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A.C.N. 086-925-466

**Trading as**

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The Registrar  
Cynthia Thompson  
Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Tribunal  
Cascom 2B Cascom Centre  
17 Scaturchio Street  
Casuarina NT 0810

29<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

Dear Cynthia,

Whilst the Tribunal as a function related to addressing alcohol-related harm to Territorians draws to a close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017, as a sitting Health Member since October 2013, for the record I'd like to submit my impressions of what I believe it has grown to achieve over the course of its tenure.

For something that began as what many considered to be a punitive policy position, rushed through the Parliament as an untested initiative, I believe it grew into being a much more therapeutic iteration aimed at establishing a holistic approach to helping identified people and their families to better manage the addiction. For many of those who appear before us, alcohol serves as a 'painkiller' to help deal with their disassociation from culture, community and a sense of 'belonging' to anyone or anywhere.

Many of the people who have been before Tribunal have been homeless, chronic alcoholics. Their situation was made worse by the circumstances they found themselves in over decades of social dysfunction, intergenerational abuse and/or neglect and destitution. Where people were deemed to have satisfied criteria under Section 10 of the Alcohol Mandatory Treatment Act (July 2013 and July 2016) for a mandatory residential order (12 weeks), their circumstances were altered considerably for the better over that period. People mandated were accommodated in a safe, secure environment with access to good food, clean and well maintained facilities, supportive professionals, medical and dental management as required, received skills training and alcohol awareness programs designed and delivered to help them address issues associated with their addiction. I believe that the Tribunal members have all made decisions in a manner that was guided by the intention of the Act based on humanitarian principles.

I was disappointed that I could not find any mention whatsoever regarding the work

undertaken by the Tribunal or any reference to the data that had been captured over time in the Issues Paper of the Northern Territory Alcohol Policies and Legislation Review (May, 2017). It's as though the Tribunal has been conveniently 'airbrushed out of history' and some of the really 'good news stories' not related or referred to in any way. Whilst there are some very relevant and well researched references included in the paper (e.g. the impact of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), no reference to the Act under which we operated as a Tribunal for almost 4 years or the successful outcomes achieved by some of the people who were mandated is made. There is evidence available that suggests that up to 80% of people who were given a mandatory residential order did not return again before the Tribunal. There were others, however, who returned on many occasions where relapse was part of their recovery process.

I understand that the cost of the mechanism was substantial and that not all people who came before us benefited in the long run. That being said, there are people who did benefit from a 12 week period of sobriety and abstinence from alcohol, education about the physical and psychological damage being caused by it, provided a safe and secure environment in which to rehabilitate and some were even given the opportunity to gain meaningful employment once their program had concluded. Whilst the processes may not be perfect, there will be some who benefited from being in a structured, safe environment who have managed to make a difference in their lives as a result. There may well be some who would no longer be alive had the Tribunal not existed in a therapeutic manner.

My understanding is that the AMT Act will be repealed on 31<sup>st</sup> August and the Banned Drinkers Register will commence again on 1<sup>st</sup> September. I trust that the efficacy of that tool will assist many Territorians who have difficulty managing their alcohol consumption in a helpful and progressive manner.

May I take this opportunity to warmly thank both you and Deputy Registrar Wendy Baldwin for the wonderful job you have both done in supporting us as Tribunal members. Though some may argue you are simply 'doing your job', you are doing so with great compassion, understanding and integrity.

Sincerely,

Phil Walcott  
Health Member