

PLENet Conference Session 23/02/09 - Advice Services & PLE

The session consisted of a panel of advice sector workers:

- Catherine Evans, Southwark Law Centre, presenting on a Possession Prevention Project Southwark Law Centre and Blackfriars Advice Centre worked in partnership to reduce evictions by combining outreach, training and policy initiatives which focused on possession prevention. The project involved social landlords, community workers, housing officers, advisors and the courts in educating all around the law, the legal process and the importance of early intervention in to prevent rent arrears spiralling.
- Tom Togher, The Village CAB (Salford), presenting on a range of community education methods developed with and for lesbian, gay and bisexual communities in the North West around a range of relevant legal issues
- Alison Lamb, ADP Consultancy, presenting on her evaluation of the EU funded Progress PLE projects delivered by a number of advice agencies
- Inderjit Dhani, Law Student, Kings College London, presenting the Streetlaw concept of students doing PLE work in partnership with community agencies

Panel members were asked to address the following:

- Outline the PLE you were involved in
- An explanation of the process and outcome (and particularly in terms of community engagement was the process an outcome in itself)
- How did the PLE complement or conflict with your advice service provision?
- In keeping with the theme of the conference how did the PLE empower individuals, groups or communities?

Issues raised/questions asked in facilitated discussion

- Many agencies have been doing PLE for many years but have not called it that
- Many agencies do this as extra work that is not funded
- PLE used to be a normal part of the work of advice centres and law centres but funding in recent years has focused on casework to the detriment of PLE.
- The advice process itself can/does have an education component
- Advisors/managers finding time when clients keep coming through the door
- Locating resources is a problem. One suggestion from a Nigerian participant was to make PLE a credited component of clinical legal education
- Conversely, Tom pointed out that in many ways his projects were a re-packaging of existing human, financial & information resources in to an appropriate form for the community. Southwark suggested a pooling of resources assisted their project
- While advice agencies are community holders of the knowledge, do advice agencies have appropriately skilled staff for PLE? Advisers are not necessarily good educators (although many are)
- Further, Alison pointed to her evaluation that questioned whether advice agencies were the most appropriate agencies to deliver PLE in light of this skills deficit. . Collaboration for example with community workers and utilising their knowledge of the community and in particular, how to involve and reach the target group was a possible solution to the skills gap of the advice centre.
- The importance of selecting appropriate learning methods/resources for the target group/community or, better, selecting them WITH the local community
- The added value of engagement with the community in a different way in terms of identifying policy & systemic reforms, improved relationships, emerging issues ...

- PLE is a challenge to traditional ways of working particularly in the way knowledge is shared. The power relationship is more equal than in advising.

Participants were also asked to generate their own ideas by completing the sentence

“I could use PLE with ... (*insert target group or community*)...aroundas a legal/social issue usingas the method/tool.”

Participants were also asked to identify what might assist them to achieve this. However, there was little time for this.

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