



Final grant report: REACH OUT

Project title	REACH OUT: Access to civil law services for remote residents on the Mid North Coast
Grant recipient	Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre (a program of Advocacy Law Alliance Inc.)
Project manager	Melanie Kallmier
Position	Administration and Projects Officer
Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount	\$50,000.00
Grant period	August 2014 – June 2016
Date of this report	24 June 2016

Description of the project

Describe the project in just enough detail so that anyone can understand it. What was the aim of the project, who was the intended audience and what strategies did you implement to achieve the aim?

The aim of the project was to establish and trial the provision of cost-effective and quality legal services using videoconferencing to residents living in remote areas of Kempsey Shire, Port Macquarie-Hastings and Greater Taree LGAs.

The target groups for this project were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities, elderly people, people on low income or people with other disadvantage, living in remote communities of the MNCCLC catchment area. It was envisioned that these target groups would benefit directly from this project by having increased access to civil legal services which would likely confer a number of benefits:

- Reducing debt and preventing debt matters from proceeding to court and/or debt collection
- Providing better outcomes in relation to fines and enforcement orders e.g. issuing of cautions, review of fines, work and development orders, time to pay arrangements, obtaining and maintaining a driver's licence
- A holistic approach to legal issues, including referral to paralegal, health and mental health services, other services e.g. financial counselling, drug and alcohol services, counselling.

We hypothesised that the families of clients with debt matters would benefit indirectly by improved outcomes for these clients in dealing with these issues in a timely matter.

We planned to implement this project in 3 main phases followed by a final evaluation:

- **Phase 1: Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service (Wingham)**

Phase 1 focused on converting the existing face to face outreach clinic into a videoconferencing clinic. Once this videoconferencing clinic had been in operation for 3 months, we performed a short evaluation to check that it was meeting the project aim. We conducted a review of any issues that had arisen. Any changes required were made to the operation of this service and were taken into account in establishing the next phase of the project.

- **Phase 2: The Rocks Info and Community Centre (South West Rocks)**

Phase 2 focused on establishing a new videoconferencing clinic at The Rocks Info and Community Centre in South West Rocks.

Once this videoconferencing clinic had been in operation for 3 months, we performed a short evaluation of both clinics (i.e. Phase 1 – operating for at least 6 months; and Phase 2 – operating for at least 3 months) to check that they were meeting the project aim. We conducted a review of any issues that may have arisen. Any changes required were made to the operation of both services and were taken into account in establishing the final phase of the project.

- **Phase 3: Thunghutti Local Aboriginal Land Council (Bellbrook)**

Phase 3 focused on establishing a new videoconferencing clinic at Thunghutti Local Aboriginal Land Council in Bellbrook. We expected that this would be the most challenging of the 3 phases so left it till last so that we could apply the experience and learning from the first two phases.

The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?

The MNCCLC is an active participant in two NSW Legal Aid funded Cooperative Legal Service Delivery (CLSD) regions – Taree/Forster and Kempsey/Nambucca. Through regular attendance at these meetings and attendance at other local interagency meetings, MNCCLC monitors service gaps and emerging needs. This project came about in response to feedback from community partners in South West Rocks and Bellbrook that there were significant financial and transport barriers for remote residents seeking to access civil law services.

Given the limited resources available to develop a response to these partners, MNCCLC began exploring the possibility and challenges of providing quality legal advice via web based videoconferencing.

MNCCLC chose Redback Conferencing to use for videoconferencing as it provided the most straightforward and reliable access to web-based conferencing that we could find. The project was rolled out in a staged fashion to give us a chance to learn lessons from each stage and reconfigure as necessary in response to those lessons.

Wingham

MNCCLC had an existing outreach at Wingham which relied on clients booking in for a face to face appointment with a solicitor. The solicitor would travel there (a round trip of 2.5 hours) in response to client bookings. Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service was an optimum location to commence the project, as it allowed us to trial the technology within the framework of an established relationship.

South West Rocks

Services at South West Rocks had long requested an outreach clinic in their village, however the distance (again, a round trip of 2.5 hours) had precluded this with MNCCLC's existing resources. In particular, The Rocks Info and Community Centre expressed interest in hosting the videoconference advice clinic and became our partner for stage 2 of the project rollout.

Bellbrook

The (then) CEO of Thungutti Local Aboriginal Land Council in Bellbrook (a village about 1hr 45 mins drive northwest of MNCCLC) requested an outreach to the Aboriginal community in 2014. There was a change in CEO and we commenced further discussions the new CEO who was interested in continuing the project and so the Land Council became the location for the third stage of the project.

