

MENTAL HEALTH COURT SUPPORT AND REFERRAL PROJECT



MANNING VALLEY NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

INTERIM REPORT

2017

Acknowledgments

This work was completed with the assistance of Anne McKenzie and Caron Watkins from the Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc.

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Contents

- Executive summary..... vii**
 - This reportvii
 - The programvii
 - The evaluation.....vii
 - Key Findings..... viii

- 1. Introduction..... 1**
 - 1.1 The policy context..... 1
 - 1.2 The Mental Health Court Support and Referral Program..... 1
 - 1.2.1 Service model/ program components 2
 - 1.2.2 Intended outcomes 2

- 2. The evaluation 4**
 - 2.1 Background 4
 - 2.2 Purpose..... 4
 - 2.3 Scope and focus 4
 - 2.4 Methods 4

- 3. Findings: MHCSR Program design 9**
 - 3.1 Appropriateness of program design 9
 - 3.1.1 Clear articulation of the nature and scope of the problem 9
 - 3.1.2 Identification of theory of change..... 9
 - 3.1.3 Process of the program development 10
 - 3.1.4 Continuous improvement in program implementation 12
 - 3.2 Program supported by policies and procedures, administration systems, communications and resources?..... 12
 - 3.2.1 Governance 12
 - 3.2.2 Policies and procedures..... 12
 - 3.2.3 Administration and monitoring systems..... 15
 - 3.2.4 Communication strategy for recruiting volunteers and engaging stakeholders..... 16

- 4. Findings: Implementation of MHCSR 17**
 - 4.1 Clients receiving service through MHCSR..... 17
 - 4.1.1 Suitability for the cultural context 18
 - 4.1.2 Client needs..... 19
 - 4.1.3 Referral intake 19
 - 4.1.4 Referrals from MHCSR to other services 20
 - 4.1.5 Follow up after being heard by magistrate..... 20

- 5. Findings: Impact of MHCSRП 22**
 - 5.1 What are the outcomes of the MHCSRП for clients?..... 22

- 6. Conclusion and recommendations 24**
 - 6.1 Program design 24
 - 6.2 The program so far..... 24
 - 6.3 Recommendations..... 24

Tables and figures

Tables

Table 1. Evaluation questions and methods..... 5

Table 2. Background of clients..... 18

Table 3. In your opinion, in what areas did the needs of the client lie?..... 19

Table 4. How did the client connect with the service on the day?..... 19

Table 5. Follow up assistance given to clients..... 20

Figures

Figure 1. Program logic 3

Figure 2. Changes to project design and implementation 11

Figure 3. Clients seen per month..... 18

Abbreviations and acronyms

MVNS	Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services
MHCSRП	Mental Health Court Support and Referral Program
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service
CLSD	Co-operative Legal Services Delivery Program
IDRS	Intellectual Disability Rights Service
CLC	Community Legal Centre
MNCCLC	Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
LA	Legal Aid

Executive summary

This report

This interim report describes the establishment, refinement and activities of the first six months of Mental Health Court Support and Referral Program (MHCSR). It uses the data collected on client interaction and documentation provided by the project team.

At this stage, the available data provided insufficient evidence to fully answer all evaluation questions. These will be explored further in the final report which will build on this report, using interviews and further data analysis as outlined in Section 2.4.

The program

In 2016, Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services (MVNS) received a grant from the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales to deliver MHCSR in the Taree area as a one-year pilot project.

The MHCSR is designed as a non-legal, single point of contact service providing support for people with mental health issues through their local court and legal processes. The program has two components: information and referral, and court support.

The program facilitates information and referral between community legal and non-legal services and for people attending court. The Project Coordinator acts as a single information and referral point for clients or services with clients that:

- have mental health issues who need legal information or referral to legal services, or
- are accessing legal services who are identified as needing support from mental health services.

The court support component of the MHCSR draws on the model implemented by Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS), who deliver a proven volunteer based model to successfully support people with an intellectual disability through the court system.

The evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation is to inform project development, ensure quality outcomes for clients, and if needed, lay the foundations to support the case for continued funding of the program.

The evaluation will describe the implementation of the MHCSR, document the changes in the model over the life of the project and gather evidence on the effectiveness of the trial project method in achieving the desired outcomes for clients.

Key Findings

Clear articulation of the nature and scope of the program

- MVNS consulted with the relevant stakeholders and conducted thorough research to identify the service gap and stakeholder groups affected by the issue of concurrent mental health and legal difficulties. They assessed how Taree's socioeconomic situation affected the legal and mental health literacy of its residents, and reviewed findings of the importance of mental wellbeing for those interacting with the justice system.
- MVNS, in their grant application to the Law and Justice Foundation, clearly articulated this service gap for people with mental health issues needing support and assistance to negotiate the court processes. The application also identified the issue from the perspective of the courts and local legal services.
- The program theory was also informed by literature and assessment of other similar successful programs. The grant application clearly specified how the intervention will bring about change by introducing a single point of contact to simplify the process for clients and other stakeholders involved. ARTD later worked with the MVNS to refine the program theory and develop a program logic making the less tangible assumptions more explicit.

Program supported by policies and procedures, administration systems, communication and resources

- MHCSR has comprehensive policies covering a wide range of areas for the benefit of the service, its volunteers and its clients. The Coordinator and Volunteer roles have also been clearly defined in the program documentation.
- During the program development and since launch, the program has made contact with a number of legal, mental health and other community services. These relationships have been fostered through networking and media releases.
- Appropriate documentation has been developed outlining procedures for services to refer clients to the program as well as procedures and responsibilities of volunteers and staff to refer out clients to other services. The program has developed number of systems to support client referrals out to needed services including a database of referral contacts and a referral matrix that links local services to specific issues.
- Before and during the July to December period, MVNS conducted a number of events and developed resources to promote the service to potential volunteers and local stakeholders. Specific recruitment and media subcommittees were formed to manage effective engagement. The comprehensiveness and timeliness of this strategy in communicating the service to potential volunteers, referrers, other services, solicitors, court staff and police, will be explored in the next report.
- The Client Daily Dairy forms are short, easy for volunteers to fill out, and capture all the key information for each client. However, monitoring can be improved through better data management processes.
- Through this review, a few areas of policy and procedure have remained unclear. These include liaising with court staff, a publicity strategy, procedures for increasing the number of referrals and professional development for the Coordinator and volunteers.

