



# VICTIMS' VOICE

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December 2011 Volume 32.4 Print Post 535515/00021

## Country Connections

"Those who care for the sustainability, lifestyle and next generations of rural Australia will need to continue to be vigilant and to be heard" (National Rural Health Alliance, May 2009).

Country living is frequently portrayed as idyllic and peaceful, but the reality is often very different for victims of crime living in South Australia's rural and remote areas.

Victim Support Service (VSS) has had a long history of advocating for the rights and service delivery needs of victims of crime in rural South Australia. The importance of improving accessibility of services for rural based victims of crime led to the initial funding by the Attorney-General's Department (Victims of Crime Levy) in 2001-2002 of five regional offices. These offices were established in Mount Gambier (Southeast), Berri (Riverland), Port Pirie (Mid North), Port Augusta and Port Lincoln. In 2004, two additional offices were established in Whyalla and Murray Bridge (Murraylands).

Statistics indicate that crimes against the person in rural and remote Australia are significantly higher than those for urban populations, despite strong indications that victims are less likely to report crime in these environments compared to their urban counterparts. The range and demand for services from our seven country offices has developed and increased substantially since their establishment, and over the last four years client contacts have grown by 120%.

The success of our country services are in part due to the extensive partnerships and positive collaborative working relationships with a broad range of service providers and community groups. In particular I would like to acknowledge the support of the Courts Administration Authority, SA Police, and our partner organisation in Pt Lincoln – Yarredi Services.

Country services are also greatly supported by being part of a Statewide Service. VSS provides professional development, supervision and consultation to regional staff working in isolation. Country issues and concerns are communicated back to the main Adelaide-based office, allowing for advocacy on a state-wide level.

The diverse generic roles of our country based staff and volunteer Court Companions ensure that they provide key VSS services such as information, court support and counselling, however also enable them to also be involved in a broad range of community development, crime prevention and community awareness initiatives.

Whilst I believe our rural model of service delivery provides a strong foundation for country service provision, there is still much to do. Whilst we provide a Statewide Service there are remote towns such as Ceduna and Coober Pedy and areas, such as the APY lands, Upper South East, Fleurieu Peninsula and Yorke Peninsula, in which accessibility to services is limited, and we rely on victims of crime being able to reach our regional offices or depend on telephone or skype contacts. We will continue to raise awareness of rural specific issues for victims of crime and explore further opportunities for improving accessibility.

In this edition of our Victims' Voice Newsletter I am delighted to be able to introduce our country staff to you and have them provide a snapshot of their community, participation in recent initiatives and key achievements.

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Jodie Sloan

Manager, Regional Services & Strategic Development

# Port Lincoln

Port Lincoln is a busy regional centre with a population of approximately 14,500. It is a major fishing area situated on the southern tip of the Eyre Peninsula, and is a well known tourist area. Although Port Lincoln is known as a wealthy city, a large majority of the Port Lincoln population exists on an average or below average income.

The Victim Support Service (VSS) partnership with Yarredi Services commenced in February 2002, providing the Port Lincoln Regional Victim Support Service. VSS Service Port Lincoln was officially opened by the Attorney-General The Hon. Michael Atkinson on 12 July 2002. During the ensuing nine years there have been three Regional Coordinators. Starting out in an office built specifically within the Masonic Lodge, the service was later relocated to its current location in the Mortlock Clinic, enhancing the profile of the service.

Port Lincoln VSS receives referrals from SA Police, Yarredi Services and many other agencies and organisations in Port Lincoln and surrounding areas, to provide counselling, information, court support, advocacy, training and support groups. Port Lincoln VSS has worked collaboratively with other agencies and organisations to provide groups and seminars to the Port Lincoln Community.



*Nola Fehrenbach and Sharyn Potts, Executive officer of Yarredi Services*



*Back: Annette Sargent from the Port Lincoln Health Services Community Division, Bethany Lohmeyer Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation, Jill Murdoch Port Lincoln High School, VSS coordinator Nola Fehrenbach. Front: students Corinna and Sarah.*

This year, VSS, Port Lincoln Health Service, Yarredi Services, Police, Drug & Alcohol Services, West Coast Youth Services and Family Violence Legal Service Aboriginal Corporation worked together to coordinate and facilitate the Healthy Relationships program for Year 11 students at the Port Lincoln High School, during terms one and two. Topics included in this very successful program were: Gender Socialisation, Healthy Relationships, Respectful Interrelationships, Helping keep young people safe in friendships and relationships, Respectful Sexual Relationships, The Law – drink spiking, media images – mobile phone and facebook use.

