

The Criminal Justice Support Network (CJSN) is a service for people with an intellectual disability who are involved in criminal matters as a witness, victim or suspect or offender.

CJSN provides:

- Trained volunteer support people in the targeted areas of the Sydney Metropolitan, Hunter and Southern NSW regions, to assist people with an intellectual disability at police stations and/or at court.
- A state-wide 24 hour telephone information and support line.

Information and resources including:

- A new updated website
www.idrs.org.au
- Training courses for carers, service providers, family members and others who support people with an intellectual disability who are in contact with the Criminal Justice System.

There will be a staged roll-out of support people in the Sydney Metropolitan area. Referrals will be initially accepted for matters at the following courts:

- Balmain
- Burwood
- Central Sydney
- Downing Centre
- Newtown
- North Sydney
- Parramatta
- Redfern
- Ryde
- Waverley



Why might a person with an intellectual disability need support at court?

Support will be provided for the Local, District and Supreme Courts. As more volunteers are trained support will be provided in other areas.

Some of the main effects of having an intellectual disability concern a person's ability to understand, ability to communicate and ability to adjust to new situations.

Due to these constraints going to court is especially difficult for a person with an intellectual disability.

Many people in these circumstances may not acknowledge that they are having difficulty. They may just try to cope and hope things turn out OK.

Providing support and spending time to assist the person to understand can help them to do their best and reduce their particular disadvantage in an often complex legal system.

A support person working in co-operation with the solicitor can enable a client with an intellectual disability to exercise their legal rights by assisting the person to communicate with their solicitor and to understand and participate in the proceedings.

Accessing court support

Ask your client whether they would like to have a support person to help them at court. If they agree:

Phone 1300 665 908

Speak to a CJSN Regional Coordinator or the CJSN Project Manager who will get in touch with the client and make arrangements to connect them with a CJSN support worker at the times required.

What information is needed before contacting CJSN?

- Name of the client or name of the person requiring CJSN support (for instance if the person with an intellectual disability is a witness subpoenaed to appear).
- Name of the opposing party.
- The type matter requiring the CJSN support. Is it a police interview, bail application, plea, mention, hearing, sentencing etc?
- Whether the person who requires CJSN support has used the Intellectual Disability Rights Service or CJSN before.
- Whether the person's advocate or care has been contacted, and their name and contact details.
- Date and time that the matter is listed.
- At which court the matter is listed.
- How long the matter is expected to run.
- A basic summary of the person's ability to communicate and understand what is being explained to them.

Before the court date the support worker can:

Help to prepare the client for going to court and assist the person to:

- understand the basic nature of their matter and what happens at court.
- understand the importance of attending court.
- remember the court date and make arrangements to get there.
- access legal advice before the day and have secure representation.
- remember to bring relevant papers with them to court.
- understand expected behaviour/attire etc.

The support person will discuss with the client how they would like to be assisted at court. With the client's permission, the support person may obtain information about the person's disability and support needs from someone such as a service provider or family member.

The support person will be careful not to discuss the client's evidence or the facts of the matter with the client.

At appointments with solicitors

The support person can assist the client to communicate with their solicitor. The support person will check that they understand the advice as they may need to reinforce this information to the client at a later time.

At court the support person can:

- Assist the client to find the relevant court room and when appropriate, the duty solicitor.
- Sit with the person and help them to stay calm while they wait for their matter.
- Advise the court/solicitor of any special needs the client may have.
- Assist the person to communicate with their solicitor and reinforce their advice.
- If appropriate and agreed, sit near the client in court and indicate to the solicitor if they think the client does not understand something, is distressed or needs a break.
- After checking the outcome with the solicitor, ensure the client understands this.
- Accompany the client to the court office/ Probation and Parole officer and explain any documents where necessary.
- Highlight the need for referrals to services.
- If the person is refused bail/sentenced to gaol the support worker will contact the Disability Services Unit of Corrective Services.

To arrange a support worker for a person with an intellectual disability who is required to go to court

**Phone the CJSN
1300 665 908**