- MHCSR steering committee meetings show communication with court registrars and staff beginning before the commencement of the program. However, a particular process for liaison with court staff has not been identified in these documents.
- Volunteers have clearly defined and implemented support processes in place. However, Coordinator support processes were unclear from the documentation.

Program implementation has been targeted and flexible

- MHCSR supported 101 clients to negotiate court processes in six months (July'16 – Dec'16).
 - Just over half (56%) of the clients supported were male.
 - Most (91%) of these clients had mental health issues.
 - Families of four clients in custody were supported during October to December.
 - Over half (60%) of clients had support person with them. Of the 48 clients with support present, most (43) still requested direct support by volunteers.
 - Most (78%) of clients had been to court before.
 - One fifth of clients (19%) had been to court for matters related to traffic while most (81%) went for other matters.
 - Less than half (43%) of clients had contact with some health or community services before attending court.
 - Eleven clients wanted to represent themselves at court. After speaking with a volunteer, 7 sought legal representation.
 - Volunteers attended Legal Aid interviews with 26 clients during the October-December 2016 period.
 - On average, volunteers spent one hour with a client. This time varied between 10 minutes to three hours.
- The early consultation with ALS ensured that the program design is suitable for the cultural context and resulted in the program supporting a high proportion of clients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (16% of the total clients supported).
- MCHSRP invested in establishing relationships and setting up processes for referral intake as detailed in section 3.2.1. Despite this preparation, just 19% of MHCSR clients were referrals from other services. Barriers to referral intake will be explored in the next report.

Program outcomes have benefitted clients

Outcomes of the MHCSR for clients will be explored using client satisfaction survey and client interviews in the second phase of the evaluation. Outcomes reported below are based on unstructured feedback to volunteers from their clients, recorded in the Client Daily Diary.

- Clients responded positively to receiving help from program volunteers. Seventy-five clients or support people explicitly expressed their appreciation for MHCSR and how volunteers had supported them through a difficult process.
- Most clients needed emotional support (81%) followed by help understanding court procedures and processes (53%).

- MHCSRП helped clients develop a better understanding court processes and procedures. Thirteen clients reported that the volunteers made the clients aware of the support services available to them which increased their confidence.
- Many clients (34) were very anxious and distressed before their court appearance. Volunteers reassured them and helped them to calm down.
- Six clients volunteered that they would not have continued with court proceedings if it wasn't for volunteer support through MHCSRП program.
- Between July and December, a total of 60 people were referred to other services.
- Volunteers followed up with a total of 59 of clients after being heard by the magistrate. A total of 41 clients needed to return to court. In the follow up, volunteers mostly checked clients understanding of magistrate's direction (81%), confirmed their next court appearance date and list of requirements (51%) and waited while they saw their legal representative (41%).

1. Introduction

1.1 The policy context

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services, through the Co-operative Legal Services Delivery Program (CLSD), identified a service gap in the Taree area for clients presenting with mental health issues who are due to appear in the Local Court for criminal or tenancy matters. The CLSD established a Mental Health Justice Working Group to facilitate discussion and action between the legal and mental health sectors.

The Working Group investigated how other programs, such as the Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS), successfully help vulnerable people with their legal issues at court. They also undertook a client survey and literature review of state and federal research reports. These reports identified that the Taree community remains one of the more disadvantaged locations in NSW, with:

- community members more likely to have spent time in prison and to have a significant mental health problem;
- the likelihood of disadvantaged groups to ignore their legal problems or leave them un-finalised;
- the important role that the non-legal sector has as the first point of contact in assisting people with mental problems identify a legal issue;
- the high proportion of people appearing before courts and entering the prison system with a mental illness;
- the need for a simple gateway to enhance early legal intervention; and
- the individual and systemic barriers to accessing legal services and participating effectively in court proceedings, such as not understanding how the court system works, lacking confidence to seek support, and not knowing who to seek support from.

1.2 The Mental Health Court Support and Referral Program

Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services (MVNS) received a grant from the Law and Justice Foundation of New South Wales to undertake the Mental Health Court Support and Referral Program in the Taree area.

The evidence gathered during the trial will provide a foundation for additional grant funding or for the project to be absorbed into an existing mental health organisation/project partner program. The program commenced working with clients in July 2016.

1.2.1 Service model/ program components

The MHCSR is designed as a non-legal, single point of contact service providing support for people with mental health issues through their local court and legal processes. The program has two components: information and referral, and court support.

The program facilitates information and referral between community legal and non-legal services and for people attending court. The Project Coordinator acts as a single information and referral point for clients or services with clients that:

- have mental health issues who need legal information or referral to legal services, or
- are accessing legal services who are identified as needing support from mental health services.

Court support is provided by trained volunteers who support clients by acting as a useful link to court services, and a friendly face in an intimidating environment. Volunteers support clients on the day of their court proceedings. This service can be given to potential clients through either of two pathways:

- referral to the Project Coordinator from partner community agencies, and assignment to a volunteer
- direct engagement through court services or by MHCSR volunteers at Taree Court on list day Tuesdays.

The court support component of the MHCSR model draws on the model implemented by IDRS, who deliver a proven volunteer based model to successfully support people with an intellectual disability through the court system.

Since the pilot launch in July 2016, MHCSR has undergone a number of small changes to develop the model to best suit clients and stakeholders. A key feature of the MHCSR is periodic evaluation to enable accurate and responsive changes for this purpose.

