

The Victims of Crime Chronicle

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The Chronicle is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Victims of Crime Bureau, a Unit of Victims Services, NSW Attorney General's Department.

Manager's Message

The Bureau, in conjunction with the Community Relations Commission For a Multicultural NSW (CRC) will be running information sessions aimed at assisting victims from a non-English speaking background. Sessions will be held in Sydney and in the regions covered by the three Rural Co-ordinators.

To complete the profile of the Bureau's three new Rural Co-ordinators, we introduce Peter Shine (Far West Region). Peter has a Graduate Diploma in Health Services, Diploma Alcohol and Other Drugs, Diploma Community Welfare and a Masters of Primary Health Care.



Peter Shine

For 15 years Peter has worked extensively with alcohol and other drug dependent people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). His other special interest includes the effects of problem gambling among Aboriginal people, as well as access and equity issues for Aboriginal people.

Prior to commencing with the Victims of Crime Bureau, he worked as the Alcohol and other Drugs Co-ordinator in Airds (Campbelltown) and Manager of Alcohol and other Drugs Services for the Macarthur Health Services.

Peter is based at the Dubbo Local Court.
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The revised edition of 'What Now' has been reprinted. This booklet was recently evaluated and has proved to be a valuable resource for victims and service providers. Copies can be ordered by contacting the Bureau.

Ms Charlie Stansfield is acting Counselling Co-ordinator while Susi Blacker is on leave.

Marianne Curtis

Authorised Report Writers (ARWs) - A Report on the Quality Management Project conducted by Victims Services.

As reported in previous issues of the Chronicle, Victims Services has established a quality management project in order to ensure that the reports provided by Authorised Report Writers (ARWs) meet the highest professional standards. The project includes the provision of feedback to ARWs on their reports.

The project focussed on the intent of the ARW Scheme as set out in Schedule 2 of the Memorandum of Understanding:

'The aim of the Services to be provided by the Authorised Report Writer will be an objective and balanced assessment of a Victim's (applicant's) condition... The Report must present evidence of the nature and extent of any disabilities with concrete, specific examples of how the disability has affected the applicant's day-to-day functioning. The Report should refer to the Victim's (applicant's) premorbid function and the relative contribution of the act of violence to the disorder and level of disability'.

The quality project aimed to provide over 20% of ARWs with feedback on the quality of their reports.

Results

By June 2002, 41 ARWs had been provided with feedback regarding the quality of their reports, representing over 20% of active ARWs.

Referrals

Of the ARW reports reviewed, over 70% were referred for review by the compensation assessor or Tribunal staff. The remainder of the reports reviewed were selected at random, or were examined upon the request of the ARW for feedback.

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Issues

The chart below indicates the frequency of issues that were raised with ARWs over the course of the quality project. The most frequent issue related to the nature or lack of evidence used in corroboration of the reported symptoms and disabilities. Concerns were also identified with the reporting of the applicant's functioning both before and after the incident. Other common issues included reports that did not follow the *Template for ARW reports*; the nature of the questioning in the assessment; and concerns regarding the objectivity of the report provided, or the diagnosis formulated by the report writer.

Actions Taken

A majority of the matters reviewed were resolved at an operational level through either written or telephone feedback. An example of a high quality or 'gold standard' ARW report was sent with correspondence in almost a third of the matters to give an indication of the quality expected of an ARW report.

Over 40% of the reports subject to review were referred to the Professional Advisory Panel for advice and further action where necessary. Other actions included the deferral of payment for the report (six cases), the monitoring and review of all reports prepared by an ARW (one case), and the termination of the contract to provide services (two ARWs).

The year ahead

While the majority of ARW reports provided are of a high standard, the quality of ARW reports requires continuing monitoring and assessment. To this end, the quality project will be an ongoing initiative, and it is planned that a further 20% of ARWs receive feedback in relation to the quality of their reports over the year ahead.

Victims Services appreciates the continued participation of all ARWs in providing the highest standard of professional services to victims of crime. Should you wish to discuss the quality management project or any aspect of the ARW Scheme, you can contact the Executive Officer at Victims Services on (02) 9374 3009.

Table 1: ARW's



Quality Assurance of the Approved Counselling Scheme

One of the more stimulating challenges of managing the Approved Counselling Scheme [ACS] that individually contracts to 420 counsellors is ensuring that all victims of crime seeking counselling through the Scheme receive a high quality service that meets their needs.

The ACS is a client focussed scheme first and foremost, and this relies on the implementation of a series of quality assurance strategies. The means by which the ACS implements quality assurance mechanisms consists of both formal and informal strategies. Victims of crime are encouraged to provide feedback to their Counsellor and to the Bureau if they believe the service they received can be improved in any way. The other more formal mechanisms include

1. Monitoring of Counsellors Reports;
2. The implementation of the ACS Complaints policy and procedures; and
3. Collation and review of a questionnaire to clients following the termination of counselling.

1 Reports

Information and advice regarding report writing is available in the Counsellors Handbook. As all Approved Counsellors are aware, a report must be completed following completion of the initial 2 hours of counselling. The report needs to be forwarded to the Tribunal within one month of the last session with the client.

The Counsellors report is an important aspect of the Approved Counselling Scheme. It provides some assurance of how the Scheme has assisted a victim of crime.

Reports are also required when a counsellor wishes to request further counselling hours. It is important that this written report set out clearly what issues remain, what objectives are to be achieved by further counselling, and

how they will be achieved, with expected outcomes also detailed.

Recently, the Professional Advisory Panel reviewed a series of randomly selected reports. The feedback on reports was that the recommendations for further intervention lacked sufficient detail on expected progress and likely interventions and anticipated outcomes of further work. The Panel also considered that reports could be less focussed on detail regarding the history of the violent event with more focus of any further treatment.

