

Legal Education and Awareness Project (LEAP) Sept 2007 – Sept 2008

Legal Services Commission SA

Report to

South Australian Attorney-General's Department Crime Prevention and Community Safety Program

1. What worked well in the operation of your project?

There were a number of elements that contributed significantly to the overall operation of the project. Importantly, the project benefited from three years of ground work carried out by the Commission's *Family Law and CALD Communities Project*. LEAP's work built upon this project's methodologies and community engagement strategies and used its extensive network to become operational in a short space of time. Other key dimensions of LEAP also included:

Flexible Community engagement and communication strategies

Working with new and emerging communities requires developing working approaches that are sensitive to the challenges associated with their resettlement experience. Identifying opportunities to 'meet and greet' African communities at their own places of gathering was one such approach that proved extremely successful. The Commission's African community liaison officer worked together with the LEAP officer in fostering working partnerships with target groups towards achieving the following objectives:

- Provide information about the project in a culturally sensitive manner
- Provide opportunities to discuss and record views about the law, access to justice and offending
- Gain cooperation by demonstrating a good understanding of settlement challenges for African youth and a genuine interest in supporting them
- Encourage community capacity building
- Identify community needs and generating discussion about short and long term community objectives.
- Strengthen the project's community liaison and engagement capacity
- Limit the reliance on printed promotional material (often meaningless for CALD communities)
- Demonstrate flexibility of service delivery and reducing the formalities associated with the functions of legal/government organisations.

A significant amount of work was conducted after hours and on weekends at a range of venues from community centres, church halls and public libraries through to schools, country camps and outdoor sporting areas. Making an effort to remain accessible and by working in a flexible manner had a very positive impact on the target groups' perception of the project in general. Over 1000 youth and youth workers attended sessions conducted by the project staff (see Attachment 1).

Culturally appropriate and youth focused workshop methodologies

The project benefited from employing in the position of Legal Education Officer a culturally competent professional with significant experience working with CALD communities. This was critical in order to engage the youth in a positive and constructive dialogue about the law, crime, police and implications of offending, particularly in light of negative media coverage of African youth.

By consulting with key partners, the project developed a strong understanding about the pre and post migration experiences of African youth. Having experienced displacement, precarious living conditions in refugee camps, loss of family members, war and violence many of the youth are classified by service providers as 'youth at risk' requiring sensitive working approaches. Other issues which further compounded the situation of African youth include limited English language skills, limited experience of functional justice systems in their countries of origin, distrust of authority including police, experiences of discrimination and racism.

Consultations with the youth allowed the project to develop a presentation style relevant to them. Importantly, the project's officer found that by sharing his own experience as a young migrant to Australia he could quickly gain the attention, trust and respect of the youth who felt identified and understood. This significantly helped the delivery of the workshop content and stimulated discussion about the importance of making informed and positive life choices and achieving a greater sense of awareness around our own rights and responsibilities and the needs and rights of others.

A total of 838 youth participated in the 33 workshops delivered since September 2007. Workshops typically lasted 1 hour and catered for a maximum of 25 participants. An informal and non-academic style, relying on easy to understand and highly interactive language encouraged the youth to pay attention and participate by asking questions and giving their opinions at any time during the session. A power point presentation prepared in plain English and with youth friendly graphics was supported by video clips showcasing thought provoking yet humorous case scenarios. Other activities included word matching, hypotheticals, case scenarios and an interactive 'law quiz challenge' towards the end of the session.

Feedback was consistently positive. One educator commented:

'The workshop exceeded my expectations, the facilitator was highly engaging, used relevant visual aides and case scenarios; the facilitator developed an instant rapport with the students...'

Training and development

A key strength of the project was its specialised knowledge of justice issues for new and emerging communities and cultural awareness training capability.

Magistrates

On 7th March 2008, the LEAP officer addressed some 30 Magistrates attending their annual Continuing Education Conference. The presentation provided information about the experience of young Africans settling in South Australia as humanitarian entrants and

refugees. It also discussed the importance of legal education and access to justice initiatives as vehicles to support CALD communities in achieving self reliance and greater social mobility. In addition, Magistrates were encouraged to think about the role of the judiciary in educating newly arrived communities about our justice system.

