

Understanding Our Clients

Prisoners

What do I need to understand to work more effectively with clients who are in custody?

- People may have negative impressions of what a prisoner is and what a prisoner deserves. It's important to remember that being removed from the community is the punishment, it's not the treatment that the prisoner is subjected to in the custodial system.
- The primary issue for most prisoners is that they don't have their freedom and are in custody. Some prisoners further have severe mental illnesses or cognitive impairments, which makes the process even more difficult.
- Prisoners are often part of the same cohort as people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. They've experienced trauma and they may have addiction issues. Those issues make prisoners more vulnerable generally because they affect their ability to function in life and may mean that they find themselves with more legal problems than what they would have had if they did not have those issues.
- The kindest and most empathetic thing we can do is take the time to listen to the client, explain to them what is happening, why we need the information we are asking for, and what will happen next. Like all clients, prisoners need to feel heard and like they are participating in their own legal matters.

Support services for non-legal issues – referral options

Online referral databases

These online databases may also assist you to find appropriate non-legal services for your client.

- [WayAhead Directory](#) – online database used to find local services, to make referrals and access mental health information and resources.
- [Ask Izzy](#) – search over 350,000 services to find housing, meals, healthcare, counselling, legal advice, addiction treatment and more.
- [Data Diction LINCS](#) – LINCS is used by almost all councils in the Sydney area and lists community services
- [My Community Directory](#) – directory of health and community services in NSW and other states.
- [Infoxchange](#) – national database of community support services.

Action learning activities

- Reflect on the points raised in the [Understanding Our Clients](#) video and consider if there are aspects you could improve on in the way you work with clients who are in custody. Take action to make changes where appropriate.
- Think about how you might develop a rapport with your client and put this into action when you meet. Consider what worked well and what you would do differently next time.
- Discuss support services for non-legal issues with your client and help your client access these services if required.
- Complete the relevant Lawyer Education Series modules and reflect on your learnings.
- Review one or more of the resources below and consider how you can apply any insights to your practice.

Useful Resources

- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series training module [Summary Crime Pt 1](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series training module [Summary Crime Pt 2](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series training module [Children's Crime](#).
- **Legal Aid NSW** Lawyer Education Series training module [Indictable Crime Matters](#).
- [Tipsheet: Working with clients in distress in a custodial setting](#)
- [The Legal Aid NSW Podcast Channel](#) that you can access via our Podbean account or wherever you get your podcasts. The series covers a variety of topics. Use the search function or topic list to find podcasts that may be relevant.
- The [With You Trauma-Informed Organisational Toolkit](#) provides practical guidance to foster the development of trauma-informed, rights-based legal assistance services.
- [The Bugmy Bar Book](#) summarises key research relating to social disadvantage and deprivation. It is hosted on the Public Defenders Website and is designed to equip lawyers with a sophisticated, accurate understanding of the impacts adverse experiences can have upon individuals.
- [Legal Aid NSW Quality Standards Manual](#) – this document outlines the practice standards, client service standards, panel requirements and law practice requirements that apply to your role.