

Minutes

VLAFF Prisoners Working Group (PWG)

Meeting number: 1 of 4

Date	Thursday 18 February 2016	
Time	10:00pm – 12:00pm	
Location	Justice Connect, Level 13, 461 Bourke Street, Melbourne	
Attendance	<p>Deborah Di Natale (Chair) Justice Connect Samantha Watson Victoria Legal Aid Craig Cairney Victoria Legal Aid Peter Darebin Community Legal Centre Harriet Darebin Community Legal Centre Sharni Williams Mental Health Legal Centre Sam Sowerwine Justice Connect, Homeless Law Laura Heffres Justice Connect Kaye Norris Diversitat Community Program (representative for the Financial & Consumer Rights Council) Helen Matthews Women's Legal Service Victoria Daniel Nguyen Prison's Legal Assistance Education Project Bonnie Renou Federation of Community Legal Centres Michelle McDonnell Federation of Community Legal Centres Ursula Noye Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre</p>	
Apologies	Carman Parsons <i>Victoria Legal Aid</i>	
Item		Attachment number
1. Minutes of previous meeting held on 5 November 2015 Moved: Daniel Nguyen		1
2. Background Deb Di Natale gave overview of the PWG for the benefit of new members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWG has been meeting for two years • The group gathered information on what service provided what assistance and at which prisons. Some services did not want the data broadly circulated for capacity reasons • Justice Connect has contacted the Corrections Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. There are joint plans to address unmet civil and family law needs of prisoners. 	
3. Updates Sam Sowerwine, Justice Connect - Homeless Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • JC have been providing services, linking prisoners with pro-bono legal assistance, to 	

Port Phillip Prison for 1.5 years and are funded until August 2016

- 85% matters related to debt /credit problems, plus infringements and fines
- Tenancy matters also featured. They have saved 25 tenants from evictions. They have been working with the Clean Slate project at DPFC
- Plans to do more with the Office of Housing
- **Action:** Sam S to send a copy of JC's annual report, which has more stats
- High need for civil legal help and financial counselling (no financial counsellor at PPP)

Bonnie Renou, Federation of CLCs

- Preparing for the Smart Justice Symposium in late April 2016 in Melbourne (paper tabled) – it will bring together experts in criminal justice reform and those with a lived experience of prison and focus on prevention and rehabilitation
- Inviting others in legal sector to implement Ombudsman's recommendations

Peter, Darebin CLC

- DCLC current offer a legal advice phone service on Fridays (male prisoners)
- Looking to implement a face to face service for female prisoners soon (capacity issue)
- Most common issues are prison related matters
- Referrals mostly come from VLA and the prison
- Working on a research task re strip searches and access to legal education
- Experiencing issues – for prisons to access DCLC advice, they need to be added to the prisoner's individual call list

Sharni Williams, MHLC

- MHLS has a good relationship with DPFC and attend once a week, plus delivering an information session bi-monthly (Flat Out deliver a session on the alternate month)
- Run a phones service for criminal matters and speak to approximately 12 clients each week – experiencing some restrictions with calling prisoners
- Currently working with financial counsellor, Christine Hunter from Good Sheppard, once a week
- Most common issues: housing, child protection, Powers of Attorney, wills, migration/deportation and seeing more family law issues
- They are hoping to do a CLE on deportation and the cancellation of visas with Linda Waters from Darebin (pro bono)
- Flagged issue with mail delays – prisoners only receiving Christmas mail now

Ursula Noye, Brimbank CLC

- Clean Slate (bulk debt project at DPFC) is now in its second round and will only continue after this round if they cannot secure ongoing funding
- Clean Slate works with Homeless Law and financial counsellors at DPFC

- Will be delivering the program to Langi Kal Kal on 19 Feb 2016

Michelle McDonnell, FCLC - Smart Justice Project

- Working with Deakin University on the Reintegration Puzzle Conference being held 21 and 22 June 2016 at Geelong with a focus on disability and incarceration
- Working group members can express interest to take part in the panel discussion or present at the conference offline

Kaye Norris, Diversitat Community Program

- Attends Barwon prison once a month to provide face-to-face advice and ongoing casework in relation to credit/debt issues (approximately 15-20 clients each month)
- Ongoing casework correspondence is via mail (issue arise when prisons are moved to other prisons or leave the prison)
- Most of the prisoner's concerns are in relation to money for their families whilst they are in prison
- Flagged issue with banks not understanding why prisoners cannot make repayments

Helen Matthews, Women's Legal Service Victoria

- Deliver legal advice (and casework in line with guidelines) to women at Tarrengower Prison once a fortnight as part of their Link Program, in relation to family violence and family law, using video conferencing at VLA
- WLSV employ a financial counsellor and is currently piloting a child protection practice that is also available to Link clients
- Elisa Whittaker manages Link and will normally attend these meeting
- Delivering Link to women at Tarrengower is relatively new and has had good uptake
- Elisa and WLSV's financial counsellor will also be delivering CLE at Tarrengower re FL/FV
- Deb noted – mail delay is causing a significant issue when prisons are deemed as 'served' for intervention orders, as the delay can result in breaches
- Helen noted while this is easily defended, it is a waste of the Courts' and the legal assistance sector's time

Craig Cairney, VLA

- VLA have committed to a pilot that will give prisoner's access to a legal advice line (to be staffed by lawyers in order to give legal advice, not just referrals)
- VLA are now recruiting the senior lawyer to manage the advice line
- Prisons to take part in the pilot have not been confirmed however likely to include some male remand prisons, a women's prison and a minimum security prison
- VLA's new phone system allows for greater flexibility around the way prisoner's calls can be handled
- VLA is looking at the PWG as a reference group for the pilot
- All members expressed their excitement to see the establishment of VLA's Prisoners Legal Advice Line

<p>Daniel Nguyen, Prisoner’s Legal Assistance Education Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently deliver legal education (run by law students) at MRC in relation to parole, civil and child protection • Plan to roll out service to Barwon prison • Each session gets approximately 10-30 attendees • They haven’t been able to get back into MRC since the riots 	
<p>4. Corrections update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group agreed that another update from Jacki Bernardi from CV would be helpful • Items/common issues to be discussed with Corrections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues contacting prisoners by phone, particularly at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Melbourne Assessment Prison • Metropolitan Remand Centre not allowing programs to run since the riot • Delays in prisoners receiving their mail is resulting in issues such as breaching intervention orders • Funding • Flagged potential for PWG to work in partnership in relation to funding and State tenders • Members agreed to invite Corrections to future PWG meetings 	
<p>5. Paper on unmet legal need in prison: distribute to Corrections?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PWG agree the paper should be shared with Corrections • Action: Sam Watson to seek VLAFF Main Forum approval to share the Unmet Legal Need discussion paper (tabled) with Corrections 	
<p>6. Brimbank Scoping Report – update</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report tabled and requested feedback (offline if any) 	
<p>7. Future Chair</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deb Di Natale has stepped down as Chair and Ursula Noye and Simon Roberts from BMCLC will co-Chair until their new program managers starts 	
<p>8. Other business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group will continue to meet quarterly 	
<p>Additional information</p>	
<p>Next VLAFF PWG meeting: 19 May 2016, 10am – 12pm Location: TBC</p>	