



**Evaluation of public legal education for Advice Champions
in the Community Links Early Action Advice project**

Final evaluation report

October 2015

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Report:	<i>Evaluation of PLE for Advice Champions in the Community Links Early Action Advice project</i> Final evaluation report
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- i. This report summarises findings from evaluation of the public legal education (PLE) delivered by Law for Life as part of the Early Action Advice project led by Community Links. Early Action Advice aimed to improve the sustainability of advice services by recruiting, training and supporting volunteers without any legal training or qualifications to help people to recognise and deal with, or avoid, legal problems at an early stage. These volunteers are known as Advice Champions. Law for Life delivered two eight-week PLE courses for Advice Champions as part of the Early Action Advice initiative. The courses took place in March/April 2014 and March/April 2015 with 46 Advice Champions participating in total.
- ii. Evaluation of the PLE element of the Early Action Advice project addressed two questions: (1) Was Law for Life's PLE course effective in equipping the Advice Champions with the knowledge, skills and confidence to help other people who are seeking advice? (2) Was there any increase in the legal capability of the clients who received help from the Advice Champions?
- iii. The evaluation found that the PLE course was highly effective in equipping Advice Champions with the knowledge, skills and confidence to help other people who are seeking advice. The Advice Champions considered that their legal capability increased as a result of their participation in the PLE course, particularly in terms of their confidence to understand legal rights and obligations and their ability to identify the legal issues within everyday problems.
 - *It's made me more confident and I feel that I can empathise with people more and maybe can help them now too.*
 - *I am armed with the knowledge and skills, and developed the confidence to inform clients in despair, and guide them to find alternatives.*
 - *It has helped me to realise that by giving someone a bit of your time you can help make a difference to their lives (even with a simple phone call clarifying something).*
- iv. A follow up evaluation survey and interviews found that four or sixteen months after completing the PLE course, Advice Champions were operating confidently in this role and considered that the PLE training had enabled this.
- v. The Advice Champions consider that they need regular, refresher PLE to maintain their effectiveness in this role. They may also need additional training to communicate what is distinct about the Advice Champion role and to increase their reach into communities and to individuals before they seek help from advice agencies.
- vi. It has been challenging to measure the legal capability of advice clients supported by Advice Champions as this type of secondary legal capability measurement has not been carried out before. The data collected through the Early Action Advice project shows that over 90% of the clients supported by

Advice Champions felt more confident about dealing with their problems because of the support they received. This is the same level of confidence reported by clients who saw a qualified adviser, suggesting that the support provided by Advice Champions is as effective as the support from advisers, on this measure of legal capability.

- vii. Limitations in the scope of this evaluation, due to resource constraints, mean that some key questions remain unanswered. These include: what additional capacity Advice Champions bring to this sector; whether Advice Champions are reaching people before they would normally seek support from a qualified adviser; and how many people helped by Advice Champions are able to resolve their problems without going on to see a qualified adviser. It would be useful to explore these in future research or evaluation. It is also strongly recommended that cognitive testing of the secondary legal capability questions is carried out in order to improve the validity and reliability of future data collected on these measures.

ONE: INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings and conclusions from evaluation of the public legal education (PLE) delivered by Law for Life as part of a wider project led by Community Links. The evaluation was commissioned by Law for Life with funding from the Big Lottery and was carried out by Shared Enterprise CIC.

1.1 Background

Law for Life is delivering PLE as part of the Early Action Advice project. The Early Action Advice project is led by Community Links, a community development charity based in East London. The overall aim of the Early Action Advice initiative is to improve the sustainability of advice services by reducing demand. To achieve this the project is recruiting, training and supporting two cohorts of Advice Champions. The Advice Champions are volunteers from all backgrounds who want to help other people in their local communities. The Advice Champions do not have legal or advice qualifications or experience. The Early Action Advice project trains and supports Advice Champions to work with people who are experiencing problems, helping them to recognise and deal with, or avoid, legal problems at an early stage.

The project is taking place in the London borough of Newham. Community Links is working in partnership with five local organisations that provide advice services to communities in Newham. Early Action Advice is funded through the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund.