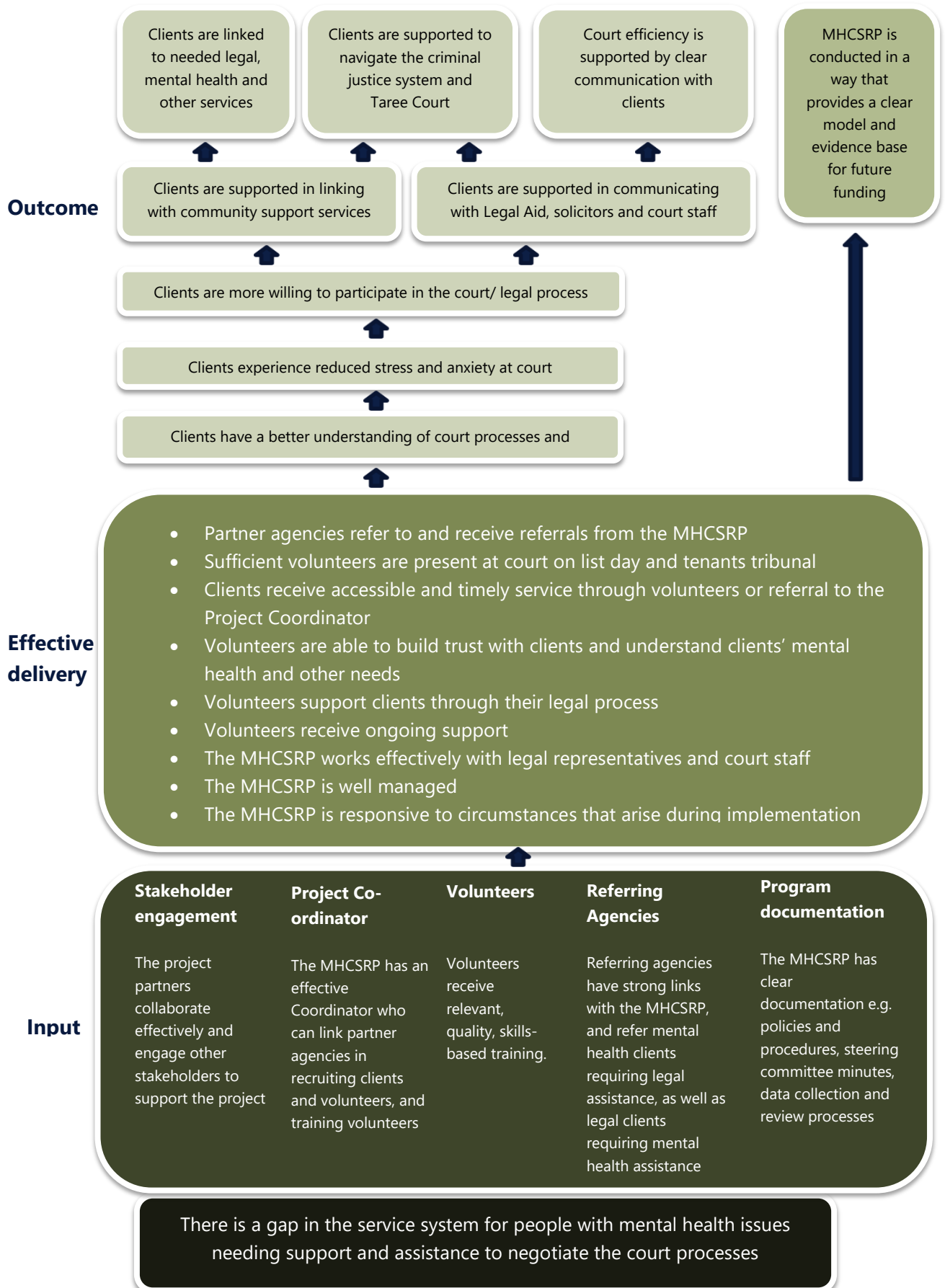
1.2.2 Intended outcomes

Through the MHCSR, the target group is expected to benefit from:

- reduced stress, anxiety and other barriers they face in participating effectively in court and legal proceedings
- increased willingness to attend, remain at and fully participate in court
- better communication with Police, Legal Aid and court staff
- early identification of potential issues and linkage to appropriate legal advisors or mental health services
- support in navigating and understanding court processes and procedures

The link between the service model and the intended outcomes are illustrated in the program logic.

Figure 1. Program logic



2. The evaluation

2.1 Background

MVNS planned for evaluation to be part of the program from its inception, stating in the grant application that their *“approach is to trial the developed model and periodically evaluate the program to enable fine-tuning as required and to ensure that the project is delivering the desired quality outcomes of our target groups and ensuring that the program represents the efficient resources.”*

A professional evaluator was accordingly engaged before the project was launched. However, this work did not continue, and ARTD Consultants was approached in October 2016 to take up this work.

2.2 Purpose

The evaluation is being undertaken to inform project development, ensure quality outcomes for clients, and if warranted, lay the foundations to support the case for continued funding of the program.

2.3 Scope and focus

The evaluation will describe the implementation of the MHCSR, document the changes in the model over the life of the project and gather evidence on the effectiveness of the trial project method in achieving the desired outcomes for clients.

2.4 Methods

The key evaluation questions, related guiding questions and evaluation methods are summarised in table 2.

Interviews/focus groups are labelled as follows:

1. MVNS and MHCSR staff and steering committee
2. volunteers
3. court staff including Legal Aid, Aboriginal Legal Service and Community Legal Centre solicitors
4. clients
5. other stakeholders

The interim report (this document) relies on secondary data analysis to understand MHCSR policy and planning, describe how the program has developed since July 2016 and

understand the intake characteristics of clients, presenting issues, services provided and client feedback. Secondary data sources included:

- funding application
- minutes for the MHCSRP steering committee (July 2016 – December 2016)
- volunteer newsletters (July 2016 – December 2016)
- Daily diary data (July 2016 – December 2016)
- Coordinator’s work plan and job description
- Volunteer job description
- policy handbook
- client data, return to court and MHCSRP referral forms
- overview of tasks and subcommittees
- MHCSRP brochures, media releases and other publicity
- MHCSRP referral matrix
- stakeholder and referral contact lists
- orientation checklist and program documents

Each evaluation question will be explored in greater detail in the second phase of the evaluation.

