

# **Equalities PLE: Plan and deliver!**

## **Working Together for Advice - regional discrimination mini-conferences**

Over the last few months we have been travelling around the English regions delivering workshops on PLE at regional discrimination mini-conferences for advisers. The mini-conferences were run by the Developing Discrimination Advice workstream of the Working Together for Advice project and so we tailored the workshops to the equalities field.

The workshops aimed to clarify participant's understanding of what PLE is, discussed the benefits and impacts for advice agencies of delivering PLE as part of their equalities work and included an exercise where people were asked to plan their own project. Finally participants were asked to fill in a 'wishlist' where they could detail the resources, skills and support they or their agency would need to carry out equalities PLE.

We appreciated the opportunity given to us by the Developing Discrimination Advice workstream to carry out these workshops, and very much enjoyed meeting and talking to all the advisers who attended. The workshops have given us a great insight into perceptions of PLE in advice agencies on the ground as well as a clearer appreciation of what might be needed in order to facilitate more and better PLE at a local level.

Below we take each part of the workshop in turn and outline the main points made at the workshops - similar issues were often raised in a number of different regions.

### **What is PLE trying to achieve?**

This is the first question we asked in the workshop. With a couple of exceptions most people who attended were not familiar with the term 'public legal education' or had not been involved in delivering it. However, participants very quickly got to grips with what PLE is and what it hopes to achieve for the public, and often found that they had been carrying out similar activity but calling it something else.

### **Benefits and impacts**

The groups were asked to discuss what the benefits and impacts might be of delivering PLE for their agency. Often these were contradictory. For example, would delivering PLE mean that you got more clients, or would effective prevention work mean that you got fewer? Below are some of the things that were discussed as benefits or impacts:

- Raise profile of advice agency
- Improve access
- Better targeting of relevant clients
- More efficient working
- Increased demand
- Reduced workload
- Simpler cases as things are dealt with at an earlier stage
- More complicated cases as simpler issues dealt with more easily by individuals
- More interesting cases, developing caselaw
- If people don't have the confidence to take action on their own could mean more general cases
- Help develop social policy work
- Increase agencies' confidence
- More funding opportunities
- Acts as market research with client groups
- PLE can bust myths and foster a culture of rights
- Can help to manage client expectations
- Works outside strict legal framework - ie with complaints and grievances
- Benefits more than just the individual client.
- Encourages compliance and accountability from providers
- Could lead to technical or procedural change from employers, providers etc
- Could generate new projects for the advice agency
- No clear funding stream for PLE, although it may open up other sources of funding for particular communities.
- Increases agency profile, inspires confidence in it and clarifies its role, breaking down barriers.
- Stops fire fighting
- Reaches different/vulnerable people
- Gives clients a grounding for dealing with future problems easing pressure on the agency
- Makes people more willing to complain, which improves systems and increased confidence in them
- Encourages active citizenship - people more likely to take part - for example vote and volunteer
- Addresses emotional issues - it's not nice to acknowledge that what is happening to you is discrimination - can take away some of the shock or upset that sometimes people feel when diagnosed at an advice session
- Increases quality of service delivered as a whole - rights based approach ripples through whole organisation
- Demystifies law - increases understanding and reduces elitist image
- Positive outcomes could work as a 'franchise' which is rolled out to other projects or organisations.

## How to plan an equalities PLE project

Participants were presented with the following scenario:

Your advice agency is seeing increasing numbers of disabled clients who are not getting equal access to services. For example, one client complained that he had to do his banking in the street because there were steps up to his bank entrance, another couldn't get into several shops because the doorways weren't wide enough for his wheelchair, and another wanted to know if there was anything she could do about local restaurants that don't have disabled toilets.

Your agency decides to address this issue with a public legal education project.

Think about what you would need to consider or do for each step to plan and deliver a successful project.

- What's the issue?
- Do you understand your audience?
- What's your purpose?
- What will you deliver and how?
- How will you evaluate it?

Then fill in the worksheet and be ready to feedback your project to the whole group.