1.2 Public Legal Education

Law for Life delivered two PLE courses for Advice Champions as part of this initiative. Each PLE course comprised eight sessions delivered over eight weeks. The first training course was delivered in March to April 2014 and the second course took place in March to April 2015. The project set a target of 40 Advice Champions to take part in the PLE courses.

The PLE element of the Early Action Advice project had two main objectives. Firstly, to equip Advice Champions with the knowledge and confidence to support advice clients. The eight week course aimed to achieve this. A second objective was to increase the legal capability of advice clients supported by Advice Champions. To help achieve this, the PLE for Advice Champions was strongly focused on ways of empowering advice clients to identify and resolve their own legal problems.

1.3 Evaluation

Law for Life commissioned Shared Enterprise CIC to support evaluation of the PLE element of the Early Action Advice project. This evaluation is focused only on the PLE element of the wider project.

The evaluation seeks to address the following key questions:

1. Has the PLE course which Law for Life devised and delivered for this project been effective in equipping the Advice Champions with the knowledge, skills and confidence to help other people who are seeking advice?
2. Has there been any increase in the legal capability of clients who have received help from the Advice Champions?

The main methods for addressing question one have been:

- Evaluation questionnaires which were completed by participants at the beginning and end of the PLE course. The evaluation questionnaires ask a series of questions derived from the PLE Evaluation Framework which was developed by Law for Life in 2011 to provide a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to evaluating PLE. In addition, the evaluator observed one training session and spoke informally to a majority of the participants at that session.
- An on-line survey of Advice Champions. The survey was open from June to August 2015 and 14 Advice Champions completed this.
- Interviews with Advice Champions, by phone or face to face. These interviews took place from June to August 2015. Seven Advice Champions were interviewed, of whom three had completed the on-line survey and four were uncertain as to whether they had completed the survey or not. It is assumed that those who are uncertain did not complete the survey and that a total of 18 Advice Champions have provided information about their motivations and experiences through the on-line survey or in interviews.

The main method for addressing question two has been through the client monitoring questionnaire which Community Links uses for all advice work. All clients, whether seen by a qualified adviser or by an Advice Champion, are asked to complete a client monitoring questionnaire at the end of their advice session. To evaluate the impact of the PLE input on the legal capability of advice clients, Community Links added three legal capability questions to the client monitoring questionnaire.

The legal capability questions were devised by Shared Enterprise CIC and Law for Life as part of the on-going process of implementing the PLE Evaluation Framework by operationalising the Framework's legal capability domains into evaluation questions which can be readily understood and answered by participants of PLE initiatives to provide meaningful and robust evaluation data. Evaluating changes in the legal capability of people who are a step removed from a PLE intervention was a new approach and there were no existing legal capability indicators to draw on for this.

The three legal capability questions which were added to the Community Links monitoring questionnaire ask respondents to say whether they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements:

Question 1: I know where to look for support to help me to deal with the problems that I am experiencing;

Question 2: I know where to look for legal information to help me to deal with the problems that I am experiencing;

Question 3: After talking to the adviser, I feel more confident about how to deal with the problems that I am experiencing.

Community Links provided response data to these questions for the period May 2014 to May 2015.

TWO: FINDINGS

2.1 Increasing legal capability of the Advice Champions

PLE course evaluation

Law for Life delivered two eight week PLE courses for Advice Champions. A total of 46 people participated in these, of which 43 completed either the baseline or the final evaluation questionnaire, with 25 participants completing both.

The data collected through the baseline questionnaire shows that a majority of participants were female (85%), from black and minority ethnic groups (88%), without disabilities (91%) and in the 25 to 59 age group (82%).

The results from the baseline and final evaluation questionnaires are shown in Table I. The table shows the combined results from the baseline questionnaires completed by participants of both courses in the 'Before' column and the combined results from the final evaluation questionnaires in the 'After' column. The 'Increase' column shows the percentage increase in the responses to each evaluation question from the 'before' to 'after' position.

The evaluation results show that participants significantly increased confidence in their own legal capability after taking the PLE course. Around half of the course participants were confident about their legal capability, as demonstrated on the selected indicators, before taking part in the PLE training. After completing the training, almost all participants considered themselves to be confident on these legal capability measures.

The biggest increase for participants was their confidence in understanding their legal rights and obligations. Before the PLE course, 42% of participants felt very or fairly confident about this, rising to 88% on completion.