The LEAP presentation struck a chord at the Magistrates' conference. In June 2008, the LEAP officer was invited as a guest speaker to address the Courts Authority's Community Relations Committee chaired by Judge Michael Boylan. At this meeting, the project officer had an opportunity to discuss in more detail emerging justice issues for African communities and suggested a series of culturally sensitive work and communication approaches including the need for CALD court support workers. This has resulted in an ongoing working partnership with the court's communication officers and particularly Judge Michael Boylan who has agreed to support LEAP in its efforts to develop culturally appropriate protocols within the justice system.

South Australian Police

The project has provided cultural awareness training to some 80 police officers exploring pre and post migration experiences of African youth within the context of police-community relations building. SAPOL expressed its interest in further training during the later part of 2008.

Settlement Service providers

LEAP joined the Youth African Workers Network (YAWN), an important reference group made up of a diversity of organisations working in new arrivals programs for youth. YAWN was an excellent forum to inform service providers about a range of topics related to young people and the law, particularly about the operation of the Youth Court. This working group met on a bimonthly basis. In addition LEAP provided training sessions to 168 community workers and educators from a number of school communities and organisations.

2. What worked less well in the operation of your project? (include discussion of key challenges, whether these were overcome, and if so, how?)

Short term funding to meet the ongoing demand for legal education

A major implication of the short term nature of the project was creating an expectation in African communities that legal education was an ongoing service readily available to them. Traditionally, migrant communities have negotiated the first years of settling in Australia with limited understanding of Australian's laws and legal system. This is partly due to a lack of recognition of the role that community legal education plays in helping newly arrived communities achieve an understanding of their rights and obligations.

A key challenge associated with limited funding was the prospect of creating an expectation in the community for ongoing legal education. Ending the project after 12 months, effectively at its peak, would have left a considerable gap and sent mixed messages to the community about our commitment to support them during the critical phase of early settlement. Fortunately, LEAP received funding from the Legal Services Commission until

2009 in order to continue meeting ongoing demand and to consolidate legal education methodologies relevant to youth.

Consultations with the youth

At the beginning of the project service providers expressed a number of concerns in relation to the involvement of their client group in the LEAP consultations. These included:

- An expectation that LEAP would fund the meetings eg: transport, food, venue hire or incentives for youth to participate.
- Reluctance to accommodate a consultation before or after one of their own planned activities.
- Concern that LEAP would operate, in practice, in a youth-friendly and culturally appropriate manner.

With limited funding, LEAP was unable to meet the costs of organising consultations for certain youth groups as requested by their service providers. This, however, was not critical as LEAP had secured the participation of the 'Nile boys', 'Ausdance troop', Liberian community, Adelaide Secondary School of Languages and The Parks Library in the consultations.

In addition, the project was able to quickly gain credibility among service providers by establishing itself as an innovative, practical and culturally competent initiative. The results of the project's surveys completed by workers and youth demonstrated this.

3. How were the community involved in implementing or running the project? (include discussion of community participation and evidence of shared responsibility and partnership where appropriate)

In 2006, the Commission, through its Family Law and CALD Communities Project, consulted extensively with African communities and organisations with new arrival programs. LEAP was designed as an early intervention crime prevention initiative responding to concerns raised during in 2006 related to youth's attitude to and knowledge of the law and the implications of offending.

The support and participation of these communities for the project was pivotal to its development and implementation. The involvement of African community workers, service providers and youth informed the development of culturally appropriate and youth-friendly learning material and guidelines for a flexible and responsive class environment. Providing young people with opportunities to share their experiences and views about the law was an important element of LEAP. More than 60 youth from a range of countries from North Central and West Africa participated in consultations between September and October 2007. Young people from the Sudanese 'Nile Boys' and students from the Adelaide Secondary School, who keenly shared their life experiences and suggested ideas for the project, also recognised the relevance of legal education for young migrants. Referring to the a consultation session with a group of Sudanese youth, a community worker commented:

'I have never seen the youth so engaged and interested in having their resettlement experience and views about the law and Police heard...' Youth worker MYSA.

African community workers and leaders worked diligently in engaging young people in the project. They booked workshops, arranged venues, provided transport for the youth and promoted the project amongst their networks. Community participation and shared responsibility in implementing the project is clearly evidenced by the fact that more than half of the total number of workshops delivered were community-initiated.

