Federation of
Community Legal Centres

Using New Technologies in Community Legal Education

A discussion of community legal education (CLE) is not complete without touching on electronic and internet based forms of communication. Centres are at very different stages in their use of new technologies for CLE. Sections of the community are at various points in terms of their access to and use of technology and in their preference for how they receive information and education.

New technologies offer exciting opportunities for CLE work. Like all other CLE tools and methodologies they need to be applied, managed and resourced appropriately.

This Information Sheet will outline some current activities.

Websites

Most CLCs now have a website. People of all ages are using the internet to access information. If your CLC does not have a web presence then it may be less accessible to some potential service users.

Some of these websites have been created independently by the centre using in-house staff or contractors, while others are hosted within the Federation of Community Legal Centre's Community Law website.

Websites enable the centre to offer the public substantially more information and resources than would be available in brochures or other forms of service information. Well-designed and maintained websites enable people to easily navigate their way to the up to date information or resources they require – including CLE materials.

However, well-designed and maintained websites don't just happen, financial and human resources must be allocated to these tasks. The centre must make a commitment to the website and it must be someone's responsibility.

Information about the Federation of Community Legal Centres sub web is available on its website – www.communitylaw.org.au - Go to the Intranet – Federation Toolkit – Sub Web Resources. This section contains tips for website administration and maintenance, content, design, images and links. It also provides a summary of and a link to the *Best Practice Guidelines for Australian Legal Websites*.

Twitter

Twitter is a "real-time short messaging service". (twitter.com, 2009)

Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre is trialling the use of "Twitter" social networking technology to keep in touch with student volunteers. A fortnightly message is sent out. There is usually a link or a reference to new information on the centre's website. Early assessment indicates a need for regular "twittering" and a complementary online presence such as the website or a Facebook page.

Facebook

> "Facebook is a global social networking website that is operated and privately owned by Facebook Inc. Users can add friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can join networks organised by city, workplace, school and region…A January 2009 Compete.com survey has ranked Facebook as the most used social network by worldwide monthly active users."
>
> WIKIPEDIA, 2009

The Human Rights Legal Centre (HRLC) is using Facebook as a new and additional way to get information about its work out to the general public. Information is updated on the centre's Facebook page when it is updated on the centre's website, with links being made to new website content. HRLC is using Facebook as a means to diversify its tools for engagement with the public and to increase accessibility. According to the centre, Facebook provides a level of interactivity not available via the website. "Fans" can post comments and provide feedback. The centre believes that using Facebook is helping them access a different demographic – younger people – than they contact via other tools such as the website and the newsletter.

Darebin Community Legal Centre also uses Facebook as a way of maintaining contact with and between volunteers.

WebEX Technology

CLCs are able to access WebEx technology. WebEx can be used for a range of collaborative and professional development activities, including:
- interactive online meetings;
- live interactive training;
- on demand recorded training sessions;
- access to recorded meetings and training sessions;
- sharing documents while an online meeting is being held; and
- hosting online events.

WebEx can be used to deliver CLE. The CLE worker can be in one location and the target group in another. As long as there is a computer, headset, screen and webcam in each location, live and interactive CLE can be undertaken.

For more information about how to access and use WebEx, go to the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc. website www.communitylaw.org.au - Intranet – Federation Toolkit – Information Technology – WebEx.

SurveyMonkey

The website – www.surveymonkey.com - states that SurveyMonkey "has a single purpose: to enable anyone to create professional online surveys quickly and easily." The website contains extensive information about how to use the survey tools.

Case Study

At the time that this Information Sheet was prepared both Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) and the Victoria Law Foundation (VLF) were using this online survey technology. ECLC indicated that it was to using SurveyMonkey to collect feedback as part of a legal needs study it was conducting in the Yarra Ranges. ECLC reported that it was easy to use and that it only took one hour to load their pre-prepared survey onto the site. VLF was using SurveyMonkey to conduct

an online survey of organisations that wanted to participate in the VictoriaLaw website.

SMS Messaging

Technology can be purchased which enables text messages to be sent to mobile phones, from a computer desktop to multiple people at one time.

Case Study

Peninsula Community Legal Centre uses SMS messaging to follow up young people who have previously attended Young Renters Program Workshops. The Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal uses the technology to remind people that they have a hearing scheduled in the Residential Tenancies List on the following day.

Victoria Law Website

The *Victoria Law* website has been designed as a tool for information sharing about CLE publications. The main target group is the general public who are looking for "plain English" legal education materials and CLE materials in other languages. The public can go to the website to access a comprehensive range of publications instead of having to hunt around for them. CLCs and other legal service providers are encouraged to upload information about new publications on a regular basis. This is a great tool for promoting your centre's CLE publications.

The website will also assist CLE providers to avoid duplication by encouraging those considering developing a CLE publication to check the database before beginning to see if a similar product has already been produced.

Web Resources

Consider incorporating relevant resources from the websites of other organisations into your CLE presentations and activities.

Tip!

Check out how VITS Languagelink is utilising new technologies with their interpreter kiosks - www. vits.com.au/interpreter_kiosk.htm

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Federation of Community Legal Centres (Victoria) Inc., website www.communitylaw.org.au
- Johnstone, A. (2009) Interview, Eastern Community Legal Centre
- Lynch, P. (2009) Interview, Human Rights Legal Centre, Melbourne
- SurveyMonkey website, www.surveymonkey.com
- Twitter website, About Twitter, http://twitter.com/about#about
- Wikipedia, Facebook, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook

FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

- Law & Justice Foundation of NSW, *Online Publishing* resources, www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/app/ ECD1FA50A889FDCCCA25733A00146F03.html
- Law & Justice Foundation of NSW, *Publishing Toolkit- Fact Sheet 6 Creating an accessible website for users with vision impairment* www.lawfoundation.net.au/ljf/app/52B5FAE4FEA9DEDACA25742D00210E4B.html