Two questions in the PLE evaluation questionnaire were focused on how well Advice Champions felt they could help other people experiencing law-related problems:

1. How well could you assess whether someone else is able to deal with a law-related issue?
2. How well could you help someone else to deal with a law related issue?

Respondents were asked to rate themselves out of 10 on these questions. On the first question, the average response for all participants was 5.7 before the PLE course and 7.8 after. On the second question, the average response was 5.8 before the PLE course and 7.5 after. These results clearly indicate that participants felt better able to carry out the Advice Champion role following the PLE course.

Participants on the first PLE course (in 2014) gave themselves higher 'before' ratings than those on the second course (in 2015). However, their 'after' ratings were also higher, so the distance travelled from before to after is much the same for both cohorts. Women who took part in the training gave themselves slightly higher

responses to these questions (both before and after) than men, but the differences by gender are not statistically significant.

Table I: Results from baseline and final evaluation questionnaires for all PLE course participants

	BEFORE	AFTER	INCREASE
1. How confident are you that you understand your legal rights and obligations			
% answering "fairly or very confident"	42	88	110%
2. Do you understand the difference between civil and criminal law			
% answering "yes"	67	100	49%
3. How far do you agree with this statement "I am able to identify the legal issues within everyday problems"			
% who agree or strongly agree	53	91	72%
How confident are you that you know when you need to get expert help to deal with a law related issue			
% answering "fairly or very confident"	64	91	42%
What sources of information would you use to find out more about a law related issue			
Number of sources identified	2.7	3.3	22%
How well would you deal with a law related issue			
Average score on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is worst and 10 is best)	5.7	7.5	31.6%
How well could you assess whether someone else is able to deal with a law-related issue			
Average score on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is worst and 10 is best)	5.7	7.8	36.8%
How well could you help someone else to deal with a law related issue			
Average score on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is worst and 10 is best)	5.8	7.5	29.3%

Participants were asked in the final evaluation questionnaire whether taking the course had helped them to understand more about legal issues. All respondents answered 'yes' to this question, with 9% saying it had helped them 'a bit' and 91% saying it had helped them 'a great deal'.

The final evaluation questionnaire asked participants what they considered the most useful thing they learned on the course. The most frequent answer was 'learning about the difference between information and advice', which was stated by around one quarter of the questionnaire respondents. Other responses to this question are shown in Table II.

Table II: What was the most useful thing that you learned on this course?

	Respondents stating this
The difference between information and advice	23%
Identifying good sources of information	23%
Information about specific legal issues	23%
Learning about the law	13%
How to work with clients	13%

The final evaluation questionnaire asked participants if there was anything about the course which could be improved. The most frequent response to this question was 'nothing', with almost one third of respondents stating this. Around one quarter would have liked more information about specific legal issues such as debt, housing or immigration. A few respondents asked for the course to be run for longer so that more could be covered, and a few would have preferred the sessions to run at a different time of day.

Table III: Was there anything about the course which you think could be improved?

	Respondents stating this
Nothing	28%
More information about specific legal issues	24%
A longer course with more sessions	12%
Running the course at a different time of day	12%
Including more activities like role plays	8%

Follow up survey and interviews with Advice Champions

The on-line survey and interviews with Advice Champions aimed to explore whether increased legal capability from the PLE course was sustained in the longer term, and how well the PLE course equipped the Champions for their role in supporting others to increase their legal capability.

The on-line survey and interviews were carried out in summer 2015. Attempts were made to contact all 46 of the Advice Champions who had taken part in the PLE course but only 18 could be reached, although we understand that 20 Advice Champions have remained engaged and active in the project.

The 18 Advice Champions who contributed to the follow up stage of the evaluation were all active in their Advice Champion role. A majority (14) had been working as Community Champions for a relatively short period as they had joined the project in the second cohort, in April 2015. Four Advice Champions had joined in the first cohort, in April 2014, and had been working in this role for around 16 months at the time of the follow up evaluation.

