

What's the law?

Australian law for new arrivals

Answer sheet 7: **Centrelink**

July 2011

Requirements: A copy of the DVD.

Pre-teaching

Vocabulary: change, correct, earned, exactly, extra, married, mistake, owe, probably, responsibility, Tax Office, tired.

Warmer activity to introduce topic: Question students to initiate discussion: *Who has filled in a Centrelink form? Was it easy (or complicated) to fill in? Did you have help?*

Key Messages

1. If you get a Centrelink payment or service, you need to tell Centrelink immediately if your circumstances change in case it affects your payment. Change in circumstances includes changes to your income or assets, moving in with your partner, if your rent changes, if your child stops living with you, if you stop studying or go from full-time to part-time, if you leave Australia.
2. If you don't understand what is happening with a payment or why you are being asked to give information, then you should ask.
3. Centrelink checks information with the Australian Tax Office, Australia's immigration authorities, government departments and other organisations, and checks your income with employers. It also acts on tip-offs from the public. If you are overpaid benefits, you will probably have to repay the money.
4. If you have deliberately given Centrelink incorrect information, then you may be charged with a criminal offence and have to go to court. Centrelink fraud is a serious offence. You could be sent to prison and have to pay the money back.
5. It is important to use interpreters to make sure you understand your rights and obligations when dealing with Centrelink. If you don't understand anything you get from Centrelink, you should call them or visit an office. You can ask for a free interpreter.
6. 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.
7. If you have a problem with Centrelink or you are not happy with a decision, tell them and get a receipt or record of the fact that you talked to them.
8. If you disagree with a decision that Centrelink makes, you have the right to have the decision reviewed (looked at again). Legal aid or your local Welfare Rights Centre may be able to help with asking for a review or lodging an appeal.

Answers

Activity A

1. he got married 2. 4 hours 3. 9 hours 4. \$2,000
5. Tax Office

Activity B

1. c 2. e 3. a 4. b 5. d

Activity C

- d f c a h b g e

Activity D

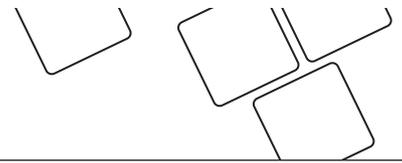
1. Centrelink 2. form 3. information 4. declare
5. review

Activity E

Discussion

Activity F

Check last slide in the DVD for the best place to get free legal help.



Script for Centrelink story

- Win-Aung Centrelink? Hi this is Win-Aung Kunoo. I just got married and I'm now living with my wife.
- Centrelink worker Thanks for telling us. Your Newstart payments may change. Please write down this receipt number and keep it in a safe place.
- Win-Aung Hey, we're still getting the same money.
- Sanda Must be OK because you called them.
- Boss Hey mate, can you work extra hours tomorrow?
- Win-Aung Sure. I have to put in my Centrelink form first - can you tell me how many hours I will work? I have to tell them how much money I get each fortnight.
- Boss Not sure - probably around four hours.
- Win-Aung OK, see you tomorrow.
- Sanda That was a long day!
- Win-Aung Yeah, they needed me for nine hours - not four! I'm tired.
- Win-Aung I really like this job, and we get cheap fruit and veggies.
- Win-Aung They say I owe them \$2,000.
- Sanda That's not right.
- Win-Aung I don't understand this letter.
- Centrelink worker You owe Centrelink money. Centrelink checked with the Tax Office and you earned more money than you declared on your forms. Also, you didn't tell us you were married so you have been overpaid on Newstart.
- Win-Aung But I did tell Centrelink I was married. It's your mistake.
- Win-Aung ... and each week my hours change, so I never know how much I'll be paid.
- Centrelink worker It's your responsibility to give us the correct information Mr Kunoo.
- Sanda Maybe you should call legal aid? I know they help with legal problems.
- Win-Aung Can you help me with a Centrelink problem?
- Legal Aid worker I'll give you the number of a free legal service that helps with Centrelink problems.
- Win-Aung Thanks.
- Lawyer You have been overpaid because you did not tell Centrelink about all your income from work.
- Win-Aung But I never know how much I will be paid!
- Lawyer We can ask Centrelink to change your pay date so that you put your forms in after you get paid.
- Win-Aung And they said I didn't tell them I was married. I did tell them.
- Lawyer Do you have a receipt number for the phone call?
- Win-Aung Yes, here it is. Lucky I kept it.
- Lawyer What did you tell them? Did you know you were being overpaid?
- Win-Aung I told them I got married and moved in with my wife. I thought they must be paying me the right amount.
- Lawyer I will talk to Centrelink about whether they can cancel part of the debt.
- Win-Aung Thanks for your help.
- Lawyer No worries. It's my job to help people with Centrelink problems.
- Lawyer I've got good news. Centrelink has agreed to reduce the debt to \$600. Can you afford to pay \$20 a week?
- Win-Aung That's fantastic! Thank you.