Table 1. Evaluation questions and methods

Evaluation question	Related guiding questions	Methods
To what extent was the design of the program suitable in meeting the needs of clients and key stakeholders?	To what extent was the nature and scope of the need or problem to be addressed clearly articulated?	Document review, Interview 1
	Were the underlying assumptions about how change occurs clearly identified?	Document review, Interview 1, 3, 4, 2,
	To what degree was the program design suitable for the cultural context?	Admin data analysis, Interview 4, 2, 1, 5
	To what extent did the program design meet client and key stakeholders’ needs?	Interview 4, 5, Client satisfaction data
To what extent is the program supported by policies and procedures, administration systems, communications and resources?	Policies and procedures	
	Have effective processes to receive client referrals been established?	Document review, Interview 1, 5, 4, Administrative data
	Have effective processes to refer clients to other services been established?	Document review, interviews 1, 4, 5, administrative data analysis
	Have effective processes for liaison with court staff been established?	Document review, interviews 1, 2, 3
Are Coordinator and Volunteer roles clearly defined?	Document review, interviews 1, 2	

Evaluation question	Related guiding questions	Methods
	Are Coordinator and Volunteer support processes in place?	Document review, interviews 1, 2
	Did the policies and procedures of the auspice organisation cover all the needs of the project?	Document review, interview 1
Administration and monitoring systems		
	Do Client court support forms provide needed management, referral and reporting data?	Document review, interviews 1, 2, administrative data analysis
	Do Client satisfaction surveys provide useful feedback?	Interviews 1, 2, client satisfaction data
	Does the Administration database support the management, monitoring and reporting of the project?	Interview 1, administrative data analysis
Communication strategy		
	Is there a timely and comprehensive communication strategy for recruiting volunteers and engaging stakeholders and referral agencies?	Document review, interview 1,2, 5
	To what extent do referrers and other local services understand the service MHCSR is providing?	Interview 5
	To what extent are the program, its goals and methods understood by solicitors, court staff and police?	Interview 3
	Have changes in the program eligibility or processes been communicated to all stakeholders in a timely way?	Interviews 3, 5
Budget and resources		
	Are there appropriate resources allocated to the MHCSR?	Interview 1, administrative data analysis
	Are there enough funded hours for the Coordinator?	Interview 1, administrative data analysis
	Are there enough volunteers for the MHCSR?	Interview 1, administrative data analysis

Evaluation question	Related guiding questions	Methods
To what extent is the service being delivered as intended?	Coordinator and volunteers	
	To what extent has the project been able to recruit a Coordinator with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes?	Interviews 1, 3, 5
	Has the project Coordinator received timely and relevant training?	Interview 1
	Has volunteer training been delivered?	Document review, interview 2
	To what extent was volunteer training effective in preparing volunteers for the context and role?	Interviews 1, 2
	To what extent is volunteer performance in their role monitored and developed?	Interviews 1, 2
	Clients	
	How many clients receive service through the MHCSR?	Administrative data analysis
	What are the demographic characteristics of clients who receive services from the MHCSR?	Administrative data analysis
	What proportion of clients referred to the MHCSR meet the program priority target group?	Administrative data analysis, interviews 1, 2
	What proportion of clients are first engaged in the program at court?	Administrative data analysis
	Who is referring clients to the MHCSR?	Administrative data analysis
	To what extent do clients understand the service offered?	Interviews 2, 3, client satisfaction survey
	Assistance at Court	
	To what extent are the Coordinator and volunteers able to engage un-referred clients at court?	Administrative data analysis, interviews 1, 2
	To what extent are the Coordinator and volunteers able to provide assistance to clients at court?	Interviews 1, 2, 4
	To what extent are volunteers able to obtain assistance in supporting clients at court?	Interviews 1, 2

Evaluation question	Related guiding questions	Methods
	To what extent is assistance provided through MHCSR within critical timeframes?	Interviews 1, 2, 3
What are the outcomes of the MHCSR for clients?	To what extent do clients have a better understanding of court processes and procedures?	Interview 4, client satisfaction survey, administrative data analysis
	To what extent do clients experience reduced stress and anxiety at court?	Interview 4, client satisfaction survey
	To what extent are clients more willing to participate in the court/ legal process?	Interviews 2, 3, 4, client satisfaction survey, administrative data analysis
	To what extent are clients' potential issues identified early?	Interviews 3, 5, administrative data analysis
	To what extent are clients linked to needed legal, mental health and other services?	Administrative data analysis, interviews 1, 2, 4, 5
	To what extent has MHCSR improved clients' capacity to navigate the court system?	Client satisfaction survey, interviews 1, 2, 3, 4
	To what extent are clients satisfied with the service they have received through the MHCSR?	Client satisfaction survey, interview 4
What are the outcomes of the MHCSR service for the courts and police processes?	To what extent has MHCSR filled a service gap at Taree Court?	Interviews 1, 3, 5
	To what extent has client communication with court stakeholders improved?	Interview 3
	To what extent has client court attendance improved?	Administrative data analysis, interviews 3, 4
	To what extent has court punctuality improved?	Administrative data analysis, Interview 3, 4
	To what extent has court preparation improved?	Interviews 3, 4
	To what extent has MHCSR impacted on the costs of court processes?	Interview 3

3. Findings: MHCSR Program design

3.1 Appropriateness of program design

3.1.1 Clear articulation of the nature and scope of the problem

In 2015, MVNS submitted a grant application to the Law and Justice Foundation that clearly articulated the service gap for people with mental health issues needing support and assistance to negotiate the court processes. MVNS described how the problem affected their work with clients seeking non-legal support at court as they lacked the knowledge to provide general legal information and advice, or any access to that information and advice, and had no point to refer them to.

MVNS also articulated the full scope of the issue from the perspective of the courts and local legal services who saw the need for some people who presented to receive mental health support at court.

Through this and other consultation, MVNS identified the following groups affected by the issue:

- people with lived mental health difficulties who also face summary criminal offences or housing tribunal issues (the primary beneficiaries)
- people with mental health difficulties who also have a more general legal problem
- support networks and families
- the justice system and those working in it
- other non-legal mental health service providers.

MVNS also articulated how the need fit within a state and national context through a document review. This outlined Taree's socio economic situation within New South Wales, how this affected legal and mental health literacy of its residents, and previous findings about the importance of prioritising mental wellbeing for those interacting with the justice system. In this way, MVNS described a thorough understanding of the problem, the drivers behind it, and could confidently assert that no existing program in their local area addressed the issue.

