

Taree - Forster CLSD Program meeting

29 November 2023, 12:00 – 2:0PM, First Steps Count Child and Community Centre

MINUTES

Present: Jane O'Dwyer (Regional Coordinator, MVNS), Seema Sanghi (Legal Aid NSW), Corinne Stephenson (Forster Neighbourhood Centre), Hannah Earley (MidCoast Council), Juno Jacobs (MidCoast Council), Emma McGuire (Mid-Coast Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service), Cindi Ulstrup (Services Australia) Ronald Dennison (Legal Aid NSW), Tiarna Byrne (Mid North Coast Legal Centre), Melanie Kallmier (Mid-North Coast Legal Centre), Meg Molony (Mid North Coast Legal Centre), Craig Partridge (Client Coordinator, Wesley Mission), Jess Thomas (Wesley Mission), Michaeli Gwilliam (Wesley Mission), Shaniane Andrews (GLAMYHS), Lujain Fayad (ALS), Joey Engel (Homebase), Nickki Reece (Catholic Care), Liz Saunders (TIDE), Steve Davis (Bamara)

Apologies: Catherine Peek (Advocacy law Alliance), Michelle Hannon (G+T), Anne Cregan (G+T), Pauline Smith (MNC Financial Counselling Service), Corinne Stephenson (Forster Neighbourhood Centre), Claudia Richardson (Mission Australia), Lachlan Gunn (NSW Police), Sarah McFadden (Wesley Financial Counselling), Alina Ljumanovic (DCJ), Kyrie Couch (Legal Aid NSW), Emma Smallwood (Legal Aid NSW), Kylie Naylor (Youth Justice), Jennifer Kladis (DCJ), Karina Orton (Mission Australia), Lindsay Hobson (Headspace), Christine Francis (Legal Aid NSW), Sam McDonald (Legal Aid NSW).

| Agenda item | Discussion | Action/Outcome |
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| 1. Opening | Mel Kallmier acknowledged the meeting took place on the lands of the Biripi people and welcomed everyone to the meeting. | |
| 2. Purpose of today's meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none">To gain a better understanding of young people's needs, as seen by the services dealing with them.To bring attention to what is available for young people and how services can meet those needs and any service gaps. | |
| 3. Group discussion | The meetings discussion on young people (YP) was very comprehensive; to reflect this I have recorded the main points under themed points. The themes are not exclusive and overlap. | |

After the general discussion, we broke up into 3 groups to focus on what appeared to be the most pressing issues: mental health; identification and housing/tenancy (see attached)

Mental Health

- Several barriers to accessing mental health services:
 - lack of services
 - Waitlists
 - Transport
 - Cost - difficult to find GP's that bulk bill to get a mental health plan. Headspace is only available in Taree.
 - gaps between service eligibilities: some people fall in between complex/acute and simple issues missing out on access so must rely on a GP.
- Significant onus on independent YP to stay engaged in their health care journey.
- Need for more information and engaging speakers to talk to YP -in schools, particularly around youth suicide. Save a mate is not being delivered across all schools.

Education and Employment

- Lack of further education and vocational courses in Taree, they are mostly in Forster and Port Macquarie.
- lack of public transport -significant barrier to participation
- Increase in the number of YP leaving school early.
- Difficulty getting YP engaged in school after years of disruption having gone from bushfires to floods to covid. Very disruptive to learning and social skills development.
- Teachers are spending more time on conflict resolution in classrooms.
- Some YP are attending school because it is a safe space and for the social side rather than the learning side.
- Some YP think they are untouchable. Despite information from police and others, they continue to record and share inappropriate and sexually explicit footage on social media. No consideration for consequences to others or their own future employment prospects.
- A lack of healthy relationships education in the school system. It is difficult to access some schools to deliver programs such as Love Bites.
- Since COVID there has been an increase in employment opportunities in Forster, but transport and accommodation are a barrier.

