



Criminal Justice Support Network

A project of Intellectual Disability Rights Service

After Hours Volunteer Lawyers for People with Intellectual Disabilities

The Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS) and Criminal Justice Support Network (CJSN) are seeking practitioners with experience in criminal law matters who may be willing to participate in an after hours emergency service on a roster basis. Volunteer lawyers are needed to provide legal advice to people with an intellectual disability in police interviews where a support worker is present. Much of the demand for volunteer lawyers will be after hours and on weekends when there are no other services available.

People with an intellectual disability are often unrepresented in police stations and typically say “yes” to police officers in an attempt to please the person in authority. This may result in a record of interview where the person with an intellectual disability admits to several offences. Volunteer lawyers are needed to ensure that people with an intellectual disability have their rights protected.

The CJSN project supports people with an intellectual disability who come into contact with the criminal justice system. It is a state wide information and referral service that provides support people in 3 designated areas: Sydney, southern and Hunter regions.

During business hours, a person with an intellectual disability accused of committing an offence can be assisted to obtain legal advice from IDRS lawyers or from other services like Legal Aid and Law Access. Such advice and assistance is essential. To complement the CJSN support service after hours, an on call roster of volunteer criminal lawyers has been established. Two hour evening workshops with CLE attached are offered by CJSN to orientate interested practitioners. Training on advising clients with an intellectual disability about their rights, and on relevant legal issues is also provided.

If the offence is very serious, a support person does not participate in a police interview unless a lawyer is present. Therefore, IDRS encourages all practitioners with the relevant expertise to register for the CJSN roster and play an active role in providing access to justice for people with an intellectual disability.

For further information contact CJSN on Ph 9318 0144.