

Legal Empowerment Conference 2010 - Youth Justice Approaches



- Young people's low level of legal capability is one of their major barriers to access to justice – and the knock-on effects for wider society are substantial in terms of crime, poor health, homelessness etc.
- Barriers to young people acquiring legal capability include: Knowledge (e.g. low awareness of rights & services); Problem-solving skills (with practical and emotional skills being equally significant); The adolescent brain (the centre of reasoning & problem-solving matures late); Psychological factors (e.g. sense of powerlessness, disaffection, alienation from legal system, lack of trust in adult services).
- Advice itself has been evidenced to improve young people's legal capability.
- The group felt that government and society have traditionally been reluctant to afford young people the means to enforce their rights.
- Marginalised and disadvantaged young people face extra barriers to accessing justice due to a number of factors which may include: isolation, low confidence, limited communication skills, negative views of legal advice professions.
- For marginalised and disadvantaged groups of young people PLE providers need to adopt a strategy of outreach and face to face delivery outside of the classroom in the youth setting.
- Making public legal education successful for young people means helping the participants to think critically about the law – understanding why laws exist in certain ways enables us to better apply them to our society.
- Learning should be active – participants should be encouraged to debate and discuss and learn through real-life case studies and stories.
- Legal knowledge and skills should be based around our everyday lives so that it is relevant and useful.

- All materials and delivery should be accessible to everyone – it is an entitlement to receive a good public legal education and nobody should be excluded from it for accessibility reasons.
- Developing skills for legal capability enables citizens to be informed, critical and empowered so that if they choose they can be engaged, effective and active.

February 2010