Housing

- Previous rental history such as being on TICA (national tenant database) or bad references are ongoing barriers to acquiring housing.
- Not everyone is covered under the tenancy act depending on the rental set up.
- Rent Choice Youth Program (DCJ) has some limitations, it is currently on hold in Taree due to available spaces being filled and waiting for approval for more. The young person must be studying or working or looking for work with 3 months to find employment. The rent must be affordable which is difficult.
- Lack of temporary accommodation in Forster, YP in Forster prefer to remain in Forster where they have links and supports. The Taree and Forster communities are different and need to be considered as such.
- Lack of properties at an affordable rent level has led to an increase in YP living with parents putting pressure on relationships and finances. This has also seen an increase in share housing with an increase in disputes.
- Issue of homelessness is often hidden as a lot of YP couch surf. Temporary accommodation is not always suitable for some people such as young mums.
- Some temporary accommodation places in Taree are:
 - Max and Shirls –a 10 room motel with most people between 16 - 20yrs. A room is \$200 pw, large furnished room with a shared bathroom, kitchen, and laundry. Includes wife, electricity, and water. Tenants pay a bond and have a lease with no timeframe to stay.
 - The Vic –an 18+ years set up, not suitable for most YP.
 - Black Boy Motel - \$260 pw.
 - Cundletown Motel – price unknown.
 - The Exchange - \$170 pw, 18+ yrs.
- No properties like this in Forster. GLYMHS has a several transition properties, most are in Forster (9), 2-bedroom units with a stay of up to 9months. Must be 16 to go into transitional housing, putting onus on young person to be able to live independently.
- Any person 14yrs old, the refuge would like DCJ involvement so there is a short term (3-month exit). Having a person so young impacts who can stay at the refuge.
- Any young person under 16yrs needs DCJ involvement so there is a longer-term exit plan. Some YP may choose not to be involved with out-of-home care but should be linked to DCJ with a plan. They shouldn't be at the refuge this young.

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| | <p>Poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ of YP living in Forster are living in poverty. <p>Living skills (online banking, applying for rentals etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YP showing a lack of living skills, 12-13-year-olds not wanting to live at home due to family violence, and drug and alcohol issues in the home. • YP, don't have life skills to live independently, setting them up to fail. • Lack of programs to support them in developing these skills. Need to be promoting independent living skills for 14-16yr olds. <p>Identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mum/dad may not give birth certificate to the young person, or they are not registered. Also, a lack of other ID to get birth certificate. Legal Aid, MNCLC and ALS can help with getting a birth certificate. • Births, Deaths and Marriages has a fee waiver policy for birth certificates. CLSD birth certificate partnership (nsw.gov.au) Pathfinders has taken up to 9 months for birth certificates to be issued. • ID issues also impact getting a driver's license and accessing the DLAP program (TIDE & Homepage). • A person may be receiving Centrelink, but no one has cross checked if they person is registered. <p>Family violence and general violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in violence in schools, kids don't feel safe, impacts of capacity of teachers to teach and engage kids wanting to learn. Fights clubs in school have become an issue which is exacerbated with social media. • Family violence in the home between child and a parent or between siblings or between parents. Children don't want to be in the home where there is DFV. Parents experiencing violence from their children are struggling with what to do. If they call the police for assistance it escalates as police are required to act. • It was noted that, if there is an issue in a rental, for example an act of violence causing property damage, tenant needs an event number to there can be an insurance claim. In social housing also need an event number so the property will be fixed. An alternative is to call the | |
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| | <p>police assistance line, can get an event number without involvement from police. This is enough for real estates and social housing, so the tenant is not held responsible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic violence related incidents do not fall under the young offenders act so have to go to court. Likely outcomes include good behaviour bond under supervision of Juvenile Justice. Youth Justice Conference is possible but there are long wait times. • Catholic Care can support FDV survivors 16+yrs with case management. <p>Legal Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fines from not wearing bike helmet to COVID fines. Go to Legal Aid for overdue fines and WDOs. • Fines write-offs are possible by showing financial hardship. Legal Aid can assist with this. COVID fines have been waived, need to apply. Legal Aid, MNCLC and ALS can assist with this. • Unaddressed mental health issues are leading to legal issues. MH – delayed access to support leaves children undiagnosed or untreated or not taking medication (especially if not being supported) and then can become aggressive violent (e.g. schizophrenic) resulting in an assault charge. Kids with intellectual disabilities can be seen as ‘stupid’ creating conflict. • Bail – question if a person can attend school while on bail. A young person cannot be granted bail if they have no address or somewhere suitable to live. A youth refuge can be an option, but sometimes no vacancy or not suitable for YP. Staying at the family home can be an option, but puts pressure on families to take kids back into the home under short notice. These circumstances can lead a young person to stay incarcerated as they have nowhere else to go. • Court – lack of access to diversion or social activity and living skills programs to refer YP, can mean YP fall back into the ‘wrong’ crowd’. Involvement in programs is beneficial as the judge likes to see YP engaged in diversionary activities. • Marijuana is choice of drug for YP now. • Many YP are exposed to domestic violence, some are perpetrators. Number of YP who have experience assault can seek a Victims Services claim as young as 14yrs old. MNCLC can help YP with Victims Services claims. Catholic Care support YP (16+ years) experiencing domestic violence and will do Victims Services applications. | |
| 7. Next meeting | Wednesday 28th February, 12.30 pm to 2.30 pm. Taree, venue to be confirmed. | |

