

## Taree - Forster CLSD Program meeting

15 March 2023, 12:30 – 2:30PM, First Steps Count Child and Community Centre

### MINUTES

**Present:** Jane O'Dwyer (Regional Coordinator, MVNS), Winnecke Baker (Legal Aid NSW), Emma McGuire (Mid-Coast Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service), Cindi Ulstrup (Services Australia) Ronald Dennison (Legal Aid NSW), Melanie Kallmier (Mid-North Coast Legal Centre), Danny Philippa (Your Story Disability Legal Support), Nicole Grgas (Hunter Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service), Kylie Naylor (Youth Justice), Fiona Bennett (Taree Community Corrections), Alison Minett (Service NSW), Kurt Schirmer (Service NSW), Sarah McFadden (Wesley Financial Counselling), Craig Partridge (Client Coordinator, Wesley), Shaarn Whitehouse (Mid-North Coast Legal Centre), Sam (Legal Aid NSW)

**Apologies:** Tim Larritt (Home in Place), Catherine Peek (Advocacy law Alliance), Vanessa MacDougall (Vocal), Jasmine Rourke (FLPN), Michelle Hannon (G+T), Anne Cregan (G+T), Pauline Smith (MNC Financial Counselling Service), Stephanie Ping (Tobwabba), Shiralee Cross (Pathfinders), Hannah Earley (MidCoast Council), Kylie Hyde (Mid North Coast Legal Centre), Joanne Adams (Services Australia), Corinne Stephenson (Forster Neighbourhood Centre), Kym Visser (WDVCAS), Claudia Richardson (Mission Australia)

Agenda item	Discussion	Action/Outcome
<b>1. Opening</b>	Jane acknowledged the meeting took place on the lands of the Biripi people and welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
<b>2. Purpose of today's meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To gain a better understanding of how Community Corrections and Arbias ITS support offenders to reintegrate into the community. Also, to better understand the challenges that offenders face and if there is a role that your service can play to help.</li><li>Identify priority projects for the year.</li><li>To reconnect with partners, 2023 is well underway!</li></ul>	
<b>3. Guest speakers</b>	<b>Fiona Bennett</b> , Manager Community Corrections Taree	

- In Taree there are 17 community corrections officers, 5 team leaders and specialist roles like an Aboriginal client services officer.
- Community Corrections works with adult offenders and their main stakeholders are:
  - The state parole authority, and
  - Courts.

#### **The role of Community Corrections**

1. Supervise people who have received a community corrections order (CCO) or an intensive supervision order (ISO) from a Magistrate.
2. Supervise people who have been released from custody on parole orders People can be released from custody with a parole order or automatically released into the community.
3. Complete sentencing assessment reports at the request of courts. If requested, community corrections officers will interview people before they are sentenced and recommend sentencing options, for example completion of a community service work order.
4. Prepare reports for the state parole authority about anyone serving a sentence over 3 years about the safety of them returning back into the community.

#### **Current areas of focus**

- Community Corrections works towards changing behaviours amongst its clients to reduce re-offending and rates of incarceration.
- Lots of factors are considered to determine how long Community Corrections should be involved with someone, like the risk that they will re-offend and if they were to re-offend, what the impact would be on the community.
- Unfortunately, Community Corrections can't supervise every offender that is courts refer to them. Research supports Community Corrections dedicating a higher proportion of its resources to higher risk offenders.
- Community Corrections would support Magistrates issuing more community service work orders when sentencing people.
- State-wide focus is to reduce re-offending and the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody and on community orders.

Cindi – invite Fiona to attend a meeting of Workforce Australia providers this year.

	<p><b>Referrals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referring externally is very important for Community Corrections because they can't directly address all of the issues that their clients face, particularly accessing housing and drug and alcohol and mental health supports.</li> <li>• External referrals are made based on each client's needs and the risks associated with their return to the community.</li> <li>• Community Corrections is keen to build closer relationships with external stakeholders that could support their clients.</li> </ul> <p><b>Internal Community Corrections programs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Corrections provides clients with some programs and group work.</li> <li>• Programs include cognitive behaviour therapy, goal setting, behaviour/consequence, dealing with addictions (any form of addiction) and education about family and domestic violence.</li> </ul> <p><b>Questions</b></p> <p>How can we support people re-entering the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being in custody, even for a short period of time can impact how a person experiences things like time and sound so services being aware of that is really important. Helping people to access housing is a major piece of the puzzle. Community Corrections advises the parole board about the appropriateness of the address that someone has asked to be released to. If the person doesn't have housing Community Corrections will refer the client to Matt at Arbias. Will usually receive this information from the parole unit 6 weeks before someone is released</li> </ul> <p>When does Centrelink get involved?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrelink has a national team of incarceration officers who support people transitioning out of custody. They provide a phone service from a hub and are contacted by each correctional facility about who is being released and when.</li> <li>• People who Centrelink is notified about will have things organised for them ahead of their release.</li> </ul>	<p>Jane – share local legal referral resource with Fiona  Winnie – email Chrissy's details to Fiona regarding WDO referrals and support.</p>
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- For anyone who is partnered, Centrelink will ask them to attend a Centrelink office in person after they are released to organise their payments because they don't want to disadvantage their partner by putting them on partner payments before their release.

Will Community Corrections provide letters to support clients who risk their tenancy being terminated, noting the importance of accommodation for rehabilitation?

- Not having somewhere to live is not a reason for Community Corrections to want to breach a client.
- Can't provide a definitive yes or no response, recommend clients tell Community Corrections about their circumstances so that they can support them.

Which correctional facilities are people being released to the area from and how do they decide where they go?

