up with their peers in Darwin and engage in a hands-on workshop that explored techniques for planning, delivering and evaluating CLE in the Territory.

People come to CLE from lots of different fields, and often, in recognition of its importance, the delivery of CLE sessions is added to the duty statement of a busy lawyer or community worker. But delivering effective CLE is different to delivering effective legal advice. For this reason the workshop took a practical approach, aiming to give participants a range of basic skills and tools that they could take with them and apply when the time comes to deliver CLE.

Sessions were facilitated by people working in the CLE field or those with intimate knowledge of the Northern Territory contexts in which CLE is delivered. Many of the sessions used webinar software and other digital media to demonstrate the practical application of these to remote Territory settings. We started out with a session facilitated by the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission on the different ways that people learn, the basic principles of adult education and what we should bear in mind about these when planning our sessions.

A panel of experts then took us through their strategies for connecting with communities in order to deliver CLE. As our panel explained to us, effective engagement with communities is crucial to running high quality, culturally proficient CLE, as it is only through building relationships with the communities we work in that we can determine what their legal needs are and how they can be met.

Our expert panel members included Yvonne Dunne from the ACCC, Matthew Wickham from Northern Territory Consumer Affairs and Michael Petterson from Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, who shared with us the strategies for engagement that they have developed during their many years of experience working in Territory communities.

Sessions on strategies for delivering CLE included a master class from the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) on the effective use of interpreters in CLE sessions. The AIS impressed upon us the crucial but challenging role that their interpreters play and the importance of thoroughly briefing interpreters prior to running sessions to ensure that key legal messages are accurately conveyed.

We continued with the theme of delivering CLE in a cross-cultural environment through a panel discussion with Michael Christie from Charles Darwin University, and Howard Amery and Miriam Yirininba from the Aboriginal Resource and Development Service. This concentrated on strategies for providing culturally relevant and successful CLE, with a focus on north-east Arnhem Land.

We wrapped up day one with a session facilitated by NAAJA in which participants got to practice CLE methods, experimenting with role-play, storytelling, drawing and media as modes of CLE delivery.

Day two launched us into the digital world as we learnt about different ways of using digital media and online platforms to deliver CLE. Agencies shared different media resources and products for developing CLE materials, including films, animation and audio-pictorial resources. These sessions explored the capability of digital and social media to disseminate legal messages to a wide audience, as well as

conversely the opportunity to create quality resources that are tailored to individual communities and language groups.

Nea Harrison, a Northern Territory consultant, took the participants through frameworks for evaluating the preventative work we do and ensuring it is effective and meets its outcomes. This is essential for legal assistance services to deliver quality education and be accountable for resources. We finished up the workshop by considering the role of CLE in creating law reform and social justice.

CLE is a powerful tool for bringing about social change as it is through increased understanding of the law, and increased confidence to engage with the legal system, that individuals and communities can build the capacity to advocate for change. Senior representatives from the Territory's key legal assistance services shared with us their vision for how CLE can bring about change in the law and society.

Feedback from the workshop was overwhelmingly positive with many participants expressing a wish to put that which was learnt into practice. As a measure of the workshops success a series of smaller workshops were held in Alice Springs in mid-June to provide those who weren't able to travel to Darwin with the opportunity to receive some of the training. The network hopes to hold similar events each year and continue to extend the Territory's capability to take innovative CLE approaches.

The Northern Territory CLE Network would like to thank the Law Society Northern Territory Public Purposes Trust for generously supporting this initiative. ●

