

## The Media & Community Legal Education

Using the media, in its many forms, should be considered by CLCs as an avenue for community legal education (CLE). Potentially, an article in a local newspaper will reach many more people than could be accommodated in a CLE workshop.

There is a lot of information available regarding working effectively with the media to get your message across, to promote your organisation or raise awareness.

This Information Sheet will highlight some key strategies and considerations and will direct readers to useful resources.

### TIP!

To ensure that the centre meets its obligations under the CLCs National Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme, it is important that the centre has policies and procedures in place to check that the content of press releases or other media statements is accurate and not defamatory. Anyone who speaks to the media on behalf of the organisation should be aware of issues around defamation.

### **The main types of print and electronic media that CLCs engage for the purpose of CLE include:**

- newspapers – local, state-wide and national, foreign language;
- magazines and journals – popular and specialist/professional;
- radio – community/public, mainstream, ethnic and specialised (such as radio for the print handicapped); and
- television – community/public and mainstream, news and current affairs programs.

### **Organisational considerations in working with the media**

- work within the requirements of the Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme;
- decide who within the organisation is authorised to speak/deal with the media on behalf of the centre. This authority may be linked to a particular position or a specific person, such as the CLE worker. It may be a blanket authority or a responsibility in relation to specific topics or types of information, for example, the Chairperson may be the media contact when controversial issues are being dealt with;
- ensure that those dealing with the media have appropriate training;
- support those dealing with the media by preparing clear and agreed information, 'messages' or policy positions. Ensure that these are properly researched and can be substantiated; and
- consider possible issues that may arise in dealing with the media and develop policies and procedures to provide guidance should a situation arise. For example, the use of case studies

based on real matters, asking clients to speak to the media or providing comment on a matter that the centre has not previously considered.

### **General principles for dealing with the media**

- get to know the media
  - » Publications or programs have their own character. They will aim at particular audiences, will be interested in certain types of matters and will cover matters in greater or less depth. An understanding of these factors will assist appropriate targeting of media work.
- Establish good relationships
  - » Building relationships with journalists is a key to getting coverage in the media. If possible, build and maintain relationships over time so that the groundwork is in place for when you want to obtain media coverage. This is also a good opportunity to find out about what journalists/media outlets are looking for in stories and the best way to provide this information to them.
- Prepare for and follow up media releases
  - » Phone the journalist or media outlet to let them know that you are submitting a media release. Follow it up with another phone call to check that it has been received and if more information is required.
- Develop an understanding of the timelines to which the media outlet is working.
- Be clear about why you are using the media and about the key information or messages that you want to get across.
- You don't have to respond to every media request
  - » If the centre is asked for comment about a matter that it has not considered, or if time is needed to prepare a response, say so. Tell the journalist that the centre is not in a position to comment on the matter or say that you will get back to them.
- In dealing with the media, ensure that concepts such as "on the record", "off the record" and "embargoed" are understood by all involved.

### **Media Releases**

- head with – Media Release;
- include the date;
- beware of putting too much information in a media release. It should be one page maximum and key points should be highlighted;
- ensure that a contact person is nominated and their details supplied so that the media release can be followed up quickly and easily if needed. Make sure that the person is available; and
- consider submitting a photograph with the media release. Include names and titles as appropriate.

### **Newspapers**

Local/Suburban Newspapers

- are concerned about how particular issues impact upon their readers and/or the geographic area they cover. Make the link, use local examples, facts and figures; and
- like to have a photograph to accompany stories. Given sufficient notice, they will often send photographers to local events. They may also accept photographs taken and submitted by the organisation.

## **Case Study**

Bushfire Legal Help, various organisations that came together to provide legal assistance to victims of the Black Saturday bushfires, obtained media coverage to promote the services that were being offered and to provide information about steps that should be taken to deal with particular situations, such as destroyed insurance policies and wills.

### Foreign Language Newspapers

- create the opportunity to get information across to particular ethnic communities;
- like mainstream media, they will not necessarily be read by everyone in a particular community and they will have their own style and focus; and
- organisations such as Migrant Resource Centres and the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria may be able to advise on relevant publications and ways to approach them.

## Case Study

Western Suburbs Legal Service issued media releases to relevant foreign language newspapers to promote the International Students Legal Clinic it established following a series of attacks in Melbourne.

### State wide and national daily newspapers

- will generally be looking for media items with broader relevance rather than being local area specific;
- letters to the Editor can be a mechanism for raising an issue or engaging in debate;
- offer the opportunity for feature articles and opinion pieces - usually the result of liaison and relationship building; and
- peak bodies such as the Federation of Community Legal Centres and specialist CLCs may have established relationships that could be tapped into.

### Radio

- if radio stations are not responding to media releases you could try calling into relevant 'talk-back' programs/discussions;
- be clear about what you want to say and how you are going to say it – time is often limited and you can't take back something that has gone 'live to air';
- the Federation of Community Legal Centres and some CLCs are active in broadcasting around legal issues, use your networks!

## Case Study

The Fitzroy Legal Service has a regular radio slot called "Outlaw", on community radio station RRR (102.7FM). It is a one hour talkback session in a program called "Wax Lyrical". The community radio station invited Fitzroy Legal Service to take part in the program a few years ago and it has continued since then. The slot is on once a month from 9-10am. Listeners are able to call in with legal queries or suggestions.

## Case Study

"Done by Law" which is a radio program sponsored by the Federation of Community Legal Centres. It is broadcast weekly on 3CR community radio. "Done by Law" looks at legal issues that may not normally get media coverage. Presenters discuss and analyse current legal issues from a social justice angle. CLC staff and volunteers are involved in the production and presentation of this program.

### Resources - working with the media

- The Federation of Community Legal Centres is an excellent resource. Federation secretariat have

expertise in working with the media. They can link you to other relevant people and resources within and beyond the CLC sector. The Federation may also be able to organise media training.

- The Federation Toolkit contains some great articles about working with the media. Go to [www.communitylaw.org.au](http://www.communitylaw.org.au) - intranet – Federation Toolkit – Media & Communications.
- Your Guide to Community Legal Education, Second Edition, produced by the Combined Community Legal Centres Group NSW (2004), has an entire section on Working with the Media (pp134-155).
- Our Community is an organisation that provides resources to support the work of community groups. Their website provides information about effectively working with the media. Go to - [www.ourcommunity.com.au](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au) - community resources – marketing/advocacy.
- Check the internet, check the library, talk to people – there is a lot of information out there!

Remember, publications such as newsletters produced by other organisations may also provide a vehicle for CLE activities.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Davies, G. (2009) Interview, Western Suburbs Legal Service, Newport
- de Kretser, H. (2009) Interview, Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc., Carlton
- Lo, B. (2009) Interview, Fitzroy Legal Service, Victoria
- National Association of Community Legal Centres (2005) *Risk Management Guide: A Guide to assist Centres in meeting the National Professional Indemnity Insurance Scheme Requirements*

#### FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

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- Law & Justice Foundation of NSW, *Publishing Toolkit – Fact Sheet 4 How to promote your resource* <http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/app/E8CD833960A7E66BCA25742C001EEA42.html>