Approximately 120 year 11 students participated in this program. The year 11 students were divided into 4 groups and attended a session once a fortnight. At least two community members and two teachers facilitated each session. Students were actively engaged in whole class and small group discussion sessions and discussion continuums, and they also watched DVD clips.

Port Lincoln VSS Regional Coordinator Nola Fehrenbach and SA Police Crime Prevention Officer, Rene' Steen facilitated an Armed Hold-Up Seminar for Port Lincoln business owners and their employees on the 15th June 2011.

The Armed Hold-Up Seminar addressed: The Extent of Armed Hold-ups (AHUP) in SA, Techniques to help you remain calm during an AHUP; reducing the Risk of Armed Hold-ups; reducing the Psychological Impact of AHUP; Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Strategies during and after AHUP. The Seminar was well attended and enabled positive relationships to be formed between VSS, SA Police and Port Lincoln community members. Port Lincoln VSS and SA Police have been working closely together to improve relationships and referral systems, and Regional Coordinator, Nola Fehrenbach, has been actively engaged in providing regular training sessions to Port Lincoln Police.

All VSS Regional Coordinators are given the opportunity to travel to Adelaide regularly to attend Team Meetings and Professional Development, which facilitates consistent state-wide service delivery.

*Nola Fehrenbach  
Regional Coordinator; Port Lincoln  
Mortlock Clinic 52 Mortlock Clinic Port Lincoln  
Phone: 8683 0111*

# Whyalla



Whyalla has a population of approximately 22,000 and is the third largest city in South Australia, after Mt Gambier and Adelaide.

Victim Support Service (VSS), Whyalla opened its door in 2005 in Forsyth St, then relocated to Head St for approximately 3 years. The past few years have seen some exciting changes happening in Whyalla for VSS. One of those changes included moving to Bunyarra Medical Clinic on Nicolson Ave, which has provided excellent awareness of the service due to the VSS sign being on the main street. Client numbers continue to grow, partly due to the easy access now available.

In 2010 we were part of the Domestic Violence Action Group (DVAG) team which saw the 'Building the Future – Challenging Family Violence' conference a real success. Guest speakers included Dr Peter Merton and Dr Elspeth McInnes who both gave passionate insights into how family violence affects children and families as a whole.

Recently, VSS Whyalla gained a new volunteer, who will be taking on the Court Companion role as the support person for victims who are attending court. The role of the Court Companion is one of importance for many victims of crime especially those who have never experienced the legal system before. The Court Companion can assist victims in remaining calm and can stop them feeling alone throughout what may often be a daunting process.

Working with other key stakeholders has always been important, so maintaining and developing a good relationship with SA Police has ensured that crime victims receive the best possible assistance VSS can provide. Crime can be an overwhelming matter for many people, and being able to step in and do the follow-up phone calls to SA Police, to attend meetings and to advocate for clients can make their life a little easier as they deal with the effects of the crime. Other organisations in Whyalla who have a pivotal role in assisting our clients are Centacare and Uniting Care Wesley and both are regarded as highly valued stakeholders. Working together ensures that each service is able to offer support and assistance when needed.

It is true that regional locations may not have the same number of resources and options as are often available in major cities and this can present challenges of its own. Anonymity is sometimes a concern for clients who are fearful of 'everyone knowing' or of being more easily seen by offenders. Transport can also be an issue for clients who live in more remote areas who may need to attend court or attend appointments. Sometimes it may simply be that counselling or support or information is given via phone calls when face-to-face contact is not feasible.

Whyalla is a community built on industry and continues to grow, however it is the country attitude of people which continues to make Whyalla a place which has much to offer.



Outside of the Whyalla Office

*Kate Kemp-Turner  
Regional Coordinator; Whyalla  
Bunyarra Medical Centre, 153 Nicolson Avenue, Whyalla  
Phone: 8645 5911*



# Port Augusta

In 2008 I came on board with Victim Support Service (VSS) as Regional Coordinator for Port Augusta. Port Augusta VSS has grown significantly in the past three years and I have enjoyed being part of this wonderful organisation.