Briefly set out the project stages and what happened in each stage.

Wingham (Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service) (MVNS)

Stage 1 commenced in February 2015 and replaced existing face to face services with a regular Thursday (fortnightly) videolink conference outreach. We provided the centre with a camera and speakers to use with their existing laptop.

The project was launched with a pizza lunch, using the service's pizza oven as a drawcard to bring people in and look at the technology. We trained the staff in how to log onto the Redback site, and provided screenshots of the step by step log on process to back them up. The existing booking protocol was retained such that MVNS staff booked clients in, liaising with MNCCLC to advise of that booking, and then the advice was provided via videolink.

We developed flyers to promote the service which were distributed to key local services (including schools, local Op Shops and faith-based welfare providers), and continued to promote the clinic via interagencies and social media. We promoted the clinic by alerting local media. We also alerted Law Access to the clinic, and asked that they direct any client enquiries on civil law matters from Wingham and surrounds to this clinic for advice. We also promoted the clinic using Facebook and Twitter, and found that this provided a good platform for raising awareness of our clinics.

It was initially intended that the Project Officer for MNCCLC would travel to establish the clinic and troubleshoot technology in the early days of the trial, but that as the trial progressed MVNS staff would take over the process of managing the technology and logging clients into a videoconference.

Some complications arose in that funding was at the same time cut to MVNS, with the result that

their staff numbers dropped and they had fewer days open. This put extra pressure on the staff there and they were less able to manage the technology - meaning that in practice the project officer for MNCCLC travelled to set up videolink appointments and support the client as they received advice from the solicitors. Nonetheless, this gave us the opportunity to troubleshoot in more depth.

Unfortunately, the reduced hours for MVNS meant fewer clients attending their office, and client numbers have dropped off for us over the project period. The Project Officer appeared on local community radio to promote the clinic, MNCCLC staff discussed the clinics at interagenices in June and October, and hosted a talk on Powers of Attorney and "Planning Ahead" at the local Wingham Library in August at which the clinic was promoted. MNCCLC continued to promote the clinic with local community organisations at local interagencies and community meetings and CLE and through direct contact with people contacting MNCCLC for advice.

South West Rocks (The Rocks Info Centre)

The Rocks Info Centre is staffed 5 days/week by an agent for DHS (Centrelink) with intermittent additional staff on other days of the week. Together, we chose Fridays (weekly) as a suitable time for clinics as that was a day when confidential office space was available. However, it meant that the only onsite staff member was the DHS agent who had separate responsibilities and wasn't always available to help.

We provided a computer, speakers and camera to be set up permanently in the office, along with the screenshot (step by step) instructions and login details. Clients would contact our office to book in (either by referral from the Info Centre or directly), and then attend the Info Centre for advice via videolink.

We developed flyers to promote the service and met with key local agencies (Community Health, preschool, Job Service provider, Primary School and NSW Police) to tell them about the service and seek their assistance with referrals. We also did some letterboxing to the local Aboriginal community and our Aboriginal Access Officer spoke to key community members about the clinic. We also alerted Law Access to our project, and asked that they direct enquiries on civil law matters from people in South West Rocks to the clinic for advice. Our Principal Solicitor appeared in the local newspaper and wrote to the local legal practitioners to advise them we were able to accept referrals to the clinic.

Clients booked in for advice and in practice, MNCCLC sent the Project Officer or other staff member to set up the client for their appointment rather than relying on Rocks Info Centre staff to support clients. This was largely due to the set up time required at the Rocks Info Centre and the need for clients to be assisted with technology during the advice appointment. On occasions the computer was disconnected and it was impractical to suggest the DHS agent to reconnect everything and set it up on our behalf. It was also not reasonable to seek the assistance of the DHS agent for technological assistance during appointments as DHS had their own clients to attend to). This did mean that although MNCCLC was not sending a solicitor to provide advice, we were sending a car and another staff person to support the clinic.

Bellbrook (Thungutti Local Aboriginal Land Council)

As mentioned above, the initial contact and arrangements for the planned project were made with

a CEO of the Land Council who subsequently left that position.

Our plan had been to attend Thungutti fortnightly on a Monday, in conjunction with a service from the Durri AMS, and to use one of the rooms in the Land Council building to provide advice. Clients could book in with us and MNCCLC would provide a computer, camera and speakers to support the clinic outreach there.

We anticipated that since the Land Council only had one staff person (the CEO), it would be impractical to rely on them to provide logistical support to the clinic and so we would need to send a staff member to set up the computer and equipment and support the client each time.