3.1.2 Identification of theory of change

MVNS staff outlined their assumptions about how change occurs in their grant application to the Law and Justice Foundation. This described how the program Coordinator would act as an information and referral point between mental health-based and legal-based services, equipping both sectors to better support their clients, and how the target group could receive the needed support at Court through referral to the MHCSR, or engagement at court on list days. They clearly identified how the single point of contact would simplify the process for clients and other services, making change more likely to occur, and how MHCSR

volunteers would be trained to give appropriate support and information according to their expertise, and support clients to gain outside support and information as needed. This was backed up by literature and comparisons to other proven programs. However, the grant application did not fully articulate how the program brings about internal change for clients, allowing them to remain at court or better engage with the court processes.

ARTD worked with MHCSRP staff to develop a program logic (see Figure 1.) The program logic is a visual representation of the important components of the program, and how these components work together to bring about change for people with mental health difficulties who have legal issues in the Taree area. The model begins at the bottom with the problem to be addressed, and is linked to the ultimate intended outcomes at the top through a series of short, intermediate and longer term outcomes. Each box in the model is a condition that is thought to be necessary to move towards the following outcomes. In combination the conditions are thought to be sufficient (with certain assumptions and notwithstanding external factors) for ensuring the outcome occurs.

Through this process, ARTD and MHCSRP staff were able to make explicit those less tangible assumptions about how change occurs for clients, such as how increased understanding of court processes and procedures could lead to reduced stress and anxiety at court, which may lead to increased willingness to participate in the court and legal process. This illustrated more of the logic of why the MHCSRP is helpful, and also allowed future alterations to the client satisfaction survey, to test those less tangible links in the logic chain.

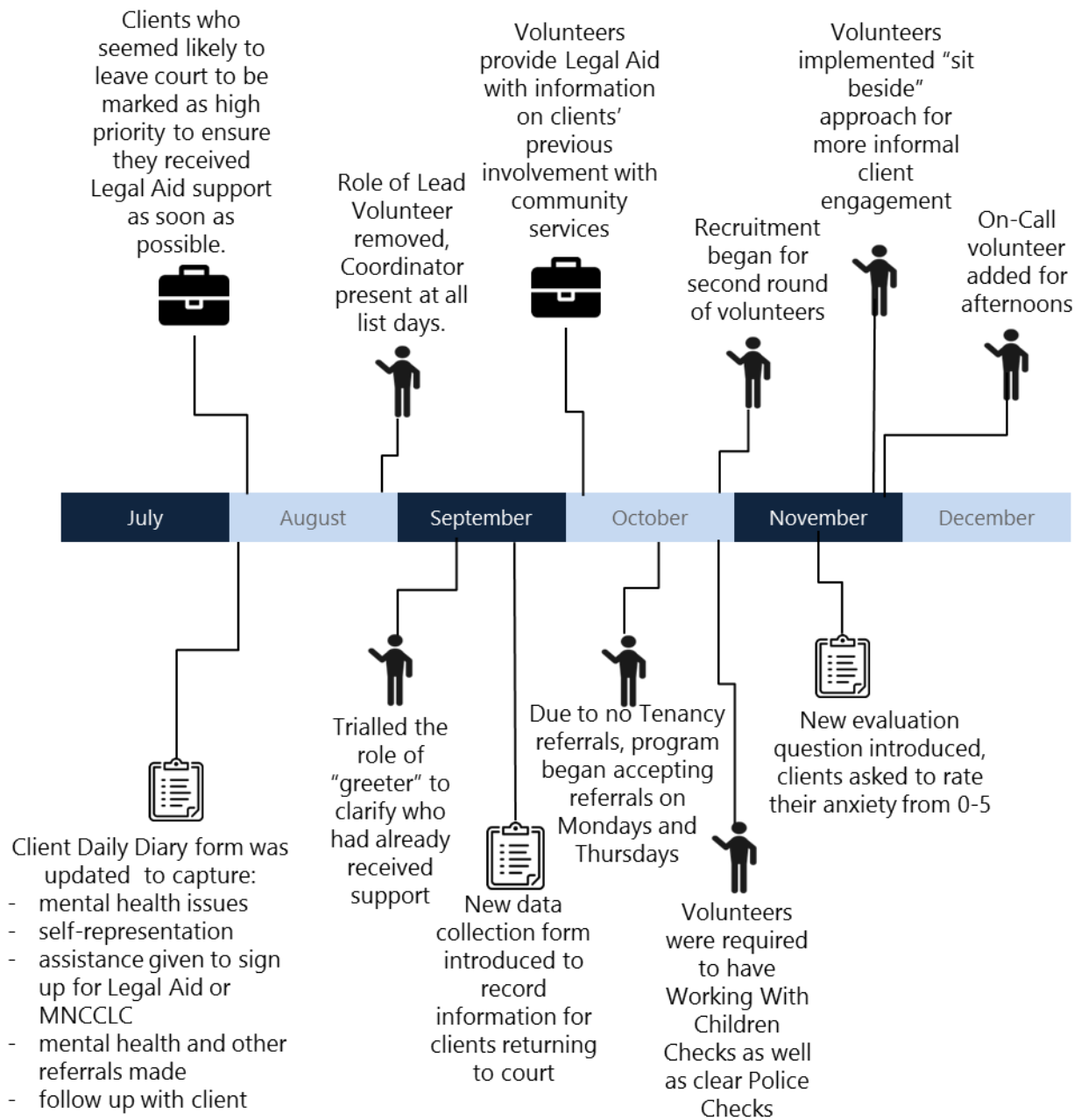
3.1.3 Process of the program development

Program development and implementation is described in the Steering Committee meeting minutes of February to November 2016, and the Volunteer Newsletters of July to December 2016. Around 6 to 13 members were present at the Steering Committee meetings and the meeting minutes record different ideas discussed for program publicity, engagement of stakeholders and training partners, engagement of the Program Coordinator, and issues arising from the various sub-committees.