In joining Youth African Workers Network, the project also benefited from harnessing the wealth of knowledge of youth workers in settlement services. In addition, working partnerships with the Adelaide Secondary School of English and Thebarton Senior College allowed LEAP to provide workshops for some 200 students from a diversity of CALD background newly arrived migrants in South Australia.

4. What in-kind contributions were made by your own organisation or other organisations/individuals? (please be specific and estimate a \$ value where possible)

The Legal Services Commission contributed \$31,922 to funding the position of a legal education officer to work on the project on a part time basis, three days per week. This contribution also covered some of the costs associated with project administration, transport and AV equipment. With the exception of the Commissions' funds, the project did not receive any other in-kind contribution.

5. Will the project continue in any form after this grant has been expended? (Yes / No, please explain why or how)

In recognition of the project's significant achievement and the need for further legal education as expressed by communities and services providers involved in the project, the Legal Service Commission has agreed to fund the project until September 2009. The project will continue to support African youth and will also seek to engage youth from other newly arrived communities in legal education. The project will also seek to establish working partnerships with organisations supporting indigenous and disadvantaged youth with a view to sourcing funding and to develop legal education initiatives for these youth groups.

6. Have any new projects/opportunities come about for this organisation or any partner organisations/individual as a result of this project.

The work of LEAP motivated a number of organisations involved in the project to apply for a 2008 Crime Prevention Grant. MYSA and MECSSA are two organisations who were successful in their application. In particular, the content and operation of MECSSA's 'Rhyme no Crime' project has been strengthened by LEAP which will be facilitating four legal education workshops for African youth participating in this initiative.

7. If you were given the chance to do your project again, what would you do differently? (also consider what advice you would give to someone else who were to attempt such a project)

LEAP was an early intervention project centred around two key concepts: crime prevention and social participation. The natural tensions associated with merging these two elements required a sensitive approach when promoting LEAP as a crime prevention initiative for a specific client group. These tensions often surfaced through the course of the project particularly when working directly with the youth. For instance, the youth needed reassurance that LEAP did not represent the position of law enforcing authorities, such as SAPOL. Thus, a significant amount of effort was directed in clarifying this. Similarly, some service providers also found it challenging to open up to a project designed to address alleged crime issues amongst African youth. In addition, the client specific nature of LEAP and limited funding made it difficult for the project to meet many requests for legal education by organisations working across the youth sector.

The Commission's decision to fund the project for another year will enable us to change some aspects of the original project:

- The client group will be expanded to embrace young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, not solely youth from African communities.
- Prospects of working with indigenous and other youth at risk will be explored.
- The focus of the project will be steered away from an early intervention-crime prevention focus towards social inclusion and access to justice for young people through community legal education.
- Opportunities for additional funding will need to be identified in order to produce alternative and youth friendly legal education resources for youth in consultation and collaboration with young people. Printed material is not necessarily the most effective vehicle to engage youth. Young people absorb information better when this is provided through interactive, innovative and exciting formats such as short films, web sites, music, theatre and information downloadable to mobiles, amongst other strategies.

A key objective of the project was the development of a legal resource kit for service providers. The kit was originally proposed as a hard copy resource containing information about the law relating to minors, the youth court, police powers, less serious criminal offences, amongst other topics. However, the project identified a number of other resources currently available containing similar information such as *The law, youth work and young people: A handbook for youth workers in South Australia* and *The Legal Services Commission's Law handbook*). In rethinking the relevance of yet another hard copy legal resource kit, we decided to develop a more user friendly online legal resource that could be easily updated at a minimal cost. The resource is located on the Legal Services Commission website. http://www.lsc.sa.gov.au/cb_pages/CALDprojects.php

In its electronic format, the Kit can be easily promoted and accessed by community workers and service providers. The Kit webpage will include information about:

- Community Legal Education
- Culturally appropriate service delivery
- Justice issues for young new migrants
- Supporting young people in police interviews
- Updated legal information by linking to the Legal Services Commission online 'Law handbook'
- links to other relevant websites such as the South Australian Courts including the Youth Court virtual tour website
http://www.courts.sa.gov.au/Virtual_Tour/youth_court/content/index.html