We produced culturally appropriate flyers and our Aboriginal Access Officer distributed them within the community, and to services who provided outreach to Bellbrook, so that we could receive referrals and book clients in. We attended a number of community days at Bellbrook to promote the service with other service providers and spoke to community members about the upcoming service.

A MNCCLC project officer attended onsite on occasions, however unfortunately the CEO was not always onsite due to competing work commitments and we were in practice unable to get access to the building on those occasions. We attended on a couple of occasions and spoke to the CEO and a new service who were planning a fortnightly outreach (Dept Health) and agreed with them that we could go at the same time they were there (proposed to be the alternate Monday) to ensure access to the building if the CEO was unable to be at the Land Council Building. This was agreed with the CEO and we re-commenced, however that service has been intermittently delivered and to date we have only been able to attend on one occasion. On that occasion, the community was holding a community meeting and a solicitor was able to speak to the group about our service, provide some CLE about fines and WDOs, and promote our clinics. Nonetheless, we have not had any clients use the technology from Bellbrook.

Now that the project has concluded, how did the implementation and/or the outcome differ from what was originally intended? Did anything surprise you? Were there any unintended outcomes?

Implementation

Technology - the web platform we used (Redback) was very suitable, with easy, intuitive features that made it user-friendly. We did find that at both locations where we had client appointments there were sound issues - which may have been a result of poorer internet connection speeds at the host agencies. These were overcome in part by both client and solicitor using a headset to reduce echo and external noise. We purchased headsets which could be connected to a "splitter" so that the client and the project officer could both be involved in the conversation if the client wanted that - this meant that the project officer could mediate if there were technical problems. Sound issues, however, meant that sometimes people's experience of the technology prevented the development of a rapport - essential in scenarios where we were giving sometimes complex advice to disadvantaged clients.

The technology we used was overridden if the computer had Skype open at the same time - the camera was not accessible to Redback under those conditions. This meant we needed to ensure that Skype was closed, and this needed to be done without unsettling the client and putting too

many barriers in the way of a client's experience. We realised it was best done by the support person before the client came into the room for advice.

The human factors in the use of the technology were also essential. We found it was important to pay attention to things like disabling the screensaver so that clients did not suddenly lose the image of the solicitor. Often a client was unwilling to touch the mouse or keyboard and so the solicitor had to be thinking about the client's response to the technology as well as the advice to be given. We realised it was important to train solicitors to look up from time to time, at the camera on their computer, so that the client felt that the solicitor was talking to them. If either party bent forward over their desk, it meant that the client only saw the top of their head - which was a little alienating.

We also found that some people with disabilities found the technology alienating. We had one client with a hearing impairment for whom the technology interfered with their hearing aid. For another client, mental illness prevented them from engaging with the technology at all.

We had anticipated the need to put effort into making the client feel comfortable with the format and technology, and for the most part our solicitors were willing to adapt - however there were clearly times when a solicitor felt the technology was an impediment to developing a rapport with a client.

Service Partners

Circumstances for partner agencies changed between the time of applying for the grant and when the project was launched on site. For Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services, the reduction in unrelated funding meant a change to their opening hours and a decrease in overall client numbers. This impacted on referrals to ReachOut and a significant decrease in client numbers. Service staff remain very supportive of the idea and are keen to see the clinic grow. MNCCLC is currently in discussions with MVNS about re-promoting the clinic and how it will operate into the future.

At South West Rocks Info Centre, competing uses of the venue meant that the only day there was an available confidential space was on a Friday, when there was only one other staff person onsite. This reduced their ability to support the ReachOut project by taking on a role of setting a client up and becoming familiar with the technology, and meant that a project officer needed to attend every appointment to support the client themselves.

At Bellbrook, we failed to gain traction with our clinic due to difficulties in accessing the building. We looked at alternative arrangements, such as attending with other service providers, however there were still difficulties in accessing the building. We are now looking at other ways of delivering services to this community, such as moving the clinic offsite to a village location or providing clinics in conjunction with community-initiated meetings.

Other services in the area

Legal Aid NSW opened an office in Port Macquarie in December 2014, and from an initial 2 civil lawyers have now added a 3rd lawyer to cover their region (Kempsey - Great Lakes LGAs). This has broadened the options for clients in the area to get advice. Legal Aid NSW and MNCCLC have met to discuss jurisdictional service planning and have a solid and positive working relationship.

ReachOut is being delivered in areas where Legal Aid are not attending, and so while it is not claimed that there is any direct impact on client numbers, the presence of more legal services for our community has changed the operating environment since ReachOut was established.

