

C de Crespigny 13/9/15

BTC Draft Plan

Identified reports on alcohol related deaths amongst Aboriginal people on West Coast SA- from 1971

C de Crespigny

kala kapi = firewater = gubbi = grog = alcohol

“I’m hoping this will stop...I’m happy, I’m thinking hopefully. I’ve been talking about this for a long, long time. It’s killing our people”. Aboriginal Elder 30th November 2012.

FAR WEST REGIONAL ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE MANAGEMENT PLAN, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

2013

Section titled:

Condensed literature review – the background

This condensed literature review has focussed on the national and local literature on alcohol and substance use issues as these relate to the issues, experiences and needs of Aboriginal communities, families, individuals in the far west coastal region of South Australia (SA). As has been happening in other Aboriginal communities across the nation so too does alcohol in particular, and substance misuse continue to have a devastating impact on the Aboriginal people of the far west region of SA. Although there has been over two decades of documentation revealed promulgated by multiple governments including; national and state strategic plans, reports, research papers and local strategies, little has changed. If anything alcohol and substance misuse problems are reportedly worsening with children and adolescents drinking, using cannabis, premature deaths of young adults and adults in their middle years, devastating families and whole communities, and severely reducing the emergence of future generations of Elders and younger leaders.

The past

On Good Friday 1991 there was a multiple fatality of five young Aboriginal people from Yalata whose car collided with a semi-trailer on the Eyre highway having just left the Yalata Roadhouse. The community was shocked and bereft, and when the Liquor Commissioner visited Yalata on 10/7/91 he met with a group of mature women who were able to speak for the women of their community, and informed him of their deep worries and concerned for the children, adults and the whole community.

In 1993 the *Kulida Ngana-na-Nya* (*‘Listen to us now’*) report was prepared from 1/7/92 to 30/6/93 by Jo Byrne and Keith Peters for the Yalata community. In 2002/03 Maggie

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Brady Jo Byrne and Graham Richardson published *'Which bloke would stand up for Yalata: the struggle of an Aboriginal community to control availability of alcohol'*. Shamefully on 5th December 2012, an Elder said:

'I'm hurting inside they been drinking since teenagers, wake up the future 'cause something is happening, a war in the community ... we are losing our Elders.'

Like the people of Yalata the Aboriginal people from the other west coastal regional communities who have informed and developed this Plan, are still grieving, struggling and asking for things to change.

In 1994 Clark and Associates reported on their Ceduna/Koonibba Substance Abuse Program consultation Notes. Clearly then, as now, their recommendations (p.1) reflect issues needing to be addressed that have emerged from the consultations for this WCRASMP, not only for Ceduna/Koonibba but also Scotdesco, Oak Valley and Yalata. That is the Substance Abuse program should be in all the Aboriginal communities of the west coast region; across the region; it should be a component of an overall community development program that also addresses general health, accommodation, training and employment; these programs should be principally based in the local community; there needs to be a strong emphasis on prevention through education, youth programs and family support; Harm minimisation (reduction) for the large numbers of people who consume alcohol at harmful levels should be a priority for government funding; and that *these programs should be supported by special facilities and programs provided at the regional level'*. These authors went on to state that *'there is a need for a substance abuse rehabilitation centre remote from the town that supplies alcohol. The centre should be capable of also accepting the families of clients'*

As we have been writing this Plan in 2013 Aboriginal men and women from all the west coast communities are still asking for the same assistance. They have been reiterating time and time again what others before them have said such as one Yalata woman, who in 1991 dictated a letter on behalf of her community to the Liquor Licensing Commissioner that amongst other serious concerns and need for alcohol availability to be strictly curtailed, said:

'It's for a lot of the kids, the tjitji tjuta. How many times you see tjitji (children) wandering around here, no mai (food), no camp, no tucker. In many areas peoples have strong laws. why can't Yalata stand up with those strong laws Which bloke would stand up for Yalata and say we need kapi wiya (no grog)?' (Byrne, Brady & Henderson 2001. p. xiii).

Thirteen years ago a report was published on the issue of family violence within the Aboriginal community of Ceduna (Taylor, Cheers et al 2002). These authors reported that a substance misuse strategy for the Aboriginal community of Ceduna and its region was being planned by the Aboriginal Health Advisory Council of the day. This strategy was being based on the previous strategy document written by Dylan Coleman in 2001 titled, *'A time for healing' - Creating Safe Spaces in Which We Can Heal Together*. In the Foreword of this document Coleman said:

'In this region not one Aboriginal family is untouched by overwhelming grief and loss issues and for this reason the Aboriginal population present with high levels of need and

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are faced with specific challenges both the same and different from the past. Substance use is one option for surviving grief and loss, and one which many finds viable.....high consumption rates of alcohol and other substances within the community contribute to poor health and well-being, violence, abuse, and disorderly behaviours. The cycle of grief and loss is perpetuated and compounded in such as environment' (p.2).

Avoiding alcohol is difficult for most Australians wherever they live - cities or small towns. In 2001 Coleman reported that, '*Substance misuse [alcohol] issues extend beyond the Aboriginal community of Ceduna, they are generic. For example, there are 14 liquor licensing {licensed premises} outlets within the township of Ceduna, with a population of 3,559 (As at the 1996 census) yet no venues for entertainment of an evening, that do not serve alcohol'* (p. 15). It is hardly surprising therefore that as with the non-Aboriginal community, some Aboriginal people choose to drink. What is seldom recognised though is that per capita far fewer Aboriginal people ever consume alcohol compared with non-Aboriginal people. Importantly those Aboriginal people who do drink at harmful levels are more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to give up the 'grog' and remain abstinent (Australian Department of Health and Ageing 2007). There is little understanding of this amongst Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people, and needs to be addressed.

Now 'this is the day for us to say what we want'

One alcohol related tragedy like the one in 1991 is one too many. Alas there have been many more deaths over the last twenty or so years, including those reported in the 2011 SA Coronial Findings. We need to honour the pleas made by yesterday's and today's Elders on behalf of their families and communities across the far west coast region. It is clear that the need is dire for this Plan and its implementation - it is urgent. As recently as November 2012, during consultations for this Plan, an Elder said: '*I'm hoping this will stop...I'm happy, I'm thinking hopefully. I've been talking about this for a long, long time. It's killing our people'*.