



Final grant report: Demystifying the criminal justice process for Indigenous women who are victims of domestic or family violence

Project title	Demystifying the criminal justice process for Indigenous women who are victims of domestic or family violence
Grant recipient	Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre Inc.
Project manager	Kerry Wright
Position	Centre Coordinator
Law and Justice Foundation awarded amount	\$28,636.36
Grant period	January 2011 – April 2013
Date of this report	April 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?

This project aimed to develop visual resources which were culturally appropriate for Indigenous women; explaining three distinct areas and processes of the criminal justice process as it relates to victims of domestic and family violence, that is: (a) when criminal charges are laid; (b) when no criminal charges have been laid (but AVO applied for); and (c) victims compensation claims. The visual resources, a facilitator's guide and a series of Z cards (fold out wallet size information brochures) developed as handouts for the women giving them details of local Family Violence services will be used for CLE delivery. The project aimed to pilot and evaluate these resources with groups of Indigenous women through CLE delivered by Shoalcoast solicitors in eleven South Coast communities over a twelve month period.

The project – what happened?

How did the project come about?

When we applied for the project funding from the Law & Justice Foundation we noted the following in regards to how we identified the need for the project:

In particular Aboriginal women (at our CLE sessions and legal advice clinics) are asking for culturally appropriate and understandable resources providing information and phone contacts for services in their area that they can contact for advice and assistance (in an emergency situation or otherwise). There are already some brochures out there providing some information (by LAC or Wirringa Baiya) but they do not provide the necessary local level knowledge of service providers and contact points.

It is proposed that the Z cards (fold out wallet size information brochures) and handouts will be able to provide this local knowledge and local contact points (in a culturally appropriate and understandable manner).

In relation to the educational tool for CLEs our solicitors have identified the need for more culturally appropriate visual educational resources which can be used in formal and informal settings to explain to Aboriginal women the criminal justice system in relation to domestic and family violence. It is our Solicitors perception that there is generally a lot of misunderstanding about the criminal justice system in the context of domestic and family violence (ie the criminal process; the AVO process and the victims compensation process). We have found that the most successful mode is to visually map out the difference roads/and processes. The educational posters will prove extremely valuable at CLEs (and can be copied down to be given to clients as hand outs to take home).

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

1. Employment of an Aboriginal Project Worker to work 1 day a week on the Project
2. Establishment of a Working Party to guide the development and evaluation of resources developed by the Project
3. Designing and piloting initial set of visual resources with Aboriginal women
4. Designing and printing of area specific wallet cards with key contacts
5. Designing and printing of handouts to include in wallets given to workshop participants
6. Designing and delivering workshops using visual resources, to different groups of Aboriginal women and workers with Aboriginal women
7. Revising content of resources
8. Designing, printing and distribution of final resource

If grant materials were produced:

How were they distributed?

Materials produced by the Project have been distributed to date via workshops organised with Aboriginal women and service providers working with Aboriginal women.

The final resource, a Community Legal Education Resource Kit, will be distributed to agencies working with women in the South East NSW communities which Shoalcoast delivers services in.

What was the extent of the distribution?

The project arranged 12 workshops with 9 going ahead. 2 workshops which had been organised did not have anyone attend and 1 had to be cancelled due to sorry business and was not rescheduled.

The project had a total of 100 participants:

1. Waminda Aboriginal Women's Health Centre in Nowra, staff and clients – Pilot Group
2. Jerrinja community – no one attended, although the Aboriginal woman who we contracted to design the artwork for the Project was there. She appreciated seeing how her artwork had been incorporated into the workshop resources
3. Wreck Bay community
4. St Georges Basin community

5. Dharwaal Housing Corporation residents
6. Moruya Women's and Children's Centre residents and staff
7. Cooma Service Providers working with Family Violence victims
8. Queanbeyan Women's Refuge residents and staff
9. Narooma community – cancelled due to sorry business
10. Bega South East Women's and Children's Service
11. Waminda Young Mums Group
12. Nowra Youth Centre, High School students and teachers

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?

We originally intended to develop a set of posters which would visually depict the Criminal Justice processes involved with taking out AVO's, dealing with criminal charges and victims compensation. These would then be sent to agencies to display and discuss with their clients. However this proved more difficult than anticipated. Once we got started meeting with the working party we realised it was difficult to capture all the information into a few posters. Our first Project Worker noted that 'the topic areas are too vast and complex to be condensed into simple and easy to understand posters. The information can only be condensed through leaving out important information, descriptions and definitions.' It was then decided that a better solution would be to produce a comprehensive set of resources which would combine a visual display with a workshop delivered by Shoalcoast solicitors.

After delivering a few workshops we realised that inviting Aboriginal women to a workshop to discuss Family Violence was problematic. We received feedback that women wouldn't attend as they were worried about what others would think. We then looked for another way to promote the workshops to encourage participation (besides the free lunch!). This led to us renaming the project as Family Harmony workshops with a focus on how to maintain or work towards healthy relationships plus how the law can assist if Family Violence occurs.