Outcomes

Client experiences

Overall, we provided 16 clients with legal assistance through ReachOut.

Overall, most clients surveyed reported that they were comfortable with the technology and pleased to have access to a legal service which was previously unavailable. Within that, however, Wingham clients were generally unimpressed with the technology. We found the technology was actually a barrier to one client with a hearing problem, and to one client with a mental illness. 3 clients reported they would be unwilling to have another videolink appointment.

Only one of the matters on which we gave advice (in Wingham) progressed to being a case (a consumer law matter), however we did provide advice across the following areas of law:

- Debt
- Consumer complaints - financial/insurance; legal/solicitors/service
- Discrimination (race)
- Other civil
- Road traffic and motor vehicle regulatory offences
- Offences - Justice/procedural
- Govt/admin complaints

A short survey was given to each person who received advice to evaluate their impressions of the service. Of the clients, 4 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 8 lived with a disability. The detail of the surveys is in the appendices but the overall response was that although there were some problems with the technology, 7 of the 12 clients who completed a survey said they would be willing to receive legal advice via videolink again, and a further 2 said they would consider it.

Solicitor Experiences

We received 12 surveys from solicitors after their advice session. Solicitors reported some difficulties with their use of the technology, particularly in Wingham. This is probably a reflection of the early stages of the project, as by the time we were providing advice in South West Rocks there appeared to be fewer difficulties reported by the solicitors.

We asked the solicitors how the use of videolink technology differed from phone advice and face to face advice.

Videolink v Face to Face

On only one occasion did a solicitor report that the videolink advice session was better than face to face, and that was because it “saved the client time”. All other responses were neutral or felt that the experience was not as good as face to face.

Videolink v Phone advice

Solicitors were not convinced of the benefits of the Redback trial. On 7 occasions, their responses indicated that there were problems or challenges with the technology. Of these, sound was nominated as the key problem on 4 surveys.

On all other occasions the response was not offered to this question, or was positive about the comparison between videolink and phone advice.

Some of the comments offered were

- "Easier to see client"
- "Like sitting beside me - can see client's body language"
- "made it easier to converse"
- "I could see client's body language"
- "Uncertain - seeing body language of client may have assisted"

We asked solicitors about suggestions they may have for improvements in either their experience or the client's experience. The comments offered were:

- "Have the support person assisting with advice"
- "Ensure host has equipment set up"
- "Redback appears to be more difficult to set up than other videoconferencing systems"
- "Ensure staff can manage web conference equipment"
- "Stop echoes"
- "Logistics at other end, set up and client arrival"
- "Ensure equipment is in working order"
- "Sound quality poor"
- "Option - for audio over telephone rather than software. Video did seem to help to a degree"
- "Poor audio quality necessitated use of telephone".

We asked the solicitors whether being able to see the client helped their assessment of whether the client understood the advice they were being given. The majority of responses (62%) said that videolink did not help the solicitor's assessment. This is perhaps explained by the fact that solicitors at MNCCLC are already used to providing phone advice and testing client's understanding using this medium. In 3 responses, solicitors felt having video did aid their assessment as they could see facial expressions or read body language.

Service Provider Experiences

We surveyed both successful trial locations and feedback was generally supportive, with some constructive criticism around promotion. Both locations felt that the trial was appropriate, helpful and needed in their community. Both locations indicated that they would like the service to continue at their agency.

Evaluation

What questions did you ask to evaluate whether you had achieved your aim?

CLIENT SURVEY

Have you previously attended a video conference advice clinic?

- Yes
- No

Have you previously attended a face to face advice clinic?

- Yes
- No

Were there any difficulties or challenges using the technology?

- Yes
- No

How did you find the location and space used for the clinic?



What do you think of the quality of the video conference?



How do you feel about attending another video conference advice clinic?



How did you hear about the video conference advice clinics?

- Radio
- Newspaper
- Flyer
- Host Organisation
- Other: _____

Is there anything else you would like to tell us to assist us in improving our services to you?

SOLICITOR SURVEY

Did you have any difficulties or challenges using the technology?

- Yes
- No

Did you feel the client had any difficulties or challenges using the technology?

- Yes
- No

Did you feel the client understood the advice you gave?

- Yes

- No

What differences (if any) did using videoconference technology make to the advice appointment as opposed to phone advice?

What differences (if any) did using videoconference technology make to the advice appointment as opposed to face to face advice?

Do you think your assessment of their understanding was helped by the videoconference format?

- Yes
- No

Please provide details of why you think this:

Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve your experience using the technology?

Do you have any suggestions for how we can improve the client's experience using the technology?