Initial program development was in part based on assumptions made by the Steering Committee about referral to and use of the program. These were informed by their theory of change and input from community stakeholders and court staff. Assumptions included the belief that the program would receive most of its clients through referral, that supporting clients through tenancy issues would be a main feature of the program, and that the program would be inundated with clients.

Once the program was implemented, these assumptions were tested and the program developed to suit the reality of Taree Court and community. Figure 2 describes these changes over time.

Figure 2. Changes to project design and implementation



Key

-  Volunteers
-  Data Collection
-  Legal Aid

3.1.4 Continuous improvement in program implementation

Steering Committee processes and volunteer feedback provide mechanisms for key stakeholders to raise concerns and suggest program improvements as they arise.

In December 2016, Legal Aid tabled a series of concerns about the program. Concerns were raised regarding volunteers' interactions with clients and the court, reach of the program and service provision. These were addressed by the program Coordinator at a stakeholder meeting in January 2017. Actions or changes arising from this feedback from volunteers and Legal Aid will be considered in the final report.

3.2 Program supported by policies and procedures, administration systems, communications and resources?

3.2.1 Governance

The MHCSRP has a central Steering Committee made up of representatives from the program, MVNS and key CLSD partners including Legal Aid, Mid North Coast Community Legal Centre, Aboriginal Legal Services, Hunter New England Local Health District, Intellectual Disability Rights Service, Flourish Australia, North Coast TAFE and Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service. The Committee's Terms of Reference outline that its roles include providing expert independent advice to the Coordinator, and supporting project implementation through active contribution to stakeholder engagement, overseeing project development and direction, the project scope and plans, resolving any issues affecting achievement of project aims, and approving any changes to the program model.

The literature scan showed that the Committee met in most months during the January – December 2016 period; minutes for June, September, and December were not sighted. Several sub-committees were also formed to target issues such recruitment, training, data collection and evaluation, and policies and information management.

3.2.2 Policies and procedures

The MHCSRP has comprehensive policies covering a wide range of areas for the benefit of the service, its volunteers and its clients. Areas covered by the program's policies and procedures include:

- privacy and confidentiality
- professional conduct
- service user feedback and complaints
- conflict of interest
- grievances
- sexual harassment

- safety
- WHS
- access and equity
- volunteer role, support and induction/leaving
- referral and service requests.

In our review, we have not seen documents outlining the following areas, which could contribute to the program's effectiveness:

- liaising with court staff
- a publicity strategy
- procedures for increasing the number of referrals
- professional development for Coordinator and volunteers.

These areas will be clarified in the second report.

Client referral processes

Referrals to the MHCSR

During program development and since launch, the MHCSR has made contact with a number of legal, mental health and other community agencies. These relationships have been fostered through networking events, on site meetings arranged by the Coordinator with managers and staff, an interagency presentation about the program, and media releases informing other services of the work that the MHCSR is able to do for their clients, and how to access the program. Appropriate documentation has been developed to support this, including a program brochure, a referral and service policy outlining the responsibilities of all agencies involved and internal requirements for establishing and maintaining effective referral networks, and a comprehensive referral intake form.

Referrals to other services by the MHCSR

The MHCSR referral and service request policy outlines the responsibilities for volunteers and staff in referring clients to needed services.

The program has developed a number of systems to support client referrals out to needed services. These include a referral matrix linking local services to specific issues including homelessness, debt, need for food, mental health problems, grief, parenting, drug and alcohol problems, medical problems, carer overburdening, family breakdown, legal problems and need for social support. The program is also equipped with a database of referral contacts including names, email addresses and phone numbers for:

- Aboriginal Legal Centre
- Mid North Coast CLC
- Benevolent Society
- BIRIPI

- Breakthru
- CatholicCare
- Flourish Australia
- Legal Aid
- Manning Mental Health Services
- Mission Australia Housing
- Pathfinders
- Samaritans
- Mid Coast Tenant Advice Service

The extent to which the volunteers use the referral matrix and database, and its usefulness will be explored in the second phase of the evaluation.

Liaison with court staff

MHCSRП steering committee meetings show communication with court registrars and staff beginning before the commencement of the program, to get feedback on how the service could best work with existing court processes, and to use court-supported events to further publicise the program. However, a particular process for liaison with court staff has not been identified in these documents. This will be further explored in the second report.

Definition of Coordinator and Volunteer roles

Both the Coordinator and Volunteer roles have been clearly defined in the program documentation. The Coordinator project role, its scope, responsibilities, and required hours (15 over two or three days) have been detailed in the official job description published in June 2016. The Volunteer job description also clearly outlines 12 role requirements and responsibilities, which are elaborated on in the Volunteer section of the MHCSRП policy guide. The Coordinator and Volunteers have access to these documents.

Coordinator and Volunteer support processes

Coordinator support processes were unclear from the documentation. Part of the Coordinator's job description required the ability to work with minimal supervision, with accountability to the MVNS.

Volunteers, however, have clearly defined and implemented support processes in place. A flow chart outlining volunteer interactions with clients explicitly identifies opportunities to seek support from the Coordinator and highlights that this is appropriate whenever a volunteer feels that they need support. If a volunteer does not feel that their support needs with a client have been met, the MHCSRП has a process for handing that client over to the Coordinator, who can deal with any larger issues and reassign the client to another volunteer if appropriate. Volunteers are also given support in the form of resources including a clear explanation of who to take instructions from, their rights and responsibilities, and an

orientation kit. Volunteers have the opportunity to debrief, ask questions, and give and receive feedback at monthly volunteer meetings with the Coordinator.

Volunteers involved for a long period are supposed to receive supervision at regular intervals, and all volunteers exiting the program are given feedback, and the opportunity to comment on the service and their experience.

All volunteers have received orientation and training including:

- an outline of the volunteers rights and responsibilities
- the process at court
- the purpose and process of data collection
- making referrals
- do's, don'ts and court etiquette
- the role of the Coordinator
- Possible problems and solutions
- Mental Health First Aid training
- Legal Aid training

The effectiveness of the training will be assessed for the next report.

