

## **Streetlaw legal capability micro-pilot**

Recent research by the LSRC has found that much of the population lacks the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to deal with legal problems when they arise. It seems that many individuals don't know their rights or have any idea how to find out, others feel that 'nothing can be done' so don't try to get advice, and others try to get advice but fail. All of this makes for less successful outcomes and more reports of stress-related ill-health. The situation is, predictably, worst amongst disadvantaged groups. The LSRC found that people on a low income, the unemployed, and women were particularly likely to do nothing because they felt unable to act. This research comes hot on the heels of a 2009 study by IARS that found a worrying lack of legal capability among disadvantaged young people. This study found that participants lacked knowledge of their rights, where to go for help or information, how to access advice, and the verbal skills required to deal with a problem.

Advicenow have been thinking about legal capability for some time. We have concluded that there is a set of generic skills and basic know-how that are needed to deal with pretty much any law-related problem effectively. This includes what to do when a problem arises, how to make your case, how to communicate with the other side successfully, the importance of recording what you've done, how to find advice, etc. Possessing these skills and know-how may also provide the key to the other crucial factor in dealing effectively with law-related problems - confidence. During the course of our work on self-help materials, it became clear that much of the population lacks the practical problem solving skills and confidence required to deal with legal problems as well as they might - just as the IARS research found.

We were keen to see how well practical problem solving skills could be addressed through Streetlaw, and whether law students (who, after all, don't have much practical experience of helping people solve their problems) would be able to deliver it. Pamela and Sara, who run the College of Law's Legal Advice Centre in Bloomsbury, were up for it, so we gave it a whirl - twice.

Two groups of four students at the College of Law incorporated material aimed at developing problem solving know-how into a Streetlaw session. Participants in the first workshop were a group of eight young people from New Horizon Youth Center (NHYC), near Kings Cross; participants in the second group were nine 8-16 year old boys who attend the Luton Young Leaders Academy (LYLA). Both groups were not without challenges - several participants at NHYC struggled with English, and participants at LYLA were across such a wide age-range it was hard for the students to find the right level to pitch it at.

We felt that the sessions would be most engaging if the skills material was presented in the context of a problem that the participants related to and found appealing, and feedback from participants suggests that this was a successful strategy. In fact, one young woman refused to take part in a role-play because it was about taking back a

mobile phone. When someone suggested that she make it about returning hair-straighteners instead, she was happy to be involved.

Both groups of students worked hard at making the sessions interactive and interesting and feedback from participants in both groups show that this was appreciated. The workshop at NHYC included an icebreaker agree/disagree game about consumer rights, a brief presentation, a video of someone failing to enforce her rights followed by group discussion of what she might have done better, a role play where participants practiced their negotiation skills in pairs, followed by a discussion of what worked and what didn't work. The workshop at LYLA included a discussion of who makes the law, an exercise about the difference between civil and criminal law, an inventive quiz about consumer rights (workshop participants had to help President Obama who had a number of consumer problems while visiting the UK), and a short presentation on skills - 6 steps to getting the result you want. The skills element, particularly the role-play aimed at developing negotiation skills, seems to have been well received.

Both groups of participants received a handout at the end of the session. The group at NHYC received a credit-card sized handout designed by the law students, reminding participants of the steps to solving a problem that they had covered as part of the workshop. The group at LYLA received a copy of Advicenow's 'Seven steps to solving a problem'. Feedback from participants was very positive and many of the responses suggest that participants valued being given a handout as a way to remember what they had learned if/when they will need to use these skills to deal with a problem in the future. Two participants from the younger group also suggested that the handout was helpful for them as it increased their understanding and reinforced what they had learnt.

With the help of the Streetlaw coordinator, both groups of students were successful in pitching the workshops at the right level for the audience. Participants at both sessions were engaged, asked questions, and took part in the activities, and feedback suggests that many understood that these skills were equally applicable to other situations. Most encouragingly of all, feedback from participants suggests that they found it not only helpful, but empowering. As one young participant put it, "It was the truth. It was really useful for young people to know".

Pamela Robotham, who co-ordinates Streetlaw at Bloomsbury, and assisted these students, felt that incorporating the skills element was beneficial for the law students too as it encouraged them, perhaps for the first time, to think about the law as a process.

This micro-pilot does suggest that this is a good approach to take and one that could be very effective. We would like to expand on this work and are seeking funding for a larger project to design and test a suite of resources and to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.