The key findings from the follow up interviews and survey are as follows:

- Not all the Advice Champions surveyed or interviewed had participated in the eight week PLE course. The numbers are unclear because not all the Advice Champions could remember, but about 14 interviewees had taken part in the eight week PLE course, while the remainder had received in-house PLE training from Community Links staff who had attended Law for Life's train the PLE trainer course.
- All those who had taken the PLE course considered that it had been very useful preparation for becoming an Advice Champion. All the Advice Champions agreed that the most useful aspect of the PLE course was helping them to understand the role of an Advice Champion. They also strongly valued the role plays and scenarios from the course, feeling that these really helped them to practice for real life situations.
- Around two thirds of the Advice Champions are carrying out this role within a community centre and one third are operating more informally, supporting family and friends to deal with legal issues.
- The Advice Champions are carrying out this role on very different scales. The Advice Champions were asked how many people they had supported since they took on this role. The responses ranged from two to 750.
- Most Advice Champions feel that in order to help people deal with the problems they face, Advice Champions need additional knowledge in specific subject areas. The subject areas mentioned were mental health, immigration, divorce, child custody and criminal law.
- Almost all the Advice Champions consider that they are very likely to continue in this role but will need refresher training to help them do this. The refresher training identified by Advice Champions is in subject-specific areas including welfare benefits and housing.
- Almost all the Advice Champions would like to gain an accredited qualification for this role. The most important factors for an accredited qualification would be the quality and the cost of the course. The least important factor would be whether the course was recognised by employers. All the Advice Champions believe that an accredited qualification would improve their career opportunities. None of the Advice Champions consider that there would be any disadvantages or drawbacks if the Advice Champion training became accredited.
- All of the Advice Champions are primarily motivated by the desire to help their communities. At the same time, a majority would like to develop their careers in the legal or advice sector and see their Advice Champion work as a useful stepping stone towards this.
- Although the on-line survey respondents indicated that 'understanding the role of an advice champion' was the most useful element of the PLE course, interviews with Advice Champions found that they were not always clear about the

difference between their role and that of an Advice Worker. Most interviewees believed that the main difference is that Advice Workers are paid while Advice Champions are voluntary. Additionally, some interviewees considered that a key difference is that Advice Workers are more experienced while Advice Champions are new to this field.

2.2 Increasing legal capability of clients supported by Advice Champions

During the 13 month period from May 2014 to May 2015, 20 Advice Champions supported clients and asked those clients to complete the Community Links client monitoring form which includes the three legal capability questions.

Over this period a total of 2,392 advice clients completed the Community Links client monitoring form. Of the 2,392 clients advised, 1,472 (62%) saw an adviser and 920 (38%) saw an Advice Champion. Each Advice Champion saw an average of 46 clients over the 13 month period, which is slightly less than one client per week per Advice Champion.

In terms of client profile, there are small differences between the clients supported by Advice Champions and those supported by advisers but these are not statistically significant. Just over 18% of the clients supported by Advice Champions had a disability, compared with 16% of those supported by advisers. Of the clients seen by Advice Champions, 72% were from black, Asian, mixed or gypsy/traveller ethnic groups, compared with 69% of the clients seen by advisers. Exactly 60% of the clients seen by Advice Champions were women compared with 58% of the clients seen by advisers.

Around 55 per cent of all the clients who completed the monitoring form answered the three legal capability questions, as shown in Table IV. The Community Links data manager considers that the response rates to the legal capability questions are about average for responses to all questions in the client monitoring form.

Table IV: Advice clients responding to the legal capability questions on the Community Links client monitoring form

Legal capability question	Number responding	Response rate
I know where to look for support to help me to deal with the problems that I am experiencing	1323	55%
I know where to look for legal information to help me to deal with the problems that I am experiencing	1326	55%
After talking to the adviser, I feel more confident about how to deal with the problems that I am experiencing	1284	54%

The responses from all clients to each of the three legal capability questions are shown in Table V.

