

Legal Empowerment Conference 2010

February 10th at the Inmarsat Conference Centre



Delegates visiting an exhibition



Planet chair - Sir Henry Brooke

The second annual Legal Empowerment Conference brought together participants from statutory bodies, NGO's, academics and researchers, legal and education professionals to share their ideas and perspectives on the following question

"How does PLE contribute to a culture of civil and social justice?"

Keynote Speech Lord Bach, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice



'PLE has come of age, as a concept. There has been a breakthrough in as much as the ideas behind it are accepted as valid and true by many across the whole justice system. Indeed government has taken it on board. The Ministry of Justice looks forward to working with you to demonstrate to others the value of Public Legal Education, through evaluating its impact, expanding its reach to new communities and raising awareness of the need for it amongst those who might not have considered the benefits of Public Legal Education work'

[Read Lord Bach's speech](#)

Theatre performance

The brilliant Theatre ADAD performed two short plays; one exploring the effects of domestic violence and the other on a young persons experience of managing their first home alone. Both offered the audience the opportunity to debate and discuss the legal capability issue; the emotional and practical needs that arise, and how people can be better equipped to deal with the law-related issues in these contexts.



[Link to Theatre ADAD](#)

Table talk

Sarah McCoubrey of the Ontario Justice Education Network discussed their work, the extensive professional volunteering programme that has been developed involving Judges and Lawyers supporting OJEN's objectives which are:

1. Foster public understanding of the justice system and the challenges it faces.
2. Support and encourage the values of a public, transparent and accessible justice system through research and education.
3. Encourage dialogue between justice system participants and the public.
4. Develop, coordinate, or deliver public legal education information and programs to students and others.

[Read more about OJEN](#)

We wanted to think about how we could employ interactive and experiential learning methods in a variety of different settings - so we asked the audience to work in groups to discuss how they would do it, what they needed help with and where there were opportunities and challenges. Here's what we came up with:

[Learning mats with summary of comments](#)



Workshops: [Read an outline of all the workshops](#)

Advice and legal services
Adult learners and legal capability
Poverty and human rights
Youth justice approaches
Research and evaluation

[Read the report](#)
[See the presentation](#)
[See the presentation](#)
[See the presentation](#) and [report](#)
[See the presentation](#) and [report](#)



Panel debate: 'How does PLE advance a culture of civil & social justice?'

The panel debate was chaired by Andrew Phillips. (Lord Phillips of Sudbury) OBE, President of the Citizenship Foundation. Panel speakers were Myles Kunzli, (Development Consultant, Law Centre's Federation), Theo Gavrielides, (Chief Executive, ROTA and Director, IARS) Sarah McCoubrey, (Executive Director, OJEN) and Carol Taylor. (Operations Director, NIACE)



Theo Gavrielides



Carol Taylor

The panel speakers gave an introductory synopsis of how PLE advances a culture of civil & social justice. For example:

'PLE is much more than just preventing or intervening earlier in an individual's legal problem: it's about civil and social justice in a collective sense'

Myles Kunzli

'PLE is not about creating lawyers. It's about active citizenship and empowering people to perform their role in society and giving them the tools to do that'

Theo Gavrielides

'We can either continue to disempower people by only offering them advice which can be expensive and complicated, or we can grow robust citizens who know when they need to know something, know how to get something, and are more confident about dealing with those things'

Carol Taylor

Questions

Several questions were put to panel members. Below is a selection with responses from members of the panel:

1. How can PLE move from the paradigm of advice to other sectors?

'In Canada we mostly do PLE through our legal aid clinics. We also do it through schools. Just do it in little ways and let the momentum build and let people see results.'

Sarah McCoubrey

'PLE is a relatively new concept in the UK and different service providers are probably doing PLE and don't know that they are doing PLE'.

Theo Gavrielides

2. What would PLE do for marginalised communities so that they can do it for themselves in another three years ?

'If we don't do PLE then TV and rumour and misinformation does it for us in the wrong direction. So even if we don't know how to solve the problems of those who need it, at least we are stopping or slowing a downward slide. Good legal information can be a preventive approach and can reduce the likelihood of cases going to court.'

Sarah McCoubrey

'It's not about additional costs but mainstreaming PLE into services that already exists.'

Theo Gavrielides

3. What do we sell to the potential fund providers of PLE ?

'There are different ways you can package PLE. From a government perspective prevention and early intervention is what they might be interested in, while a trust or foundation might be interested in civic participation and the policy work that comes through gathering people together.'

Myles Kunzli

'It really is tough for someone to say that a programme that is so closely linked to democratic participation and lively democracy isn't a good idea. They might say that they don't have the money right now, but they are not going to say it isn't a good idea.'

Sarah McCoubrey

[Read the minutes of the debate](#)

Andrew Phillips thanked the panel for their contributions adding that in a democracy, it is vital for citizens to be engaged - public legal education is about engaging with the democratic system and the need for PLE has never been so intense.

In conclusion Sir Henry Brooke made closing remarks as chair and concluded a very successful Plenet conference.