

Legal Theatre

A Regional Community Legal Education project

In addition to traditional workshops, the Illawarra Legal Centre has been proactive in organising new, innovative, and interesting ways to educate people. A example of this is whereby two special Legal Theatre performances – (the first of it's kind in the Illawarra) were held.

The first Legal Theatre performance was held in March 2005 as part of the Domestic Violence Forum held at Wollongong Town Hall, included in the festival of events for International Women's Day. The project was the initiative of the Illawarra Legal Centre in conjunction with Illawarra Women's Health Centre and other community agencies throughout the Illawarra. The play entitled "Marla", originally developed by South West Sydney Legal Centre, highlighted legal issues of domestic violence and attracted over 200 community workers.

The second colourful and entertaining Legal Theatre performance on 17 June 2005 was organised by the Centre in conjunction with the Illawarra Multicultural Services was for the newly arrived African community members of the Illawarra. This performance addressed legal issues of credit and debt, Centrelink and tenancy.

Local professional actors performed short theatre pieces and then used 'forum theatre' applications to initiate a discussion on the issues presented in the performance. Students, community members & workers attending the interactive performances, were then invited to participate in the performances and offer solutions to the problems identified in the theatre pieces.

The Centre has received positive feedback for both performances and has found that Legal Theatre, an alternative to a regular educational workshop method has been a successful way of educating people from a variety of NESB or CALD backgrounds.

"I really enjoyed the time of discussion and I want it to continue more and more because it will help us to know what we are to do."

Legal Theatre, African participant 2005

The Illawarra Legal Centre won two awards at the 2005 Fair Trading Awards night for consumer protection for the innovative African Legal Theatre project. The first award was a service award for the best regional community organization. The second award was the Einfeld Awards which recognises organisations or associations that demonstrate outstanding work in protecting vulnerable consumers, such as ethnic communities.

Legal theatre is a proactive and preventative community legal education project. Newly arrived migrants often face social exclusion and are unfamiliar with the Australian legal system which in many respects is entirely different from the legal system they were used to. As a result of the theatre some of the participants came to the Centre to obtain specific advice and word about the ILC has spread throughout the African community in the Illawarra. This has made their settlement process easier and will hopefully prevent some problems from arising.

More information about Legal Theatre can be found at:

'Legal theatre': a theatre based approach to community legal education, Jaclyn Borton & Paul Dwyer, Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney, 2005, 125p. [Book] [NSW]

<http://www.lawfoundation.net.au/grants/LegalTheatreRpt05.pdf> The report documents and evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the legal theatre, carried out by the South West Community Legal Centre.

www.illawarralegalcentre.org.au