Counsellors also need to remember that a request for further counselling hours needs to be made in writing by the client, not the counsellor.

2 Complaints Policy and Procedure

The Approved Counselling Scheme values feedback on the experience of counselling from the perspective of the client. Sometimes this feedback is in the form of a complaint about some aspect of the Counsellors practice.

The Bureau recognises that it requires courage by the client to make a complaint about a Counsellor. An important role of the Counselling Co-ordinator is to support a complainant through this process. The Bureau also recognises that most Counsellors welcome feedback on their work, and the opportunity to perhaps clarify a misunderstanding of which they otherwise would not have been aware. This feedback can only assist in their work.

All Counsellors need to be aware that complaints from clients are responded to first by requesting that the Counsellor respond to the complaints in writing. The Director will then make a decision on any further action that may include referring the matter to the Professional Advisory Panel. This procedure is documented in the Counsellors Handbook.

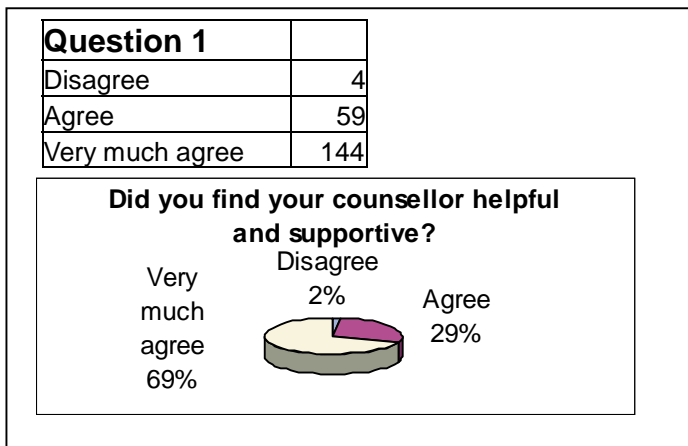
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3 Client Questionnaire

On completion of a period of counselling through the ACS, the client is sent a questionnaire that is collated on a regular basis by the Bureau. Although the sample respondent rate is low, the results of the most recent questionnaire collated from June 2001 to May 2002 are encouraging.

Chart 1 illustrates that an overwhelming number [69%] of respondents found the counsellor helpful and supportive, most [95%] found that there was flexibility in appointment times (Chart 2), and most respondents felt that counselling was worthwhile and helped them cope better with the aftermath of a violent crime [95%] which is shown in (Chart 3).

Chart 1

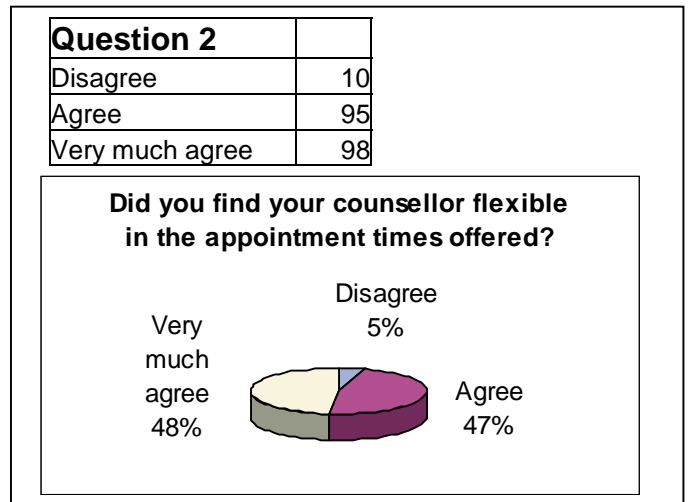


Where clients made comments about negative aspects of the scheme, their comments tended to be around flexibility of appointment times. This is an issue that the Bureau is addressing in ensuring that services are accessible to clients regardless of the region they live.

In terms of clinical issues, some clients reported that counselling had raised painful memories and had left them feeling ill equipped to respond to the feelings they were re-experiencing.

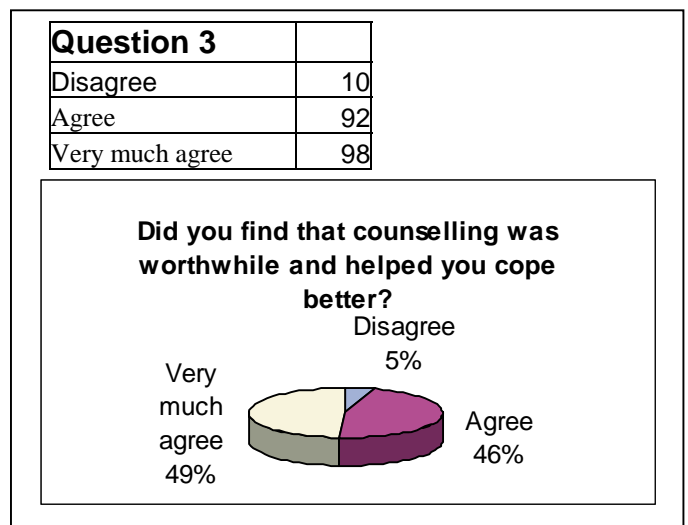
Mostly however, clients who completed the questionnaire reported positively about their experience of counselling under the Scheme.

Chart 2



Client feedback will continue to be sought through informal and formal mechanisms such as the questionnaire.

Chart 3



The Bureau always welcomes comments or suggestions on possible improvements to the Scheme and encourages you to contact the Bureau if you wish to discuss any aspect of the Scheme.

The Chronicle is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Victims of Crime Bureau, a Unit of Victims Services, NSW Attorney General's Department.

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