

Speaker's notes

What's the law - Centrelink

How to use these notes

Topic: Rights and responsibilities regarding Centrelink payments and services.

Resources: *What's the law?* education kit 'Centrelink', which contains a photo story (on DVD), activity sheets and answer sheets.

These notes provide guidelines for a speaker's script and information on how to use these resources when presenting to a community group. The notes include a story summary, questions and answers, key messages, areas for further discussion and referral information.

1. Preparing to present

It may be useful to read the activity and answer sheets to prepare for your presentation - they may give you ideas for additional questions and activities for your group. It is also a good idea to look at the websites and referral information given in section nine of these notes.

If you need assistance with presentation skills, engagement ideas or coordination support for the group you are preparing for you can contact communitylegaled@legalaid.qld.gov.au or 3238 3431.

2. Introduce yourself and *What's the law?*

Before you begin your presentation, introduce yourself, your role and your organisation.

For example, if you work at Legal Aid Queensland:

- Legal Aid Queensland helps the community in many different ways if they have problems with the law. We provide legal education to newly-arrived communities about their rights and responsibilities.

Refer to the *What's the law?* education kit and its purpose by mentioning these key points:

- We see many different newly-arrived communities get into trouble with the law and often it is the same legal problems that arise. These legal troubles can be avoided if you know some simple information about the law and where to go to for help before your problem becomes serious.
- The photo stories in *What's the law* have been made to help you learn about the law on ten different topics.

Begin with some introductory statements and general questions about the topic:

- Today we are going to show you a photo story about why it is important to tell Centrelink about changes in how much money you earn, your living and study arrangements, relationship status or if you leave Australia.
- Centrelink problems can be complicated so it's important that you get legal advice, especially if you're asked to pay back money.
- Has anyone filled out a Centrelink form? Was it difficult? Did anyone help you with the forms?

3. Summarise the photo story

- This story is about some problems Win Aung has with Centrelink payments.
- Win Aung starts working more, gets married and starts living with his wife. These changes have an impact on his Centrelink payments.

- Centrelink sends him a letter saying that he needs to pay Centrelink \$2000.

4. Ask questions

To strengthen engagement with the photo story and develop the group's legal literacy, ask key questions before showing the story. This will encourage the group to watch actively and think about key messages.

While you are watching the photo story think about the next three questions:

- 1) **What should Win Aung do when his circumstances change?**
- 2) **What could happen if you don't tell Centrelink about changes in your life?**
- 3) **What can you do if you disagree with a decision Centrelink makes about your payments?**

5. Show the photo story



6. Answer the questions

Ask the same key questions after you show the story and allow for discussion to tease out the right answers.

What should Win Aung do when his circumstances change?

- Win Aung must tell Centrelink if he earns more money or if any other important things change in his life.

What could happen if you don't tell Centrelink about changes in your life?

- Centrelink has many different ways they can find out about changes in your circumstances. For example, they can check with your employer or other government departments.
- If you don't tell Centrelink and you get more money, you may have to pay that money back.
- If you tell them incorrect information on purpose you may be charged with a criminal offence.
- If you don't understand something Centrelink tells you, ask for an interpreter.
- Do not ignore any letters from Centrelink.

What can you do if you disagree with a decision Centrelink makes about your payments?

- You can ask for the decision to be looked at again.
- Legal Aid Queensland can help you get the decision looked at again if you have to pay back money or go to court. They can also help if your payments have been stopped or you cannot get a payment.
- Legal Aid Queensland is a separate organisation from Centrelink. The information you tell Legal Aid Queensland lawyers about your Centrelink problems will not be told to Centrelink.

7. Emphasise key messages

- Tell Centrelink about any changes in your life which effect your financial situation.
- If you don't understand something Centrelink tells you, ask for an interpreter. Do not ignore Centrelink letters.
- Call **Legal Aid Queensland** or your **community legal centre** if you have legal problems or have to go to court.

8. Further questions and discussion

- Does anyone have any questions?

You are not expected to be a lawyer to use this resource, many teachers and community workers use this resource successfully. If a participant raises personal legal issues, you can provide referral information. If you are not a lawyer, legal assessment or advice should be referred to **Legal Aid Queensland** on **1300 65 11 88** or the closest **community legal centre**.

9. Possible discussion points and referral information

Centrelink interviews /appointments

- If you have a problem with Centrelink and they ask you to go to an interview, you can get free legal advice before you go. Ask for an interpreter for the interview if you need one.
- Information on dealing with Centrelink, buying things on credit, debt, bankruptcy and contracts: Legal Aid Queensland <http://www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/legalinformation/workandmoney/Pages/Centrelink.aspx>

Reporting changes

- Tell Centrelink straight away when there are changes to: your pay, who you live with, where you live, your rent, child care, study, travel and other changes that affect your financial situation.
131 202
www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/information/centrelink-website

Employment issues

- Other topics that may be raised are minimum wages, fair conditions and discrimination.
- Fairwork Australia gives advice and helps you to understand your workplace rights and responsibilities:
13 13 94
www.fairwork.gov.au/

Other referral services

- **Centrelink multilingual services**
131 202
Translated material: www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/information-in-your-language/