

## **PROGRAM UPDATE**

### **New regional coordination services**

Welcome to new services who will be providing CLSD regional coordination in these regions:

**South Coast** – the Family Place.

**Central Coast** – the Regional Youth Support Services (RYSS)

**Far West** – the Intellectual Disability Rights Service.

In the next quarter we are supporting the new services to meet with regional legal assistance services to agree on the priorities for the rest of the year. The new services bring significant knowledge about their regions and the needs of people facing social and economic disadvantage.

Details about CLSD meetings and the regional coordinator are on our [website](#).

### **CLSD Reflection Project**

How could CLSD partnerships be aligned more strongly with the expectations and needs of legal assistance services? We are calling for feedback on how the CLSD Program and partnerships could provide greater value to the service delivery challenges, how regional planning and communication could be improved and how CLSD partnerships could work more equitably.

Feedback can be provided via the online [survey](#), or by sending an email to [clsd@legalaid.nsw.gov.au](mailto:clsd@legalaid.nsw.gov.au) by **29 March 2024**.

## **CLSD PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION**

### **Young people and bail in the Central West**

Breach of bail proceedings against young people (under 18 years) is a significant issue in the Central West region which covers Dubbo, Coonamble, Walgett, Bourke and Brewarrina. In 2022 the Western Orana Police District had the highest rate of bail proceedings against young people (772.2 per 100 000) across NSW, by comparison the rate for Mt Druitt PAC, which had the highest rate amongst metropolitan police districts, was 593.3 (data provided by BOCSAR/Youth Justice).

This issue was investigated over 2 CLSD meetings held in Dubbo in 2023. The CLSD Program also liaised with Youth Justice about the Short-term Remand Project

being implemented in Wagga Wagga and Sutherland to learn about how that Project is responding to the problem in those locations.

Lawyers and youth workers participating in the meetings held in Dubbo considered that many of the bail breaches are technical and many young people appearing in court have suspected or diagnosed intellectual disability or cognitive impairment. Bail conditions are complex, and the capacity of young people and their families to understand the conditions is often limited. Lawyers and youth workers have limited time available at court to explain conditions and young people can lack support from family at court. Very young children are on bail and subject to welfare conditions for extended periods due to doli incapax.

CLSD partners identified some actions that might be taken locally to address this problem:

- Training for support people for young people who are in police custody.
- A resource for young people and their families to help them understand bail conditions.
- A quick reference guide on support services for custody managers.
- Advocacy for the expansion of the specialist Children's Court in Dubbo.

Support person training will be offered in Dubbo, Walgett and Coonamble for community workers and interested community members on 7, 8 and 9 May, and the Central West partnership will conduct a survey of youth services in the region. Further work on a resource for young people and their families will be considered, however the partnership is aware of other work by the Children's Court and Youth Justice that will potentially have an impact.

## **Legal Information and Referral Forums: Northern Rivers and Central West**

CLSD partnerships aim to increase access to justice for people experiencing social and economic disadvantage. Supporting professional relationships between potential referrers and legal services and building effective referral pathways is critical to achieve this. We regularly hear from our community service partners that they would like to know more about what legal services provide.

In 2023 the Northern Rivers CLSD partnership trialled a new approach for community services to meet legal assistance lawyers and advocates, using a speed-dating format, to hear about new programs and services and how to make referrals. The Northern Rivers partnership held their first forum in Ballina and plan to hold one in Tweed Heads in 2024. The Central West partnership held a similar forum 'Get up close and person with lawyers and advocates' in Dubbo in February 2024. The events allow for informal interaction between the different services and have been popular with community services, attracting NDIS support coordinators, youth workers, domestic and family violence workers, workers from the education sector, mental health and drug and alcohol services.

## **SYSTEMIC ISSUES**

### **Young people in contact with the criminal justice system, homelessness, and poverty**

The situation of young people in contact with the criminal justice system was discussed over 2 partnership meetings in late 2023 and February 2024 in the Taree Forster region. Partners identified that young people are facing homeless on exiting the health care and the criminal justice system. Lack of appropriate non-legal support at court and in police custody mean that young people are not getting the help they need to address the circumstances that bring them into contact with the criminal justice system. As well as shelter, other everyday needs such as income support, identity documents and food are not being met, leading to greater risk of involvement in the criminal justice system.

### **NDIS consumer problems**

Recent discussions in Broken Hill and Kempsey highlighted consumer issues faced by NDIS participants in regional areas. They include unscrupulous NDIS service providers, over-servicing, over-charging, unqualified service providers, poor understanding of the rights of NDIS participants and lack of NDIS services who will accept people with complex needs. This is compounded by fear of retaliation if NDIS participants complain, and lack of understanding about how to pursue complaints. We are currently looking for appropriate resources about the consumer rights of NDIS participants to share with partners.