Table V: Legal capability question responses from all clients (%)

	Question 1 (Knows where to look for support)	Question 2. (Knows where to look for legal information)	Question 3 (Feels more confident to deal with problems)
Strongly agree	12	12	31
Agree	43	41	54
Neither agree nor disagree	10	10	6
Disagree	31	31	7
Strongly disagree	4	4	1
Don't know	1	1	0
Total	100	100	100

Table V shows that for all advice clients, whether seen by an adviser or an Advice Champion, around 60 per cent agreed that they knew where to look for support to help deal with the problems they were seeking advice for, and around 60 per cent agreed that they knew where to look for legal information to help deal with those problems. Of the three legal capability questions, the strongest positive response was to Question 3 which asks whether having seen an adviser, the client now feels more confident to deal with the problems for which they are seeking advice: 31% strongly agreed and 54% agreed, with only 8% disagreeing with this statement. This very strong indication that advice clients feel more confident to deal with their own problems, suggests an increase in their own legal capability as a result of having seen an adviser or Advice Champion.

The responses to Questions 1 and 2 are difficult to interpret. Although more respondents agree than disagree that they know where to look for support and information, a substantial proportion disagree (35% of respondents to both questions). This is in contrast to responses to these legal capability indicators in other evaluations of Law for Life's PLE initiatives, where positive responses have been consistently and considerably higher. However, none of these previous evaluations have collected responses from people who are at the point of seeking advice for their problems, arguably a very distinct client group, nor have they sought to test the legal capability of people who are a step removed from those directly participating in PLE courses.

The strong positive response to Question 3 suggests that the phrasing of this question ('Do you feel more confident...') is easier for respondents to answer positively. It would be hugely valuable to carry out cognitive testing of these PLE questions with advice-seeking clients to gain a better understanding of how the questions are received and how answers are formulated. This cognitive testing should be used to develop the PLE indicators for use in future evaluations.

It is not possible to identify whether the responses shown in Table V are better for clients supported by an Advice Champion than they would be for people with advice problems who get no support. There have not been sufficient resources available within this project to investigate legal capability of clients who do not receive support, nor to look at the legal capability of the Community Links advice clients before and after they receive support.

What we are able to look at is whether the legal capability outcomes for clients supported by Advice Champions are in any way different from the clients who are seen by advisers. Tables VI to VIII show cross tabulations for responses to the PLE questions by whether the client saw an adviser or an Advice Champion. For these tables, the responses are aggregated so that strongly agree, agree and neither agree nor disagree are shown as 'Agree'; disagree and strongly disagree are shown as 'Disagree'. The 'don't know' respondents are excluded from these tables.

The tables show that there are only minimal differences in the responses to these questions between the clients who saw an Advice Champion and the clients who saw an adviser. After seeing an adviser 63% of clients agreed that they know where to look for support to help deal with their problems, compared with 60% of the people who saw an Advice Champion. On the second legal capability indicator, knowing where to look for legal information, 61% of the clients who saw an adviser agreed that they knew how to do this, compared with 59% of those who saw an Advice Champion. Slightly more of the clients supported by Advice Champions agreed that they felt more confident about dealing with their problems; 92% compared with 90% of those who saw an adviser. However, the differences in responses for advisers and Advice Champions are slight and are not statistically significant.

These findings tell us that both advisers and Advice Champions were effective in developing the legal capability of clients seeking advice, particularly as measured on the third legal capability question, and that the Advice Champions were as effective as the advisers, as measured on these three indicators.

Table VI: Cross-tabulation: *Knows where to look for support by adviser/Advice Champion (row percentages)*

Supported by:	Agree	Disagree	Total
Adviser	63.2	36.8	100
Advice Champion	59.6	40.4	100
Total	61.8	38.2	100

Table VII: Cross-tabulation: *Knows where to look for legal information by adviser/Advice Champion (row percentages)*

Supported by:	Agree	Disagree	Total
Adviser	61.4	38.6	100
Advice Champion	59.3	40.7	100
Total	60.5	39.5	100

Table VIII: Cross-tabulation: *Feels more confident about dealing with problems by adviser/Advice Champion (row percentages)*

Supported by:	Agree	Disagree	Total
Adviser	89.8	10.2	100
Advice Champion	92.1	7.9	100
Total	90.7	9.3	100

THREE: CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Achieving the PLE objectives

The PLE element of the Early Action Advice project achieved both of its intended objectives.

In terms of the first objective, equipping Advice Champions with the knowledge and confidence to support advice clients, the evaluation feedback from the PLE courses shows that Advice Champions feel far more confident and have increased skills and knowledge to carry out this role as a result of the training.