3.2.3 Administration and monitoring systems

The program is supported by a comprehensive suite of administration and monitoring tools. The following forms are filled by volunteers and the Coordinator to monitor progress:

- client data diary – this sheet is completed by volunteers for every client supported, and later entered into an excel sheet
- floater summary/ Coordinator daily summary
- referral form
- return to court form

The forms are short, easy for the volunteers to fill out and capture all the key information on each client including demographic details, how they connected with the service, referral details, feedback on the service, details of follow up after the matter has been heard by magistrates, identification of client needs and outcomes.

However, monitoring and reporting can be improved through adding validation rules to the data collation spreadsheet to ensure that the data entered is consistent. This will make both data entry and analysis more efficient.

Volunteer performance

Volunteer performance is monitored as part of weekly de-briefings.

3.2.4 Communication strategy for recruiting volunteers and engaging stakeholders

Before and during the May to December period, MVNS conducted a number of events and resources to promote the service to potential volunteers and local stakeholders. These included advertising through Law Week in May, an interagency presentation in August, the official program launch in September, another media release in November to recruit more volunteers, and continuous communications through brochures, posters and the MHCSR website. Steering committee documentation identified specific recruitment and media subcommittees formed to manage effective engagement.

The comprehensiveness and timeliness of this strategy in communicating the service to potential volunteers, referrers, other services, solicitors, court staff and police, will be explored in the next report.

4. Findings: Implementation of the MHCSR

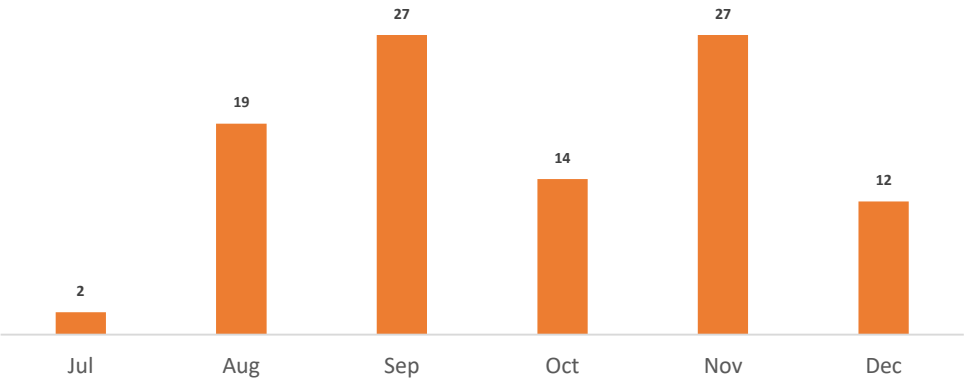
4.1 Clients receiving service through the MHCSR

Details of clients receiving service through the MHCSR is captured through the Client Daily Diary form which is completed for every client supported by the volunteers. A new version of the Client Daily Diary was introduced in October 2016 to capture additional details relevant to the refined evaluation questions. Therefore, additional data reported below is captured only for clients seen between October and December 2016.

The MHCSR supported 101 clients to negotiate court processes in six months (July'16 – Dec'16).

- Just over half (56%) of the clients supported were male.
- Most (91%) of these clients had mental health issues.
- Families of four clients in custody were supported during October to December.
- Over half (60%) of clients had support person with them. Of the 48 clients with support present, most (43) still requested direct support by volunteers.
- Most (78%) of clients had been to court before.
- One fifth of clients (19%) had been to court for matters related to traffic while most (81%) went for other matters.
- Less than half (43%) of clients had contact with some health or community services before attending court.
- Eleven clients wanted to represent themselves at court. After speaking with a volunteer, 7 sought legal representation.
- Volunteers attended Legal Aid interviews with 26 clients during the October-December 2016 period.
- On average, volunteers spent one hour with a client. This time varied between 10 minutes to three hours.

Figure 3. Clients seen per month



Source: Client Daily Dairy, July'16 – Dec'16.

4.1.1 Suitability for the cultural context

More than five percent of the Greater Taree area’s population is Indigenous, and Indigenous people make up more than 8.6% of the population of Taree City itself¹. As the program deals with concepts like mental illness and legal authority that have different meaning and connotations between groups, it was important that the program design suited the paradigms of a diverse group of cultures. During project development, MVNS established a partnership with the Aboriginal Legal Service of Taree and Legal Aid Port Macquarie, who represent Aboriginal people at court. Both provided active support to the design of the MHCSR, and were scheduled to work closely with the ALS field officers as the project continued.

During the July-December 2016 period, 16% all clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This high proportion suggests the program design was suitable for the Indigenous cultural context; in that people felt comfortable engaging with volunteers and discussing sensitive topics. However, this review is based only on available data, rather than the explicit views of Indigenous, CALD or other residents of Manning Valley. The extent of appropriate program design for the cultural context will be better answered in the second report.

Table 2. Background of clients

	Number	Per cent
Indigenous		
Indigenous	15	16%
Not Indigenous	77	84%

¹ ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2011 (Usual residence).

Missing	8	
CALD		
CALD	2	2%
Not CALD	99	98%

Source: Client Daily Dairy, July'16 – Dec'16.

4.1.2 Client needs

According to volunteers, most needed emotional support (81%) followed by help understanding court procedures and processes (53%). A few needed help in verbal communication (20%), and reading and understanding documents (13%).

Table 3. In your opinion, in what areas did the needs of the client lie?

Need	Number	Per cent
Emotional support	76	81%
Court procedures and processes	49	53%
Verbal communication support	19	20%
Literacy	12	13%
Other	5	5%

*multiple response question, 6 missing

Source: Client Daily Dairy, July'16 – Dec'16.

4.1.3 Referral intake

MCHSRP invested in establishing relationships and setting up processes for referral intake as detailed in section 3.2.1. Despite this preparation, just 19% of MHCSR clients were referrals. Most (79%) connected with the service on the court day through a volunteer or had used the service before. Though the low level of referral intake is contrary to the early expectations from the program, the high number of people referred out (as detailed in the following section) is an unexpected positive outcome. Barriers to referral intake will be explored in the next report.

Table 4. How did the client connect with the service on the day?