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

How well do you believe the project is going to plan?

How well do the clinics meet the needs of the community?

How well do you believe the project is achieving the intended goals and objectives?

How satisfied do you believe community members are with the videolink clinics?

Do you want the service to continue?

Is there anything you would change or suggest to improve the project for clients and the community?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?

Wingham

Over the course of the trial, we provided 6 clients with advice in Wingham via Redback. This was significantly less than we had anticipated, particularly as we commenced the trial in Wingham in February 2015 and therefore had the longest exposure to the community there over other sites.

In Wingham, 2 clients identified as having a disability, and no clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The majority of advices were in relation to consumer matters, and one of those led onto becoming

a case.

Of the six advices,

- 2 said they had previously attended videoconferencing clinics (this question did not test whether those clinics were MNCCLC clinics or other type of clinics)
- 4 said they had previously attended face to face advice clinics (this question did not test whether those clinics were MNCCLC clinics or other type of clinics)
- 4 of 6 there were challenges or difficulties in using the technology
- All 6 said that the location and space was suitable
- 5 of 6 said the quality of the video conference was not good
- 4 said they would be willing to attend (or “try again”) another videoconference clinic
- Comments made in conclusion were “Sound was a problem for me” and “prefer face to face”

Comments from Manning Valley Neighbourhood Service have been helpful and will inform our ongoing service provision to that host agency. Their final comments include

- “People aren’t accessing the service as much as we would like”
- “This can be resolved with more promotion and raising awareness”

Both Table 1 and Figure 1 (below) shows the number of clients receiving advice from MNCCLC lawyers in the period since 2013, broken into 6-monthly brackets. As is evident, the introduction of “Reach Out” has not resulted in an increase in client appointments in Wingham.

Month	2013 In-person outreach	2014 In-person outreach	2015 'Reach Out'
Jan	n/a	0	0
Feb	n/a	3	2
Mar	n/a	2	1
Apr	n/a	7	2
May	n/a	7	0
Jun	n/a	1	0
Jul	4	3	1
Aug	6	2	0
Sep	2	0	1
Oct	4	1	0
Nov	3	2	0
Dec	0	1	1
TOTAL	19	29	8
Monthly average	3.2	2.4	0.7

Table 1: Monthly numbers of advice services at Wingham, before and after Reach Out

