

DIRECTIONS ACT

Speech for Opening of Althea Wellness Centre

Thursday 12th March 2009

The launch of a holistic health service

I welcome you all: our friends, partners, MLAs, invited guests, board and staff and thank you for attending today.

My name is Carol Mead, I am the Executive Director of DIRECTIONS ACT and am pleased to celebrate with you the launch of the Althea Wellness Centre.

I acknowledge that we are on the lands of the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people and give my respects to their elders both past and present.

My words today will give you a snapshot of the vision and the results of that vision which is the Althea Wellness Centre.

The Althea Wellness Centre assists people from every walk of life, who have drug and alcohol issues, in particular those who do not have access to a general practitioner. The model of care is holistic, integrated and respectful to their needs.

At DIRECTIONS ACT we believe that good health care is a fundamental human right.

We know that many people who have substance use issues do not access regular medical assistance and care. They fear discrimination and have often had difficulties with gaining respectful and appropriate medical care in the past. This tends to make it difficult for people to access health care when they, or their families, need it.

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Althea Wellness Centre is changing the health landscape of primary and secondary care in Canberra for people with alcohol and other drug issues and their immediate family. People are relieved to have clinicians who understand the issues they face and they don't have to hide the truth about their issues. This is a relief to many of people who access Althea.

In May 2007 we started to consult with our clients about whether they felt a clinical service at DIRECTIONS ACT would be something that they would access.

The results of that survey of 200 people were not too surprising.

- Of 200 people surveyed 99% said that they would access the service
- Of most concern to them were issues around pharmacotherapy, hepatitis C, general health care, child health and sexual health.
- Other issues included mental health and legal assistance

We applied for funding in the first instance from the Ian Potter Foundation and diverted an underspend from DoHA with their permission to construct stage 1.

With the construction nearing completion we then approached many organisations such as Mental Health, Liver Clinic, ACT Hepatitis Resource Centre, Alcohol and Drug Program, Canberra Sexual Health, a naturopath and a nurse to work in the centre. And I am so happy to say that without exception, they all agreed to this request!

Then we applied for further funding to build stage two under the ATS funding and staffing under the NGO TGP funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. We are grateful for their support and I particularly want to thank Peta Nelson who believed in this project from the beginning stages when it was still all rubble, smelly drains and barred windows and doors.

After 6 months of managing the project – with thanks to Sue Haviv, and our builders Joe and Terry, Althea Wellness Centre became what you see before you today.

We opened stage two, where you are currently standing and the GP clinic on the 5th January. Currently we are conducting 5 GP clinics a week, we have a clinical manager, staff and nurses and hope to expand the clinicians further as the need arises.

The clients have responded well to the Centre and we are currently booking two days ahead. The attendance rate is exceptionally high in a client group which sometimes find it hard to keep times and appointments. Many clients who did not previously have medical support are now accessing health care through Althea Wellness Centre.

The difference the Althea Wellness Centre is already making to people's lives is amazing. With the combination of our other services, such as our counselling services, and detoxification at Arcadia House and the secondary care facilitated by other services, we truly offer a one stop shop which provides integrated health care to people who really need this support.

I welcome Gerard Rees, President of DIRECTIONS ACT to say a few words.