We also realised it was important that the final resource produced be suitable for use by community agency workers with Aboriginal women as a tool for delivering information to their clients, to reach as wide an audience as possible. This has led to a Workshop Kit being produced with a Facilitator Guide, Workshop Presentation, Posters for Discussion Starters and relevant handouts for participants.

Evaluation

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

Visual Resources on Criminal Justice Process

Are they easy to understand?

Do they truly represent the processes involved?

Information cards on local contacts for DV related matters

Are the contacts correct?

Is the information easily understood?

Any experience with contacts in the past (positive/negative)?

CLE Workshops

Information presented understood?

Increased knowledge of criminal justice process?

Increased knowledge of who to contact in DV related matter?

Increased confidence to contact services including legal services?

CLE Facilitators Guide

Is it easy to use?

Does it meet aim of project?

What data did you gather to answer your questions?

Data gathered for the Project evaluations was both informal and formal. The informal data (feedback) was gathered through discussing the resources as they were developed firstly with working party members and then trialled with workshop participants. The Project Worker attended all workshops delivered. During these she would take notes on the key issues being raised or questions asked by the women participating and this feedback was also considered by the working party. The Shoalcoast Solicitors who delivered the workshops have also provided valuable feedback to the Project, as resources were developed, delivered and then modified.

We gathered formal feedback via evaluation forms completed by group participants. We received 48 in total from the 100 participants (48%) in the 9 workshops.

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

Visual Resources

We employed a local Aboriginal woman artist, Mally Smart, to design the 'look' of the project resources to make them culturally appropriate. Mally provided a number of designs and the one chosen by the working party was provided to our graphic artist. Our graphic artist has incorporated this design into templates for the different visual and paper resources produced over the life of the project – wallet cards, handouts, posters and powerpoint presentations.

We used feedback from working party members as well as workshop participants to evaluate how well the resources developed presented the information. As a consequence there were several

versions of the posters and powerpoint presentations over the two years, as feedback was incorporated on an ongoing basis.

Information Wallet Cards

Working party members, Shoalcoast staff and local community contacts assisted in the development of the Information Cards to ensure they had correct information about relevant local contacts for assistance with Family Violence.

CLE Workshops

Our aim in regards to the workshops was that at least 11 workshops were run with approximately 10-20 women in each. Whilst 12 workshops were organised, only 9 went ahead, as explained above, with 100 participants in total.

We aimed that feedback would indicate:

75% found the workshop informative

75% found the visual resources easy to understand

75% indicate they know what to expect from criminal justice process in regards to DV & FV

75% indicate they know who to contact for assistance

From the 48 participant evaluations we received:

81% indicated they found the presenter either very interesting or interesting

92% indicated they found the workshop easy to understand

63% indicated the handouts provided were useful to understand the topics

100% said they would be sharing the information they learnt at the workshop with family or friends.

The most useful information that was learnt during the workshops was noted as:

The AVO process, Family Law and the Victims Compensation process. The majority also indicated that they thought the presenter was 'great' and involved the group in the discussion.

Therefore we determined that the workshop format was successful, with sufficient time allowed to encourage discussion of the information being presented between participants and the presenter. We also found the provision of refreshments to provide a break during the workshop was important to encourage an informal atmosphere to allow participants to feel safe and able to ask questions/discuss issues. This information has been included in the Facilitator Guide.

CLE Facilitator Guide

Working party members and Shoalcoast Solicitors provided feedback on the development of the Facilitator Guide to ensure that it is easy to use by community based workers when delivering the Workshop to individual clients or groups of clients.

Conclusion and recommendations

What is your conclusion?

Shoalcoast appreciates having this project funding which was able to be used over a 2 year period to develop these resources and test them with a range of different groups. Having this time has meant we are confident that the final resource is one that will be useful to community based workers to understand and assist their clients to understand the law as it relates to Family Violence and associated issues.

We have concluded that there is a lot of information available regarding Family Violence and the Law. However we have found there is very few resources which provide information wholistically about the different areas of law which come into play at different stages when women are dealing with Family Violence.

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?

In terms of designing resources on these topics for Aboriginal women, we found that attempting to reduce the information to simple and easy to understand visual resources such as posters would mean that important information would be left out. We therefore decided it was better to produce a comprehensive plain English resource which can be used by lawyers and community service workers to deliver the information to their clients would be more effective way of disseminating the information.

In terms of what we could do differently - we would split the Project into 3 distinct phases which would have had different staff working on each phase. The first phase was the development of the resource materials – this required a Project Worker with a knowledge of the law and an ability to prepare Plain English resources regarding the legal issues identified by the working party members as being important to include in the workshops for piloting. The next phase was the delivering of the workshops – this required both a Solicitor and an Aboriginal Project Worker. The Project Worker was important to the Project to liaise with local Aboriginal communities/agencies and set up the workshops, plus assist the Solicitor with the delivery of the workshops and prepare reports on feedback received from participants. The third phase was the development of the final resource and Facilitators Guide. This required a Project Worker who again could prepare Plain English educational resources using feedback from the workshops, plus who had some adult education/training skills to prepare the Facilitators Guide. This would have meant less resources had to be provided by Shoalcoast to ensure the end product was consistent with the project funded outcomes.