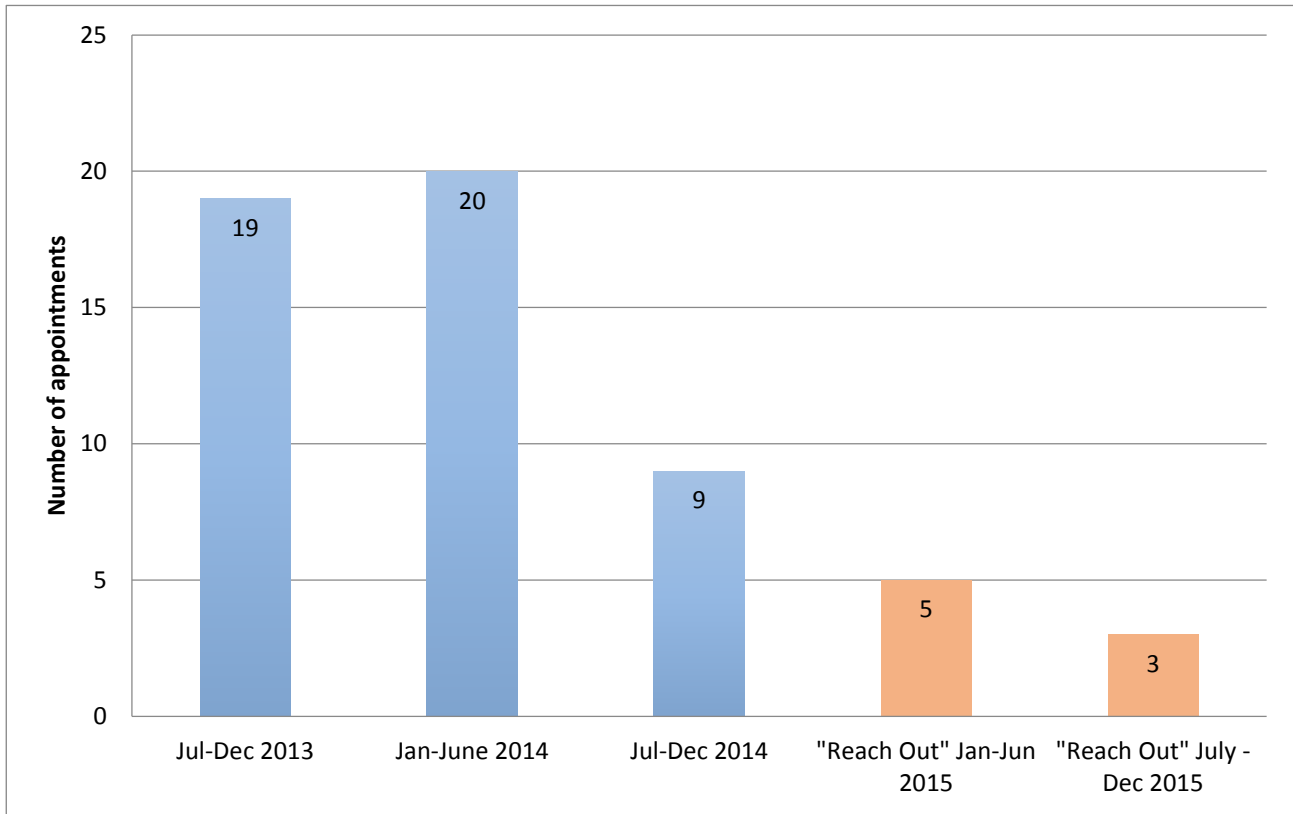


Figure 1: Advice appointments at Wingham before and after the commencement of 'Reach out'

Although it is evident that the number of advice appointments has been dropping from a peak in Jan-June 2014, it is also evident that the introduction of videolink appointments has not reversed this trend. We do not consider this is evidence of reduced need, more that clients may be taking alternative options for legal assistance.

MNCCLC intends to continue to offer legal services using Redback in Wingham, and with greater flexibility of day or time, may be better placed to meet some of the needs of the community this way.

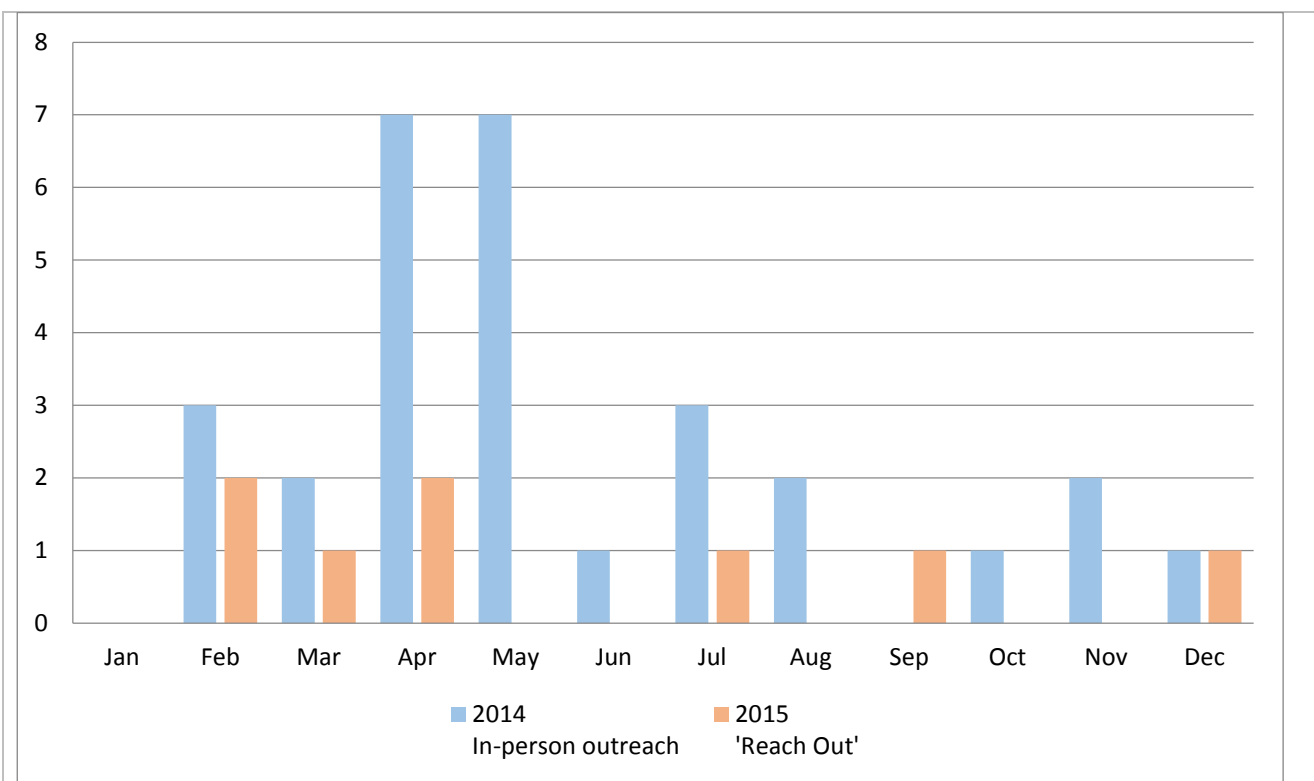


Figure 2: Advice appointments at Wingham by month, before and after the commencement of 'Reach Out'