Participants came up with lots of fantastic ideas to address this issue. One of the key themes we noticed was the emphasis on partnership working and involving other agencies. Below we outline some of the project ideas that were suggested, grouped into different approaches:

### Explain and promote the issue to a wider audience

- A 'Day in the life' films
- A film where disabled people explain why access is a problem and how it affects them.
- Mystery shopper with a difference - promote experience of those involved.
- Work with 6<sup>th</sup> form colleges to produce and distribute DVDs
- Street drama
- Good practice examples
- Local media work
- Celebrity champions
- Produce newsletters
- Case studies
- Blogs
- Self help packs

### **Work with the problem originator**

- Good practice events
- Awards ceremonies for good practice service providers
- Get service providers to sign an agreement
- Challenge service providers - are you breaking the law?
- Working with governing bodies, shareholders etc to cascade message
- Make the business case
- Networking lunches (charge businesses to attend) with speakers
- Work with chamber of commerce, develop a code of conduct for local businesses.
- Gather evidence of the problem by photographing the disabled person experiencing problems and ask the service providers what they are going to do about it. Give the story to the local press whatever the outcome - spin as positive if service provider takes action, name and shame if not.

### **Work with intermediaries**

- Link up with GPs and social workers
- Work with local council

### **Work with the people experiencing the problem directly**

- Address people's concerns - barriers
- Supervised 'be your own adviser' sessions to give knowledge and confidence
- Establish disabled people's forum
- Sessions and seminars - accessible, with food
- Produce directory of accessible services
- Local workshops on rights and skills promoted through local media, radio and internet

### **Work to bring people together**

- Bring 'victim' and 'perpetrator' together to discuss issues - perhaps in a forum
- Local disability groups run sessions with youth groups on what it is like to be disabled. They then train the youth groups to carry out simple disability audits.
- Workshops / training (from service providers premises)
- School visits
- Get local MP involved
- Experience swap - get non disabled people to try and gain access - promote their experience.
- An event where non-disabled people could learn what it would be like to be disabled - get local service providers along and get them to try the wheelchair
- Ask local authority to set up a fund to advise local businesses on access.
- Get together at venues such as shopping centres, put people into pairs to sample access.

## Wishlists

At the end of the workshop we asked participants to fill in a 'wishlist' detailing what skills, support and resources they or their agency would need to carry out PLE. It was clear from the wishlists that just as PLE aims to give the public knowledge, confidence and skills; advisers feel that they also need these attributes in order to deliver it.

Below we list the things that advisers most 'wished for':

- Local training
- Training on how to do outreach and interact with other sector agencies - LAs, PCTs etc
- Train the trainer courses
- Adaptable training materials including case studies, exercises and evaluation sheets.
- Subject specific training on the law for advisers.
- Media training / press skills
- Access to trainers
- Dedicated skilled PLE deliverers / PLE facilitator to lead
- Local PLE coordinator
- Volunteers
- Awareness of current and future PLE projects
- Directory of PLE involved agencies / contact details of other PLE practitioners in the same field.
- PLE specific website
- Practical support for people delivering PLE - an advice line, support meetings, a consultancy service
- Sources of help/advice/support/guidance on delivering PLE
- Contacts to bounce ideas - what succeeds / what doesn't
- External guidance and support for advisers - someone to talk ideas through with - how practical is it?
- PLE Handbook
- Practical tools
- Programme design know how
- Online discussion forum
- Regular email newsletter
- Examples of good PLE practice
- Advice on who to focus education on and how to evaluate effectiveness of education
- Tips on how to influence change
- Better local contacts and referral processes.
- Networking opportunities
- Opportunities to visit PLE projects
- Grounded research identifying local discrimination issues on which to base local PLE work.

- Following the public health analogy public legal rights intelligence at a national, regional and local level. For example, demographic data, number and rate of cases taken etc
- Funding
- Funding to target particular community groups
- PLE fundraising assistance and advice
- Funding for accessibility
- Marketing support
- Office supplies, access to internet and computers and IT support, dedicated meeting room and clerical support
- A general leaflet for clients explaining the benefits of PLE for them - knowledge, skills, confidence etc
- Leaflets, posters, information sheets, case studies, Q&As, promotional materials, self help packs, DVDs for group work aimed at the public etc
- Template posters, letters, leaflets and flyers etc for the public
- Help with writing self help guides / examples of good self help guides
- Subject specific freebies for the public such as pens, badges, posters etc
- Case studies
- Speakers
- Information resources aimed at service providers and other organisations.
- Ways of measuring success
- Time!

We are grateful to all the advisers who took part in our workshops. They were interesting and lively sessions and it was good to see so much enthusiasm for PLE. We learned an awful lot and hope that participants did too. We also hope that we are able to take forward some of the things that advisers asked for. Watch this space!