In the past three years VSS has delivered a plethora of victim orientated workshops to schools and local service providers as well as to offenders in prison and involved with Community Corrections. This year, for Law Week, VSS in conjunction with SA Police, local lawyers, Caritas College Year 11 Legal Studies Students, and a Port Augusta Secondary School student, prosecuted Goldy Locks in a mock trial after she was arrested for breaking into a home where three bears resided.



*Hayley McGeever, VSS, First Class Senior Constable Wendy Priestley, Caritas College Year 11 Legal Studies Students, and a Port Augusta Secondary School student*

In 2010, VSS initiated a twelve month outreach pilot to Coober Pedy, in alignment with the Magistrate Court Circuit. Uniting Care Wesley Country South Australia was kind enough to allow us to utilise their office space. Throughout the twelve months I worked with a number of organisations in relation to providing information on common reactions to crime and the criminal justice system.



*Deborah Bailey, First Class Constable Alison Craig, Hayley McGeever and Senior Constable Nicole Rooney outside Port Augusta Police Station*

In June 2010, VSS and SA Police began a 12 month pilot where a VSS staff member was based at the police station three days a week. As a result of this pilot we saw an overall 29% increase in referrals from police. As an outcome of this, we now have a full time staff member based in the Port Augusta Police Station and this will be reviewed annually.

Staying Home Staying Safe has enabled a number of local women to feel safer in their homes. The program has been received well by the local Port Augusta community and is one that differs from a lot of other programs due to the practical support it offers for women experiencing domestic and family violence. In March this year, Port Augusta was fortunate to have a staff member join the team to assist in the delivery of this program across Northern Country, based in the Port Augusta Court House.

Since July this year I have been the chair person of our local Family Violence Action Group (FVAG). It is an honour to be given this opportunity to lead such a wonderful collection of agencies in a number of events and causes

that we feel are relevant to Port Augusta. We have achieved so much in 2011 in the way of facilitating events, and I look forward to doing it all again in 2012.

It is my passion and forward vision to continue to develop VSS within Port Augusta in ways of crime prevention programs, community events and strengthening relationships with local service providers. VSS is a valued state-wide organisation and one that is committed to bringing about positive change for all victims of crime and I am very happy to be part of it.

*Hayley McGeever  
Regional Coordinator; Port Augusta  
with the assistance of Deborah Bailey  
Community Support Worker; Port Augusta  
Port Augusta Courthouse, 4 Flinders Terrace, Port Augusta  
Phone: 8641 1115*

Hang old clothes on the line when going on holiday to give the appearance that someone is home.

Turn the volume of your telephone & doorbell down to low when on holiday.

Ask a trusted neighbour to park their car in your driveway while on holiday.

# Port Pirie

Port Pirie is a bustling city with diverse industry, situated between the Spencer Gulf and the Flinders Ranges. Prior to July 2001, services to victims of crime here were provided by phone and post from our Adelaide office. In 2001, funding was secured from the State Government to set up regional Victim Support Service (VSS) offices. Port Pirie and our neighbour Port Augusta were the first two regional offices to open. Initially, our office was located alongside the former Port Pirie Magistrates Court. Today, we provide services from an office on Main Road. It is an ideal location being close to the Port Pirie Magistrates Court, Police Station and other essential services. The Port Pirie office provides an outreach service to Clare, regional towns dotted throughout the Flinders Ranges and also the Yorke Peninsula.

Setting up something new always provides a challenge and so it was for us initially as we learnt to manage distance, limited hours of service and resources. A positive influence is that Port Pirie is always eager to embrace a new service and so it was for VSS. We had an existing group of volunteers. Support for them prior to the Port Pirie office opening, was provided from our Adelaide office. It didn't take long however, for people to put their hand up and we added to our group of volunteers. Currently, volunteers servicing Port Pirie live in Port Pirie, Kadina and Terowie.