South West Rocks

We had 10 clients (with a total of 12 different legal matters) in South West Rocks in the period from July 2015 - Feb 2016. 6 clients completed a survey. Of the clients we saw, 5 identified as having a disability and 4 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

None of the matters progressed to casework, and the majority of the matters were consumer related issues.

Of the 6 clients who responded to a survey

- 1 said they had participated in a videoconference advice clinic before.
- 1 said they had attended a face to face advice clinic before.
- 3 reported challenges or difficulties with the technology.
- All 6 were comfortable with the space and location for the clinic.
- 2 said the quality of the videoconference was not good.
- 3 said they would be willing to attend another videoconference clinic, with 1 person non-committal about this question.
- Comments made in conclusion were “sound” (indicating an issue with sound quality).

South West Rocks was a venue which did not previously have an advice clinic, and so client numbers reflect a growth from a baseline rate of zero.

There have been no additional comments or suggestions from the host agency about improvements to the service, and they have indicated they would be happy to support it into the

future.

Month	Number advices
Jul 2015	1
Aug	0
Sept	1
Oct	1
Nov	2
Dec	1
Jan 2016	1
Feb	2
Mar	0
Apr	1
May	0
Jun	0
TOTAL	10
Monthly average	0.8

Table 2: Monthly numbers of advice services at South West Rocks

As is clear from the table above, the opportunity for advice appointments in South West Rocks has been taken up, with an average since the project commenced of just under 1 appointment per month for the past 10 months.

We consider this is evidence of ongoing need for legal service provision in South West Rocks, and with greater promotion and flexibility around the days or times that advice is available this number will increase over time.

Did you achieve your aim? What did you find out?

The project did achieve the aim of establishing and trialling the provision of cost-effective and quality legal services using videoconferencing in two of the three trial locations. In one of the locations, the aim was not achieved.

We determined a number of things from the trial:

Cost effectiveness

The trial was not really cost effective in the period we allocated to establish the project, however has the potential to become efficient and effective in the medium-longer term. The cost of sending a project officer to each appointment to assist with technology substantially negates any savings from not sending a solicitor - car/fuel costs were the same and wages costs were only slightly less than a solicitor's costs would have been.

The time taken to transition to host-service supported appointments was significantly longer than anticipated and at one location, was made unachievable by the shortage of staff on the clinic day. However, the goodwill shown towards the service has made the long term sustainability of the two key trial locations possible. With the cessation of the trial, there is a different approach to the project by host services who are now willing to trial “immediate” appointments for people attending their service with a legal problem. This format will mean that the host service will now have on the spot access for a client to a duty lawyer from MNCCLC. These appointments could be offered by phone or video depending on the client. This is not something that other clients approaching MNCCLC for phone advice would have access to, thereby encouraging clients to attend and use community facilities and enhance their community connections.

Service Provision environment

The unfortunate reality of funding for host services is that there can be uncertainty and instability about programs that are run through their centres. Changes to funding can mean reductions in opening hours, and changes in total client numbers as a result. There is a real danger that this can become a vicious circle. In some ways the more flexible delivery of advice clinics may support a host agency’s client numbers overall and contribute to their sustainability.

Host agency staff were supportive of the project, though it is also clear that different levels of technological skill, or available time to support a client with logging on or troubleshooting technology, had a big impact on the cost effectiveness of the project.

Quality of Service

The quality of the technology was intermittently good, and in South West Rocks a faster internet speed provided a better experience.

Where bandwidth or speed was lower, there were also some problems with image “freezing”, which was distracting for clients and solicitors alike.

We found from early experiences that some of the sound quality issues could be overcome by purchasing headset/microphones for host agencies and solicitors, and this minimised echo problems. However, where there was a person supporting the client (which was usually the case) that person also needed to be able to hear the conversation so that they could assist with troubleshooting any issues (e.g. if the screensaver came on, or the sound broke down, or the client clicked off the website or got confused in other ways). This meant that either the support person needed to be available in the room and on a linked headset (for best quality sound), or not use a headset so both could hear from the speakers (reduced quality but still audible). This scenario in turn could impact on staff resources at the host agency if there wasn’t a project officer present to support the client.

