

# From Public Legal Education to Public Legal Empowerment

Presentation to ASA Conference

23 March 2007

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# PLEAS: work in progress

- PLEAS task force has not yet completed its work
- This presentation reflects ‘work in progress’
- For this reason, it should not be quoted as representing the findings of the task force

# About the PLEAS Task Force

- Sept 2004: paper by ASA, Citizenship Foundation, LAG; further report June 2005
- Aug 2005: DCA agreed to set up task force
- Jan 2006: Public Legal Education and Support Task Force set up, chaired by Professor Hazel Genn DBE QC
- Diverse sectors represented – 28 members
- Final report in spring

# The PLEAS Task Force - roles

- Define PLE - what it does and how it works
- Make the case for PLE: with government; legal and education professions; NfP/community advice sectors
- Review delivery of PLE: what is needed to improve and develop PLE to its full potential?
- Make recommendations: what needs to be done to achieve this?

# The legal framework

- “Justice is at the heart of a peaceful, prosperous society. For most of us, most of the time, the legal framework that surrounds us and supports our daily lives is something that we take for granted. But the law and the legal system provide the framework of rights, responsibilities and rules that help individuals, families, communities and businesses live and work together in harmony.”
- *Modern Laws for a Modern Scotland. A Report on Civil Justice in Scotland.* Scottish Executive, Feb 2007

# Why people misunderstand the law

- The media - The Bill, Judge John Deed, Boston Legal, even Miss Marple
- Perception that the 'law' means crime, police, criminal courts, judges and juries
- Popular myths - eg, common law marriage

# The scale of the challenge

- A third of adults: at least one problem in 3.5 years
- DCA economists estimate cost at £13 billion
- People vulnerable to social exclusion = most problems
- 10% took NO action in response to problems
  - 33% believed nothing effective could be done
  - 39% thought no local advice provider (two thirds wrongly!)
- 15% who try to get advice fail to get it
- A quarter of those not seeking advice, and a third of those who tried but failed, regretted not having done so
  
- Source: *Causes of Action – civil law and social justice: 2004 survey*

# ‘Education’ or ‘empowerment’?

- Public Legal Education – ‘traditional’ term
- Ambiguity of ‘education’ – both goal and activity
- PLEAS Task Force wanted emphasis on problem solving, confidence building, skills
- Increasing people’s opportunities to use legal system in their day to day lives

# What public legal empowerment can give us

- Understanding when/how the law offers opportunities or helps avoid or resolve problems
- The knowledge, skills and confidence:
  - to benefit from those opportunities
  - to manage problems more effectively
- Knowledge of when, where and how to go for effective help and advice
- Know-how, anticipation, planning, organising

# Examples of benefits of PLE

- Settling disputes without ending up in a tribunal or a court
- Knowing when you need professional help and getting it. Making it easier for the professionals by presenting the problem more clearly

# Some PLE initiatives

- *Pride not Prejudice* - campaign DVD by LCF and LBGT to encourage employment discrimination complaints on grounds of sexual orientation

# Some PLE initiatives

- *Karz ki Baatein* (Let's talk about debt) - Money Advice Television live phone-in chat shows about avoiding or managing debt problems, signposting to 'Leicester Money Advice' if needed

# Some PLE initiatives

- *Advicenow Living Together* - media campaign and website to challenge the myth of 'common law marriage' with downloadable magazine-style info on wills, housing, pensions, benefits, tax, children

# Some PLE initiatives

- *Information Matters* - Shelter Cymru project for people with welfare-type problems who don't use advice services, with a resource pack aimed at intermediaries - health visitors, social workers, probation teams, mental health teams and voluntary groups

# Some PLE initiatives

- *Southwark Preventing Possessions Project* (Southwark Law Centre and Blackfriars Advice Centre) – aims to reduce rent arrears evictions of council tenants:
  - by training local community groups to recognise problems
  - by influencing staff procedures

# Some PLE initiatives

- *RIZER* - website helping teenagers to navigate problems of daily life – truanting, family problems, crime – and understand/use opportunities offered by the law. The website was developed with target users, with techniques that are popular with them.

# What makes PLE different...

- PLE is not “information for the public”, though information plays a big part in PLE
- PLE is not advice, though many advisers include some PLE in what they do

# What makes PLE different...

- *Targeted* legal empowerment
- Projects start with user's needs, capabilities, skills
- Identify methods and channels – what would work best?
- PLE finds these things out – it doesn't assume
- “When completed, what difference will project have made?”

# What there is a lot of...

- Financial capability training
- Citizenship in schools
- Crime and social problems in schools
- Websites of many types
- Information leaflets from many sources
  - Advicenow's research found few information materials providing information on the skills and support people need to solve a problem.

# What we need more of...

- A clearer identity and better recognition
- Networks to enable shared learning between PLE providers: knowledge, good practice, techniques
- Evaluation frameworks – based on outcomes
- Framework to support (true) quality
- Longer-term, more systematic funding of PLE
- Development of sustainable PLE

# How to get it...

- A new strategic approach to PLE
- An independent PLE partnership to take it forward
- A PLE body to support the partnership
- Core funding for the strategy
- Effective communication and recognisable brand
- Mapping PLE: Gaps? Quality? Effectiveness?
- Pilot projects to test and develop good practice
- Accessible support and resources for all providers
- Developing quality frameworks

# Still for discussion.....

- An ‘empowerment’ approach – how would it work?
- ‘Developing skills’ – which skills, and how to develop them?
- What role does ‘information’ have?
- How does PLE fit into advice setting?

# Contact details

PLEAS:

Public Legal Education and Support Task Force

[www.pleas.org.uk](http://www.pleas.org.uk)