



Youth Worker Practice Network Members Session “Working Within the Legal System”

Guest Presenter: *Michelle Bryant-Smith (Solicitor, Youth Law Centre, Legal Aid ACT)*

Michelle provided an overview of the services that the Youth Law Centre ACT provides. The Youth Law Centre ACT (YLC) is a free and confidential legal service for young people between 12-25 years of age. The YLC is provided through a collaboration between Legal Aid ACT and the ANU College of Law.

The YLC is staffed by a Coordinating Solicitor who is employed by ACT Legal Aid, and paralegals who are ANU law students who provide legal support under supervision. The YLC provides free and confidential legal advice to young people aged between 12 and 25. There is a centre in Canberra, and they are also able to provide assistance over the phone or via email.

The Youth Law Centre will soon be trialling a drop in service for youth workers, who will be able to go along with a client to support them to get advice, or drop in by themselves and ask questions on behalf of the young person if they do not want to attend. *The Youth Coalition will advise members & youth workers when this service begins, as well as times, through the ebulletin and our email networks.*

The YLC can provide assistance in a number of areas, including:

- criminal law
- employment (and apprenticeships)
- motor vehicle accidents
- contracts
- residential tenancy
- consumer issues
- debt
- traffic offences
- family law
- discrimination
- protection orders

If they are unable to assist, they will refer you to other services, including other legal centres and youth organisations.

The YLC is also involved in community legal education. Their outreach program runs on a regular basis at ACT high schools, colleges and youth organisations. As part of this program, the YLC gives free interactive presentations on a range of legal topics, including:

- drug and alcohol awareness
- police powers and security guards
- employment and apprenticeships
- internet and mobile phone use including cyberbullying
- car accidents
- buying and selling goods

YLC work in community legal education aims to promote young people's knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities. You can request a free YLC presentation or find out more about the outreach program by contacting the Youth Law Centre.

Q & A Session: Case Studies and Scenarios

Michelle led a Q&A session with the youth workers who attended the session. Key messages for workers who were not able to be there include:

- Young people and membership/contracts: Many young people we work with get in a position where they sign up for ongoing membership to a club or a contract (eg mobile phone contract, interest free loans), but are then not in a financial position to continue to pay. If you are working with any young people in this position, connect them in with the Youth Law Centre, who will be able to assist them to either end the contract or re-negotiate the terms. The sooner they seek help for this, the better.
- Court Support: Young people who are begin investigated or have been charged with any offence are encouraged to contact the Youth Law Centre ASAP to find out what support is available to them through Legal Aid.
- Interactions with the police: Youth workers may have contact with the police regarding the young person. If you ever have any questions about what information you should/can/must provide, please contact the Youth Law Centre and have a chat about what your obligations are. Issues of confidentiality or being uncertain if organisational policies are in line with legal requirements were raised, and workers were encouraged to discuss these further with their managers.
- Reporting breaches of bail: Workers were encouraged to discuss the policies of their organisation with their manager, and check in with the police and the Youth Law Centre to ensure their policies comply with the law as well as provide the best response for their clients.

Please note that at the next YWPN session we will have members from ACT Policing here to discuss these types of issues and answer your questions.

Follow up

If you haven't already, please join up to the Youth Worker Practice Network - go to members.youthcoalition.net/ywpn

The YWPN social sessions are continuing – last Thursday of each month, 6 – 8pm at Civic Pub. Drop in for a chat, a drink, some dinner, or a game of pool. These sessions are a great opportunity to interact with other youth workers.

The next two member training sessions are:

- Thursday 19 May – Working with the Police
- Tuesday 7 June – Ethical Dilemmas in Youth Work

These sessions run from 9 – 11am, at the Youth Coalition of the ACT, 46 Clianthus Street O'Connor. All frontline youth workers are invite to attend.

For more information on the Youth Worker Practice Network, contact Hannah Watts on 02 6247 3540 or hannah@youthcoalition.net

To contact the Youth Law Centre, call 02 6173 5410 or drop in to Legal Aid ACT, 2 Allsop Street Canberra.