	Number	Per cent
Approached by MHCSR volunteer	56	55%

Have used the service before	24	24%
Referred by unknown	6	6%
Referred by ALS	6	6%
Referred by Legal Aid	2	2%
Referred by MNCCLC	3	3%
Referred by D&A	1	1%
Referred by Catholic Care	1	1%
Approached MHCSR volunteer	2	2%
Total	101	

Source: Client Daily Dairy, July'16 – Dec'16.

4.1.4 Referrals from the MHCSR to other services

The program has been effective in linking clients with other support services. Between July and December, a total of 60 people (60% of clients) were referred to other services including mental health, housing, financial, family/ relationship, Legal Aid, MNCCLC, welfare, counselling, emergency relief, drug and alcohol and other community services.

The following factors contributed to clients not receiving referrals to other services:

- client did not need referral at the time
- volunteers were not dealing with the client directly but a support person
- not enough time to make a referral
- client refused a referral

4.1.5 Follow up after being heard by magistrate

Volunteers followed up with a total of 59 clients after their matter was heard by the magistrate. A total of 41 clients needed to return to court. In the follow up, volunteers mostly checked clients understanding of magistrate's direction (81%), and confirmed their next court appearance date and list of requirements (51%). A few were not followed up, either because the volunteer did not feel there was a need or they were unable to meet the client after court. Five clients are missing follow up data.

Table 5. Follow up assistance given to clients

	Number	Per cent
	(n=59)	
Checked their understanding of magistrate's directions	48	81%

Confirmed next court appearance date and list of requirements	30	51%
Waited for them to get clarification from legal rep	24	41%
Assisted with paperwork or bonds etc. at registry	14	24%
Other	2	3%

*multiple response question - 5 missing
Source: Client Daily Dairy, Oct'16 – Dec'16.

5. Findings: Impact of the MHCSR

5.1 What are the outcomes of the MHCSR for clients?

Outcomes of the MHCSR for clients will be explored using client satisfaction survey and client interviews in the second phase of the evaluation. Outcomes reported below are based on unstructured feedback to volunteers from their clients, recorded in the Client Daily Diary.

Clients and their support people overwhelmingly expressed appreciation and gratitude for the MHCSR service. Seventy-five clients or support people made explicit comments thanking volunteers, and expressing how volunteers had reassured, supported, and clarified things for them. They also commented on the significant difference the presence of a volunteer had made on their court experience, whether it was through helping them remain calm, writing out the steps clients or support people needed to take to get further help, or providing a listening ear during a difficult experience.

These comments also highlighted the support that the MHCSR provides for people close to those presenting at court. Five mothers who were with clients at court made particular comments about how they felt reassured and calmed thanks to the support and information provided by the volunteer for their children's case. Further themes from client feedback are outlined below.

Clients reported they developed a better understanding of court processes

The MHCSR helped clients develop a better understanding of court processes and procedures. The volunteers led client through processes (what was going to happen) and provided the necessary explanations, giving them an opportunity to discuss anything that was unclear.

Some clients reported they experienced reduced stress and anxiety at court

Many clients (34) were very anxious and distressed before their court appearance. Volunteers reassured them and helped them to calm down. Clients considered volunteers a friend who provided moral support and helped manage tensions between client and family members involved if needed. They saw them as open and approachable but not intrusive. Sometimes clients saw volunteers as someone they could vent to.

Some clients reported they were more willing to participate in the court/ legal process

Six clients volunteered the information that they would not have continued with court proceedings if it wasn't for volunteer support through the MHCSR program. Volunteers

helped clients feel more confident to participate in court/legal proceedings. Their assistance was especially valuable when case worker was not present.

Clients reported that the program helped link them with support services

As detailed in section 4.1.4 the MHCSRPs connected 60% of clients to community services. Thirteen clients reported that the volunteers made the clients aware of the support services available to them which increased their confidence. Volunteers also noted that clients (2) were better linked with Legal Aid due to their assistance. They also helped clients fill Legal Aid forms.

Clients are satisfied with the service they have received

As part of the client data form, volunteers ask about satisfaction with the service. All clients (who responded to the question) said they would recommend the service to someone they know (October to December data), indicating that they were satisfied with the service provided.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Program design

The MHCSR program design was informed by consultation with relevant stakeholders, a literature review and research with a clear articulation of theory of change and evaluation framework in the early stages. The program is well supported by policies and procedures, an administration system, communication and resources. The program adequately supports volunteers and welcomes feedback from clients and other stakeholders to ensure continuous improvement.

6.2 The program so far

The MHCSR supported 101 clients to negotiate court processes in six months. The program has supported a high proportion of clients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander indicating the program design is suitable for the cultural context of Taree and surrounding areas.

The program invested in establishing relationships and setting up processes for referral intake. Although the number of clients referred to the service was not as high as expected, the high numbers of referrals out to other programs is an unexpected positive outcome of the program, as clients are better linked to community services.

Clients and their support people overwhelmingly expressed appreciation and gratitude for the MHCSR service. They reported that volunteers had reassured, supported, and clarified things for them, helping them develop a better understanding of court processes and experience less anxiety before their court appearance. These outcomes for clients are aligned with the MHCSR's theory of change, suggesting that the program is positively contributing to longer term outcomes for clients, those close to them, and Taree Court.

6.3 Recommendations

A few areas for improvement are identified below. These will be explored further in the next stage of the evaluation.

- The MHCSR has comprehensive policies covering a wide range of areas for the benefit of the service, its volunteers and its clients. However, ARTD did not see documents covering the following policies or procedures. If this documentation has not been developed, we recommend outlining these policies and procedures on record to help address areas of operation of the program:
 - liaising with court staff
 - a publicity strategy

- procedures for increasing the number of referrals
- professional development for the Coordinator and volunteers.
- Coordinator support processes
- Monitoring can be improved through better data management process:
 - Validation rules need be added to excel workbook 'Client Daily Diary' to control for data entry errors.
 - Volunteer training needs to be provided on better data collection.
- Although referrals made to other services are clear in the data, it is unclear how many clients were in need of a referral. If this data could be recorded, it would clarify how well the MHCSR was meeting the needs of clients, and whether any improvements are needed for the referral-out process.



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