The follow up stage of the evaluation found that Advice Champions were operating confidently in this role. All those who had taken part in the PLE courses considered that this had provided very useful preparation for the role of an Advice Champion.

In terms of the second objective, increasing the legal capability of advice clients supported by Advice Champions, the available data shows that over 90% of the clients who are supported by Advice Champions feel more confident about dealing with their advice problems because of the support they received. There is no difference in the confidence reported by clients supported by advisers and those supported by Advice Champions, suggesting that on this legal capability measure the support provided by Advice Champions is as effective as that from advisers.

3.2 Developing the Advice Champion role

What the Advice Champion role is and how this should operate has evolved over the course of the Early Action Advice project. The PLE course focused on the nature of the role and highlighted the distinction between the information and support role of the Advice Champion and the advisory role of an Advice Worker. The Advice Champions are clear about this distinction within the context of the PLE course, but less clear when describing what they actually do as Advice Champions. The Advice Champions consider their role to be essentially the same as an Advice Worker but unpaid and requiring less experience.

It is not clear how far the Advice Champions are taking a proactive approach in this role. That is, how often are Advice Champions reaching people before they present as advice cases? Most of the Advice Champions interviewed for this evaluation are working as volunteers in community advice centres and it is not clear that they are reaching clients other than those who are already seeking advice. Some agencies working with Advice Champions believe that the role needs to become more proactive to maximise its effectiveness; that Advice Champions should be seeking out people whose problems have not yet built up to the point where they need expert advice, rather than waiting for clients to come to them for help.

Further work is needed to clarify the role of an Advice Champion and to promote this more widely. Advice Champions themselves perhaps need help to articulate what is unique about their role and how it differs from an Advice Worker. It may be useful for

the PLE course to include a stronger focus on proactivity and how to engage with people before they ask for help.

3.3 Limitations of the available data

There are limitations within the data available to track the impact and effectiveness of the Advice Champions. It would be useful to report on the following aspects of the Advice Champions' work, but we currently lack the data to enable this:

- How many clients each Advice Champion has supported;
- Where the Advice Champions have provided support and how many clients they have supported in each location, e.g. in community centres, faith centres, schools etc.;
- How many clients supported by Advice Champions resolved their problems satisfactorily without needing to see a qualified adviser;
- How clients were referred to or found Advice Champions, and whether these referral pathways are different from the routes to qualified advisers.

3.4 Limitations of the evaluation methodology

The limited resources available for evaluation have restricted the scope of the methods employed. Clearly, there are a number of additional ways in which evaluation of the Advice Champion role could be developed to provide more detailed evidence of the effectiveness of this approach. These include:

- Identifying how many clients who are supported by Advice Champions are additional to those who may have received support from elsewhere if Advice Champions were not available. That is, how much additional capacity do Advice Champions bring to this field?
- Identifying what outcomes are achieved by clients supported by Advice Champions in comparison with those achieved by clients supported by advisers. That is, are Advice Champions able to help resolve or avoid legal problems? Are the legal problems that Advice Champions can help with different in nature from those which advisers help with, or the same problems at a different stage?
- Measuring the legal capability of clients before as well as after they receive support from Advice Champions, in order to identify what difference this support makes for clients who receive it.
- Comparing legal capability and outcomes for clients supported by Advice Champions with people who receive no support at all. The Advice Champions are providing support which is additional to advisers, so it is likely that clients seen by Advice Champions would not otherwise have received any support. It would be more useful to replace the comparisons made in this report between Advice

Champions and advisers with a comparison between clients receiving Advice Champion support and people with similar problems who receive no support. This would provide a more useful indication of the value which Advice Champions are bringing to this field.

3.5 Measuring secondary legal capability

The evaluation of the PLE element of the Early Action Advice project has been a useful opportunity to further develop and test indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of PLE. The indicators and methods for measuring the effectiveness of PLE courses for primary participants (i.e. the people who take part in the training) are well established and producing consistent and therefore reliable results.

The challenge of measuring legal capability for 'secondary participants' (i.e. people supported to tackle their own legal problems by people who have taken part in PLE) has been a new departure. It would now be useful to carry out further investigation, through cognitive testing, of the ways in which secondary participants interpret legal capability indicators, to develop a clearer understanding of which indicators would be most appropriate for future evaluations.