Cultural and Health Considerations

Across the client cohort, 4 (of 16) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. However, our inability to introduce the trial effectively to Bellbrook indicates that there may be some cultural issues to be overcome for this to succeed in remote areas. We intend to explore this more closely in upcoming months, through liaison with Aboriginal community members both in Bellbrook and the wider Kempsey LGA.

We also acknowledge that the technology may be a barrier to help for some people – for those

with mental illness characterised by paranoia, or with a hearing impairment, there may be little effective alternative to face-to-face advice.

Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?

Advice via videolink can be an effective tool, however there are limitations to the technology, and to the human use of the technology.

The clinic approach, as we expected from previous research done on this issue, relies on good relationships with the service provider hosting the clinic. Where we had a robust relationship in place, or the ability to develop one, the clinic provided an opportunity to access legal advice that would otherwise have been difficult for clients to source. In the case of the clinic where that relationship was interrupted, the clinic is still yet to be properly established.

Technological limitations can be overcome in some circumstances, such as through purchasing headsets to reduce echo or external noise, and the human use of technology can also be addressed through training solicitors to manage the client's experience effectively.

Nonetheless, the approach is a useful tool in the overall aim of improving the access to legal help for clients facing disadvantage.

MNCCLC intends to add this tool to the "kit" of methods by which we improve accessibility to legal services. In many circumstances, it may enhance advice which would otherwise be given only by telephone. We will continue with the "relationship building" activities for those host centres, which are part of outreach work in general (visiting and maintaining relationships with outreach partners). We will continue to monitor the uptake of the videoconferencing option as compared with telephone advice.

What are your recommendations for improvements both for the intended audience of your project, and for the strategy you used to achieve your aim? What would you do differently next time?

Project Initiation

Allow longer than you think you'll need for liaising with partner organisations and establishing the clinics. Their time pressures and goals are different from yours, and you need to establish the project so that you can work with them in a way that's understanding and reflective.

Technology

Appreciate the human factor in using technology - if a solicitor sits too close to the screen and bends over their desk to give advice, the client only sees the top of their head. If there's an echo on the computer, the client won't be able to talk or listen freely.

Solicitors need training in this so they can help the clients with the technology, because it's

important that they are anticipating the client’s experience and helping them through it. Organise the computer so there’s no screen saver interruption (if the client doesn’t use the mouse the screensaver cuts in), and pay attention to ways that sound quality can be addressed. Check any software or program incompatibility that might render the camera or microphone unusable (Skype and Redback, for example).

Managing client expectations

It helps for a solicitor to have a conversation with the client about the technology before they begin - acknowledging that there may be limitations and inviting them to say if there are any problems. This gives permission for the client to interact with the technology and to address issues if they come up.

Support staff

A host service needs to be able to have time or resources to support the project in a practical, hands on way. This doesn’t meant there needs to be someone on hand all through the advice clinic, but does mean that someone needs to be available with simple technical knowledge or capacity to spend time with the client to assist where necessary.

These issues have been compiled into a “checklist” for services which may want to establish a videolink outreach. The checklist is below, and is intended as a working document – other services may add elements to it based on their experiences.

Checklist – Factors to consider when establishing a videolink outreach for legal service provision

Step	Completed
First interview with host agency	
- Do they have bandwidth capacity to host the clinic?	
- Do they have a quiet, confidential space for the clinic?	
- Will the service provide a staff member who can assist the client?	
- Does the service have its own computer and speakers?	
- Can the clinic run at a time convenient for both partners?	
- Does the service have other programs which complement the advice clinic?	
- What are the timeframes and time pressures the service has?	
- What are the booking in procedures that work best?	
- What other technology or resources does the service need to be able to run the clinic (headsets? videocamera?)	
Training with legal service staff	
- Are screenshot style login instructions available to be kept by the service?	

- Training in understanding human factors of the technology & importance of assisting client with the technology itself.	
- Draft information to be read to client to help manage expectations.	
- General training in full extent of capability of the technology.	
- Training in technological troubleshooting – screensaver, software programs that override camera or microphone.	
Training session with host agency staff	
- Are screenshot style login instructions available to be kept by the service?	
- Training in technological troubleshooting – screensaver, software programs that override camera or microphone.	
- Training in the human factors for clients successfully using technology.	
- Finalise the details of booking clients in.	