



Social Work Service
Christmas and Cocos (Keeling)
Islands

Social Work Service
PO Box 868
Christmas Island
Indian Ocean WA 6798
Mobile: 08-9164 8111 ext. 5346
Phone: 08-9164 7829
Fax: 08-9164 7553
Email: dianne.wood@dotars.gov.cx

INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORIES HEALTH SERVICE

SUBMISSION 11

Inquiry into Australia's External Territories.

Submission for the committee in regard to Public and Community Health, Health and Community Care:

I believe it is essential that the Senior Social Work service for Christmas Island remain as it has been since the beginning of 2002.

It is important that the Social Worker has a vast array of skills in order to serve the community well. Because of the demand, a person who has experience in mental health is preferable. It is a very busy position for one person. There are no supports such as child protection or other relevant welfare agencies on island. A visiting psychologist or psychiatrist would be an excellent addition to services for people. Issues dealt with range from marriage guidance, sexual assault, child abuse, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, depression, suicidal tendencies, child development guidance, monitoring of people on community service orders, visiting hospital patients, liaison with legal services, post natal depression, mediation, pension queries, visa applications, job seeking, support for the disabled, letters of support for a myriad of reasons, providing lending material, and much, much more. I also run group sessions for parenting programs, conflict resolution in-service days for organizations and I am either organizing various groups such as the Women's Well-being Group or I am on committees that support local people such as the Youth Group and the Parenting Group.

The social work office is based at the Neighborhood Center. It will shortly be relocated within the Neighborhood Center if all goes well. It must not be moved elsewhere. It is a most appropriate site as many people use the area, particularly parents with young children and they make good use of the service and the library. The service is not a medical one but a community one. It would probably be accessed less if it was based at the hospital. It is acknowledged that it is important to have close connections with the hospital and for regular visits and team meetings to take place. The hospital staff offer valuable support.

Use of the service is free and therefore open to all people. It is very accessible. It should continue to be so. I don't believe privatization is an option. It is a preventative service in most instances and probably saves other organizations, such as the hospital and the police, a considerable amount of money and time.

The Social Worker is on-call and a car (and fuel) is provided for use at all times. This part of the contract is essential.

Social Work Service
Christmas and Cocos (Keeling)
Islands

Social Work Service
PO Box 868
Christmas Island
Indian Ocean WA 6798
Mobile: 08-9164 8111 ext. 5346
Phone: 08-9164 7829
Fax: 08-9164 7553
Email: dianne.wood@dotars.gov.au

Housing is provided with the position and it therefore an incentive for applicants to come to a remote corner of Australia. At present housing is scarce and rental has soared to \$700 a week for some places!!

Remuneration should not be reduced and, in fact, could be raised when consideration is given to the worker being on-call all the time and the complexity of issues to be dealt with in this particular community. The community has been made up of 65% Chinese, 20% Malay and 15% Anglo people until now. We have people in detention here and there are plans to bring many other asylum seekers to the island.

In the foreseeable future it appears that the workload will increase due to the increase in workers building the detention center, increases in detention center staff and the arrival of workers related to the space station. The influx of Anglo workers and all the complexities that entails is already evident.

The Service Delivery Agreement with the Department for Community Development in W.A. is beneficial in that the lone social worker has frequent supervision from another social worker. DCD also provides important 2 X one week professional development off island programs annually. They provide relevant books, videos and other materials for people to borrow and for the Social Worker to use in training programs. DCD pays for training programs to be run for the community on Cocos as well as on Christmas Island.

The Social Worker spends 10 days on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands every 9 weeks or so. The Community Services Officer is based over there and regular contact is made between the two workers and clients all year round. It would be beneficial if a .5 Social Work position could be created on Cocos as there is a considerable amount of work there. 500 people are Cocos Malay. The Senior Social Worker on Christmas Island could provide the supervision.

I believe the Social Worker provides valuable support to the community and to other professionals on the Cocos and Christmas Islands and that it is important that it remain as is as a base and any additions would be appreciated.

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting with you early in October. (I will be off island from Friday Sept 27th until Sunday October 6th but I can access phone messages).

Dianne Wood, Senior Social Worker
12/09/02