



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.

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Ms Erika Owens
Department of Justice
Level 1, 436 Lonsdale Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Owens,

Re: Publications on Family Violence Court

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) is dissatisfied with the Family Violence Court Pilot to date. The manner in which the concerns raised by the Indigenous Australian community have been managed is poor. VALS is also disappointed with the publications about the Family Violence Court. It is unsatisfactory that the Department of Justice (DOJ) will not produce a specific publication about the Family Violence Court for Indigenous Australians. VALS does not wish to commit much energy to providing feedback on the publications because the DOJ has not listened in the past.

VALS is also disappointed by the inconsistent approach of the DOJ in its dealings with this organisation. It appears that the DOJ engages with VALS only when it suits the DOJ, such as a feedback process like this. VALS requests a response to the question of why this organization was not invited to the Family Violence Court training with other legal service providers.

VALS does not want to give the impression that it endorses the publication by participating in this feedback process or that this letter mentions all the flaws with the publications. In general terms VALS argues that the publications are:

- Too long, complicated and inaccessible.
- Contain many gaps and do not provide enough specific information.

Counselling Orders Document

The structure of the Counselling Orders for Men/Women Publications is not logical and is repetitive. VALS recommends that the structure could be simplified by going through the process of receiving a Counselling Order step by step, starting at the beginning.

As it stands the Counseling Orders document will unnecessarily confuse people, such as by having heading number four '(who can receive a counseling order)' after heading number two '(about counseling orders for men)'. Heading number four should precede heading number two

as the former answers the latter. VALS Questions why the heading 'Understanding the Counselling Order' is the second last heading as this seems out of place.

Applying for an Intervention Order - Indigenous and Ethnic Outreach Worker

VALS notes that the reference to 'an Indigenous Family Violence Worker and an Ethnic Family Violence Worker' is more appropriate than a reference to Indigenous Family Violence Workers. The reference to plural workers is misleading as it implies that there is more than one Indigenous Family Violence Worker at each Court. VALS advises caution in stating that the Indigenous Family Violence Worker is available "some days" for similar reasons. VALS recommends going into specifics about the Indigenous Family Violence Worker at this stage of the document (ie: how many workers, what days are they available at the Court? etc).

Information and Referral

It should be mentioned that the Indigenous/Ethnic Family Violence Worker can assist with Information and Referral (ie: the Applicant Worker is mentioned under the heading Information and Referral only).

Responding to an Intervention Order – Indigenous and Ethnic Outreach Worker

It is a serious omission that the paragraph explaining the Indigenous and Ethnic Outreach Worker in the 'Applying for an Intervention Order' document is not included in the 'Responding to an Intervention Order' document. VALS understands that the Indigenous Outreach Worker is available for both Applicants and Defendants. It is essential that Defendants have access to information about the Indigenous Family Violence Worker also.

Support Services

In the document for Applicants and Defendants culturally appropriate support services should be mentioned.

We urge you to take the following into account before printing the publications. If you have any questions please contact Greta Jubb (Research Officer) on 9419 3888.

Yours Sincerely

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

Frank E. Guivarra
Chief Executive Officer