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VALS Police and Chroming Questionnaire (version sent to Department of Human Services August 2006)

Survey completed by Client service Officers in Mildura/Robinvale, Swan Hill. Western Victoria based at Heywood, Morwell (solicitors comment only), Bairnsdale and Shepparton

I prefer it when the chromer is taken back to the police station. I think this is a better procedure than the procedure that existed prior to the legislation. Prior to the legislation police stayed with the chromer on the street until I met them on the street. In the meantime the chromer was in the public and was shamed because it appeared to the public that he was under arrest. Also, it is in the interests of the chromer's safety to take him back to the police station (Comment from a VALS Client Service Officer).

1. Do the police notify you if they have a young person in custody?

Summary:

Police are not obliged to contact the local Client Service Officer (CSO) and are only obliged to notify VALS head office. Most regions report that police also make contact with local CSOs at a local level. Contacting the local CSO indicates the police understand the value of the local CSO being aware that a person is in custody. The fact that Mildura police never do this and Shepparton occasionally do this suggests a lower level of understanding by police at these stations which is concerning given the relatively high numbers of Aboriginal people in these regions.

2. Do the police notify the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel if a young person is in custody?

Always / Usually / Sometimes / Hardly Ever / Don't know

Summary:

Police usually notify the Aboriginal Community Justice Panel with the exception of Morwell and Bairnsdale where there is no CJP.

3. How would you describe your relationship with police in your region?

Very Good / Generally Good / Average / Below Average / Poor

Summary

The response to this question highlights the variation between regions. The Morwell and Swan Hill relationship with police is reported to be worse than other regions.

4. How would you describe your relationship with the police in your region compared to last year?

Relationships are improving / Relationships are about the same / Relationships are becoming worse

Summary

Relationships are the same or improving in all regions except for Morwell.

5. What procedure do police follow if they find someone chroming?

Summary

Bairnsdale and Mildura CSO's had no knowledge of police procedures in relation to chroming. The lawyer covering the Morwell region had no knowledge of what the police procedures were. In other regions the extent of CSO notification varied but the police practices were reported to be in line with the protocol.

6. Is chroming a problem in your region or parts of your region?

Western Victoria

Chroming is a problem in the region. I know about chroming though:

- the community circle (ie: rumours)
- I am approached by parents who are concerned about their children.
- I see it down the street
- People break the law under the influence of chroming
- The problem is kept at a local level and the co-operatives look after the kids. I tell the co-operatives about the kid and they follow it up.

Morwell

Kids are coming to court with paint around their mouths, it is a serious problem as kids as young as 10 years old are doing it. Up to one third to one half of the kids who VALS represents at Court are affected by chroming.

Swan Hill

Chroming is not a problem in my region at this stage. It used to be (see question 7).

Shepparton

Chroming is a problem in my region, but there is only one chromer I am aware of. He is a young adult and a problem is that there is nowhere for him to go. There is no accommodation for him as he needs 24 hour supervision and nobody is willing to do that. He is not eligible for drug or alcohol counselling because he does not have a drug or alcohol problem, and the agency does not deal with chromers. He can only get accommodation if he is remanded in custody.

Bairnsdale

I have only had dealings with 2 young lads years ago with chroming.

Mildura

Chroming is a problem, but there are not a lot of people who chrome. I am aware of a small group of young boys who chrome (ie: aged 10-13 years old).

Melbourne

I have only come across 3-4 people with the problem of chroming since I have been working at VALS (15 months)

7. If there is a problem of chroming in your region how would you describe it?

Chroming has become more of a problem in the last year / The problem of chroming has remained the same in the last year / Chroming has become less of a problem in the last year

Western Victoria

CSO: Chroming has become less of a problem in the last year. Stories about chroming float around the community circle, but stories about chroming have quietened down now. I recently heard of a kid who was chroming being taken to general care in Melbourne but that is the biggest story I have heard about chroming in a long time. In Horsham a while ago there were 4 to 5 chromers and now I do not know of any. I put this down to how the Co-op has looked after them. There are youth groups through the Ballarat and Horsham co-ops which are good.

Solicitor: It is a problem in the region. I have had people attend Court who have been chroming.

Morwell

It is difficult to judge the journey of the problem because I do not think VALS is notified properly about chroming. All I can say is that the problem is not going away and there does not appear to be any services to help the kids.

Swan Hill

Chroming has become less of a problem in the last year. Chroming still happens, but it is not as severe as it was 18 months ago. 18 months ago I would see kids (aged 10-18) chroming in public (ie: on roofs, down the street, in the river to do it under water to be out of sight). I do not really have an explanation as to why chroming has become less a problem recently. Perhaps, 18 months ago the kids were experimenting and there was a short period

of high intensity but the experimentation stage has died down now. Perhaps there have been education programs that I was not aware of.

Shepparton

Chroming has become less of a problem in the last year only because the young man mentioned above has been out of the area. Since he has come back the problem of chroming has got worse.

Bairnsdale

There is not a problem of chroming in the region.

Mildura

As I am so new to the position I could not say. I only became aware of the issue of chroming through this job.

Melbourne Metro

About the same.