

**The Legal Empowerment Conference
Improving lives, empowering communities**

10th February 2010 in London

**Minutes of the Panel Debate
How does PLE advance a culture of civil & social justice?**

Panel Chair: Andrew Phillips (Lord Phillips of Sudbury) OBE, President of the Citizenship Foundation

Panel Speakers: *Myles Kunzli, [Development Consultant, Law Centre's Federation] Theo Gavrielides, [Chief Executive, ROTA and Director, IARS] Sarah McCoubrey, [Executive Director, OJEN] Carol Taylor. [Operations Director, NIACE]*

All panel speakers gave an introductory synopsis of how PLE advance a culture of civil & social Justice within the time allocated to them.

Myles Kunzli stated that this is done through three strands of delivery by the law centres in Australia which involves casework and representation, law reform and public education. He explained that PLE is about being associated with the community and the law centres are community based agencies that are funded to provide PLE and thus ensure that the law centres are more connected with the community.

Theo Gavrielides stated that PLE is not about creating lawyers but rather about active citizens, performing their role as active citizens. PLE gives tools to the young and focuses on the vulnerable groups.

Sarah McCoubrey stated that PLE ensures that all stakeholders from lawyers to high school students collaborate in learning. PLE also teaches that conflicts are acceptable but those different types of conflicts needs to be managed. Further when change is introduced to the system through PLE it makes sure that citizens are involved in reform and are not passive.

Carol Taylor stated that either citizen can be disempowered by giving them advice or make them robust citizens by providing them with PLE.

There after questions were posts to the panel speakers by the audience. Some of which and the response to them are as follows.

Howard Gannaway asked "how can PLE move from the paradigm of advice to other sectors?" Sarah McCoubrey said that it can be done through schools and to just do it in little ways so that when results are seen, that would lead to more results. Carol Taylor stated that communities should work together to identify the issues concerned and find the solutions. Myles Kunzli responded that community ought to link with the non-advice organisations and work together. On a similar note Theo Gavrielides also stated that PLE is not just the advice sector, all sectors such as the Ministry of Justice should come together. Also added that there is a possibility as PLE is relatively new in the UK, those involved may be engaged in PLE without knowing that it is PLE.

Chillie Reid from AdviceUK asked ***"what would PLE do for the marginalised communities so that they can do within themselves in another three years?"***

Carol Taylor stated that even though funding is less, policies and agendas ought to link and hence people would feel it. Myles Kunzli stated that if the law centres come together with the public then the public would be empowered to do it themselves. Sarah McCoubrey stated

that even though the credit crunch hurts, the people who most need it are more hurt and good legal information is a preventive approach than going to court and something in between has to be provided. Theo Gavrielides stated that the voluntary community ought to play the role with or without money and that PLE must be introduced to the public service and main streamed to bring together more communities.

Richard Grives asked **“What do we sell to the potential fund providers of PLE?”**

Myles Kunzli stated that as prevention and early intervention is important, policy work that comes through community work together is more important. Carol Taylor stated that indicators can be used to influence them. Sarah McCoubrey stated that a programme that revitalised democracy cannot be dispensed.

Thereafter the panel speakers summed up their views before closure and Andrew Phillips thanked the panel for their contribution and PLENet for organising the conference for the second time.