- Correctional facilities are organised according to risk. People are allocated to a correctional facility based on the best location to keep them safe while in custody. This means that people may be placed in a correctional facility located far from their home and people may also be moved between facilities while they are in custody.
- People are always released with a ticket to return to the location where they were sentenced, or to their home. They get to nominate the address that they want to be released to.

What proportion of people that Community Corrections works with have mental health issues?

- Sadly, it is so prevalent amongst clients and accessing mental health support is extremely difficult. Everyone on medication is meant to leave custody with up to 7 days' worth of medication. Community Corrections supports people to get a mental health care plan with a GP but supporting people who experience acute mental health issues is a significant challenge.

**Danny** – Your Story Disability Legal Support

- This legal service was established to support people to engage with the Disability Royal Commission, but the service is transitioning to provide broader help for people with disability as submissions to the Royal Commission have closed and the report is due in September.

- Now, Your Story can help anyone with a disability or the carer of a person with disability with most civil law issues.
- The service classifies disability very broadly and doesn't require people to provide any proof of their disability.
- The legal help available is very broad, and could include help for issues with things like:
  - Housing
  - The NDIS
  - Employment
  - Debt, fines, and consumer issues
  - Discrimination
  - Complaints about government services.
  
- Your Story is a trauma informed service; all lawyers have had extensive training in providing a trauma informed service, many lawyers in the team have direct experience of living with a disability and the team includes social workers.
- Your Story also works closely with Blue Knot, which is the counselling service that was connected to the Royal Commission.
- For issues that Your Story can't help with directly, like personal injury, they have good relationships with private law firms to refer clients to for pro-bono help.
- Danny noted that the team generated about 50 submissions to the Royal Commission from people in the Clarence Correctional after their visit there last year.

**Partner comments**

- Kylie noted that a significant proportion of young people that Youth Justice works with in Taree are illiterate and can't operate mobile phones proficiently.
- Nicole noted that the tenancy service is receiving enquiries from people about onerous terms in their NDIS agreements. For example, one client was given 2 days to get out of their Supported Independent Living accommodation, and others are being told that they need to use a particular NDIS provider.

**How to refer**

Phone: 1800 771 800

Email: [yourstorydisability@legalaid.qld.gov.au](mailto:yourstorydisability@legalaid.qld.gov.au)

	Other options to contact the service, including an online form and using the national relay service <a href="#">are available here</a> .	
<b>4. Standing items</b>	<p><b>Homelessness/Risk of homelessness – anything new?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to replicate the Housing Hub in Port Macquarie in Taree.</li> <li>• Cindi attends the housing hub every Thursday for 2 hours. Many services attend at different times on a rotating roster.</li> <li>• The hub has a pantry, clothing available and pet food for animals provided by Pet Barn.</li> <li>• Lots of men experiencing homelessness attend the hub.</li> <li>• Partners noted that Forster and Gloucester are high needs areas for this type of service as well.</li> <li>• In Port Macquarie the Hub is run by the Hastings Homelessness Collective and New Horizons and YP Space are involved as well.</li> </ul> <p><b>Ideas for the local model</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think that it would fit well with the BBQ that Wesley already puts on fortnightly that is attended by Orange Sky Laundry.</li> <li>• Locating the hub centrally was supported because this is a strength of the Port hub.</li> <li>• Wesley doesn't have a pantry in Taree but sometimes the church does provide fruit and vegetables from the community garden and pet food at its own expense.</li> <li>• Building on the existing BBQ could work because the facility has showers that people can use as well.</li> <li>• Mel noted that incorporating a vet support day where a vet can check pet registrations and minor pet care could be complemented by the provision of legal and other services.</li> <li>• Craig will prepare a proposal for the church about building upon the existing BBQ.</li> </ul>	
<b>5. Arising challenges?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both Tenant Advice and Advocacy Services noted ongoing issue of clients facing rent increases, sometimes up to \$200/week in one hit.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Aid NSW family law clinic for Taree/Forster is still operating by phone due to staff shortages but Legal Aid is hopeful that this will be resolved this year. Please contact the Port Macquarie office if clients need to see someone in person as this can be arranged with notice either at court or another location suitable for the client.</li> </ul>	
<b>6. Partnership actions</b>	<p><b>1. Birth certificate update:</b> the CLSD Program is hopefully of having a new allocation of fee-free birth certificates available for eligible people in the new 2023-2024 financial year. The allocation for the current financial year has been exhausted.</p> <p><b>2. Court election social media tile update:</b> the CLSD regional coordinator and CLSD Program Unit are working on a social media campaign about the risks associated with court electing to challenge fines in partnership with Mid North Coast Legal Centre, Legal Aid Port Macquarie, Central Coast Community Legal Centre and the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT Fines Service.</p> <p>Mid North Coast Legal Centre raised concerns about the number of people choosing to challenge a fine at court without getting legal advice first during the Q4 CLSD meeting last year.</p> <p>This issue has also recently been picked up at a state-wide level by the Fines and Traffic Working Group of the NSW Legal Assistance Forum.</p> <p><b>3. DFV information session in partnership with MVDVMC:</b> in partnership with Manning Valley Domestic Violence Monitoring Committee (MVDVMC) and Mid North Coast Legal Centre to run an information session for workers on a range of legal DFV related topics including consent law legislation, what the coercive control legislation is going to look at, how family law intersects with DFV issues. At this stage plan to hold at First Steps Count in May pending availability of solicitor and venue.</p> <p><b>4. Free legal help/cost of living day:</b> free legal help days have previously been run at Court Houses on list day at Taree and Forster. To look at running this again and possibility of incorporating cost of living components. Date and location to be discussed.</p>	
<b>7. Next meeting</b>	<b>14 June – Planning Meeting - First Steps Count Community Centre Taree</b>	

