



# Final grant report: Improving access to justice for the Mandaean community

<b>Project title</b>	Improving access to justice for the Mandaean community
<b>Grant recipient</b>	South West Sydney Legal Centre
<b>Project manager</b>	Peter Multari
<b>Position</b>	Acting Executive Officer/Principal Solicitor
<b>Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount</b>	\$4,500.00
<b>Grant period</b>	December 2011 – February 2013
<b>Date of this report</b>	January 2013

## 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 overarching aim of the project was to improve access to justice for members of the Mandaean Community by improving their knowledge & awareness of the Australian Legal system and laws. The strategy involved the delivery of 10 legal information sessions over a period of 8 months to the Mandaean Community of South West Sydney. This region is home to the great majority of the Australian Mandaean Community. SWSLC partnered with the Mandaean Women's Union of Australia (MWUA) to promote the sessions to the Mandaean community and utilised the Mandaean Resource Centre as the venue for the workshops. The sessions covered a wide range of legal topics selected by MWUA representatives. Language specific flyers were developed for the MWUA to utilise in its promotional activities. Language specific workshop handouts were also developed and a qualified interpreter attended each workshop session.

## The project – what happened?

***How did the project come about?***

The Mandaean community is a small and emerging community, the great majority of whose members entered Australia as refugees. The Mandaean Women's Union Australia had initially approached the Law & Justice Foundation for funding for legal information sessions. The Law and Justice Foundation approached SWSLC to coordinate and conduct the project. SWSLC had identified this need. The approach complimented our community legal education strategy very well.

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

**Stage 1**

i. Consultations with MWUA – gaining an understanding of the Mandaean community, determining their legal needs, determining workshop topics

**Stage 2**

- i. Development of workshop schedule
- ii. Promotional material designed and printed
- iii. Workshop handouts drafted (ongoing throughout the project)
- iv. Development of evaluation tools

**Stage 3**

- i. Translation of Workshop handouts (ongoing throughout the project)
- ii. Translation of evaluation tools

**Stage 4**

Delivery of 10x2hour language specific Workshop sessions with Arabic interpreter

**If grant materials were produced:**

***How were they distributed?***

Comprehensive language specific workshop handouts were produced. These were distributed to every workshop attendee. Additional copies were provided to the Mandaean Resource Centre for general distribution to the Mandaean Community.

***What was the extent of the distribution?***

The materials were directly provided to about 200 attendees with further copies available for the general Mandaean Community at the Mandaean Resource Centre.

***If applicable, at the time of this report, what has been the extent of online use of your publication?***

We are in the process of up dating our website and intend to make the materials available on our website both in English and in Arabic.

***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?***

The delivery of the workshops eventuated as planned. Perhaps not a surprise but of interest was the dynamics of the groups. We observed a language and culturally specific audience enhances the CLE experience and dynamics, since audience members can draw from and relate to common and shared experiences and problems. This is particularly so for a small community who's members arrived in Australia predominantly as refugees. For example, members feel very comfortable putting forward and debating individual experiences within the context of the seminar topic. The nature of the exchanges and discussions demonstrated audience understanding and application of seminar content.

## Evaluation

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

#### Pre-Post Workshop Questionnaires

Tailored multiple-choice questions were drafted for each workshop session to assess audience knowledge and understanding of each legal topic. Members were asked to answer identical questions pre and post each workshop and the responses were compared.

#### General 'Qualitative' Evaluation

A more general, qualitative evaluation was also administered.

### ***What data did you gather to answer your questions?***

Workshop attendees' responses to pre and post workshop questionnaires and general evaluation.

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

Whilst the comparison of Pre-Post Workshop Questionnaire answers demonstrates an increase in 'correct answers' (by about 17%), thereby indicating an increased post workshop level of awareness and understanding, we found this approach not as useful as we had hoped. Some reasons for this include:

1. The dynamics of the groups was such that attention to the questionnaires was not regarded as a priority, particularly the post workshop component;
2. It may have been an unrealistic expectation for attendees to direct sufficient attention to the post workshop evaluation component after a 2-hour workshop session;
3. The post workshop questionnaire component in particular, invariably generated intraaudience discussion and debate, which whilst being both a strong learning mechanism and barometer in itself, occupied a significant amount of time and focus, thereby relegating completion of the questionnaire as a secondary consideration of audience members
4. Regularly post workshop, a significant number of audience members were keen to approach the facilitator with specific questions rather than completing the post workshop questionnaire.

Overall, the nature and extent of audience interaction and intra-audience debate during the workshops was a much better barometer for the effectiveness of the workshops. Invariably, audiences were very engaged and lively. The personal accounts put forward indicated they understood the content and context of the workshop and audience buy-in into and debate around these personal accounts demonstrated members were understanding the information being relayed to them and were able to apply it to those situations. For example, through discussion and debate the audience would construct solutions and evaluate and assess audience comments and contributions within the framework of the workshop content, indicating a strong learning and comprehension process was taking place.

## Conclusion and recommendations

### ***What is your conclusion?***

Language and culturally specific groups are very effective vehicles for legal information workshops.

Our experience indicates qualitative rather than quantitative evaluation mechanisms are more appropriate for the dynamics of these groups.

Our experience indicates that for these groups, there is strong audience identification with individual accounts and a keenness to debate, discuss and offer 'newly educated' constructs around these accounts. This process can be utilised as an excellent learning mechanism and also a barometer for workshop effectiveness.

The shared background and experiences of culturally and language specific groups offers a good opportunity for facilitators to gain valuable insights into perceptions and awareness on cultural level and formulate a sense of how the culture perceives itself and its aspirations in a host nation.

### ***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?***

For ourselves:

Please see earlier comments. Additionally:

- a. A short post workshop session solely devoted to the 'application' of what the audience had learned to specific individual accounts would have been useful for a number of reasons:
  - i. As outlined, audience members identified with individual accounts which became pivotal discussion points. Greater use of these could be made as a learning mechanism.
  - ii. Reinforcement of the learning and comprehension process
  - iii. Greater focus permitted on quantitative evaluation tools
- b. It may have been useful to make the translated seminar material available to potential audience members prior to the workshop sessions. This may assist to facilitate the flow of sessions and also flush out any confusion, which may exist at an early stage.