



~ Organisation Statement ~

VWCCS' Purpose...

1. VWCCS has been established to inform, support and prepare victims and witnesses (clients) of crime for the unfamiliar environment of the Court. VWCCS personnel assist clients by demystifying court procedures and legal terminology. With adequate knowledge about the court process, and the assistance of a court support volunteer, clients are empowered whilst they are fulfilling their role as witnesses for the Prosecution.
2. *VWCCS' Principal Objective*
To provide a high standard, unique and non-judgmental court support service for victims and witnesses of crime, their family members and close friends, in both State and Commonwealth criminal matters.

Who We Are...

3. VWCCS was formed in 2006 and became incorporated in March 2008.

VWCCS' Management

Pieta Thornton: President, Founder & Director, VWCCS Inc District & Supreme Court Coordinator

Maggie Weiley: Vice President, Treasurer, VWCCS Inc Education Coordinator

Peter Thornton: Treasurer, Lawyer, and VWCCS Legal Consultant

VWCCS' Committee Members

Sheila Curson: VWCCS Inc HR Manager

Chris Burgess: VWCCS Inc Parramatta Courts Coordinator

A/Professor John Basson: NSW Statewide Clinical Director, Forensic Mental Health

4. VWCCS' personnel come from a variety of relevant professions. In addition, VWCCS' personnel have completed the VWCCS Inc Induction and Training Programme which is structured specifically for *managing* clients' concerns prior to and on the actual day of

their court appearance. On the day of giving evidence clients are at their most vulnerable, but a witness who is familiar with court procedures is best able to assist the Crown in putting the veracity of its case to the Court.

5. VWCCS is not an advocacy service, nor does it advocate for legislative change. VWCCS works directly with its clients in unison with the Police and Police Prosecutors in the Local Courts, as well as the Police, Instructing Solicitors and the Crown Prosecutors in the District and Supreme Courts.

6. *VWCCS' Independence:*

VWCCS is self-funded. It does not have any political, religious or commercial agenda nor does it operate under the umbrella of any other organisation. Since 2008, VWCCS has accepted two grants awarded to it by the Victims of Violent Crime Grants Program (NSW), Department of Corrective Services.

VWCCS' Role...

7. VWCCS is a pro bono court support liaison service that assists its clients throughout their involvement in the court process.

VWCCS' brief consists of:

- Initial contact with Police and/or client.
- Contact with the OIC to outline VWCCS' role, request a brief outline of the charge(s), event number, OIC's email address and mobile number.
- Relevant preparation work pre client contact.
- Contact with client outlining its service and informing the client of the confidential nature of its service.
- Referring its client to a range of free services such as, counselling and victims' compensation through Victims' Services (part of the Department of Justice and Attorney General), and other appropriate agencies.
- Building and maintaining relevant communication with client, Police OIC and Instructing Solicitor.
- Pre-trial preparation with client (NOTE: VWCCS' policy prohibits its personnel from reading or discussing client's Statement).
- Informing its client of the serious consequences of contamination of evidence.
- If relevant, VWCCS assists client with Victim Impact Statements.
- In matters in the District and Supreme Courts, initial communication with Police and /or the WAS re VWCCS' appointment as Court Support Assistant.

Outcome...

8. The role of VWCCS as outlined above is designed to achieve the following:

- To familiarise client with court procedures.
- To assist client understand his/her role as a witness on behalf of the community at large.
- To assist and support client with dedicated personnel on the day of the trial, and during his/her court appearance.
- To dispense with the sense of isolation experienced by a client who finds him/herself a victim of crime.
- To empower the client during the court process.
- To exclude the client's feeling of criminalisation.
- To imbue client with a sense of inclusion in the court process.

VWCCS is the only representative in the courtroom present solely for the client and/or family. If requested by client, VWCCS represents the client in the public gallery of the Court in circumstances where the client has given evidence and thereafter, for whatever reason, cannot be present. In these circumstances, the presence of VWCCS in the Court may be enough for Officers of the Court, the Jury and the Defence team to see the client as *still visible* through VWCCS' representation.

VWCCS Locations...

9. VWCCS has dedicated Court Support Rooms at the following Courts:

- **Downing Centre Courts:**
Level 1, Cnr Liverpool and Elizabeth Streets, Sydney, receiving referrals from NSW Police, Police Prosecutors, DPP, CDPP, Australian Federal Police and the general public - operating 5 days per week.
VWCCS also manages a Police Witness Meeting Area and its Witness' Safe Room on Level 1 Downing Centre Courts – operating 5 days per week.
- **Bidura Children's Court:**
357 Glebe Point Road, Glebe - operating 2 days per week.
- **Parramatta Children's Court:**
2 George Street, Parramatta - operating 5 days per week.
- **Parramatta Local Court:**
12 George Street, Parramatta - operating 5 days per week

- **Katoomba Local Court:**
5-7 Civic Place, Katoomba - operating 2 days per week and by appointment.

VWCCS forms part of the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre's *Wellness Program*, and as such has use of a room at the Centre.

VWCCS attends the District Courts at the Downing Centre and Parramatta as well as the Supreme Courts at Darlinghurst, St James and Parramatta by appointment.

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