What has allowed us to flourish and grow is the integrated support from all stakeholders. We all support each other to provide outcomes for the people within our community who need assistance. Very often it is a team approach as we support a client to achieve outcomes. One way I can think to describe this is by making a cake. If one wants to end up with a cake that looks appealing and also tastes delectable, then one must have the right ingredients. So this is how it is in Port Pirie. A range of stakeholders (as the ingredients) come together to provide support and advocacy for a victim of crime. It's a bit like being part of two teams, the team that you work for and the community team who works together to assist their fellow citizens. I think a reason for this is that we all want our community to be strong, safe and healthy. Another strength for our community is the number of committees that we have. These committees look at education, issues, and solutions. For example, our Port Pirie Domestic Violence Action Group is a very proactive committee as representatives from an array of organisations not only work with clients within their own service, they also spend time as a group organising community forums for educating the community via events. These include White Ribbon Day, Remembrance Day, Law Week and Child Protection Week. Other committees include Youth Sector Network Committee, Drug Action Team and Mid North Rape and Sexual Response Group.

There are some things that do impact on service provision at times. Equity for people living in the country is an ongoing issue. People often find it difficult to travel either due to distance, work commitments or resources for a face to face service. When this occurs we provide a service via phone, e-mail and post. I have found that people can be creative and resourceful by pooling resources so that they can visit for a face-to-face service. It can be difficult for people living in rural areas to have anonymity if they become a victim of crime because "everyone knows everyone". Also, it is much easier for victims to come face to face with the accused for their crime due to the compactness of country areas.

In summary, while there can be some specific impacts for people living in the country these are far outweighed by a team approach in providing support for victims of crime.

*Jennifer Lewis  
Regional Coordinator; Port Pirie  
106B Main Road, Port Pirie  
Phone: 8633 4888*

# Murraylands

The Murraylands Victim Support Service (VSS) office has undergone some massive changes over the past 2 years. From moving location, twice, and appointing a new Regional Coordinator, to implementing changes to services including the new Staying Home Staying Safe program, and more active promotion of VSS as an organisation and the services we provide effectively we have undergone a massive shake-up!

The office is now located at Unit 2, 1 First Street Murray Bridge which is in the heart of the CBD. We are within walking distance of the Police Station, the Courts, central shopping precinct and the soon to be opened Murray Bridge Market Place.

In October 2010 I was selected to be the chairperson of the Domestic Violence Action Group and as part of this position have been an active member of the White Ribbon Day working committee. I have also been involved in encouraging local service clubs to support the active push to put an end to Domestic Violence and am planning on being involved in the promotion of White Ribbon Day at some upcoming events that the local service clubs are organising. This role has been very interesting and a role which highlights a very important aspect of my work, and also promotes a cause I am very passionate about.



*The new Murraylands office*

My work has taken me in many directions, to the remote community of Raukkan on the lower lakes area, to Mt Pleasant in the Adelaide Hills to support clients and work with communities interested in making an impact on crime and violence. As part of the Crime Prevention aspect of my role I have also been involved in running Victim Awareness Programs in conjunction with local agencies including Headspace, Families SA and Community Corrections, highlighting the impact of crime on victims.

In relation to networking and other support agencies in Murray Bridge, I have been meeting with many different agencies, increasing awareness of VSS, the services we provide and the assistance we can give to victims of crime in the Murraylands area.

One of the areas of crime that has been highlighted in my area has been that of serious assaults, in particular offences against, and by, young people. This has included home invasions, aggravated assaults, vehicular assaults and gangs assaulting individuals, and client numbers in these areas have escalated in recent times. I am currently planning to provide training and awareness in combination with other organisations who address this type of violence, and am looking at providing training to school-aged people and identifying the need to address crime as a community.

This year, VSS have assisted me in attending conferences and training in supporting victims of crime with disability through the criminal justice system, and in investigating the social impact of gambling on the community and on crime.

*Amy Ambagtsheer  
Regional Coordinator; Murraylands  
Unit 2, 1 First Street, Murray Bridge  
Phone: 8531 3987*

Install a motion-activated light outside your home to deter burglars & save you from searching for keys in the dark.

Leave a radio on so the house sounds occupied.

Don't advertise gifts received by leaving packaging on the kerb. Destroy & compact boxes to fit in the recycle bin.

# Riverland

The Riverland Region of South Australia is located north-east of Adelaide, stretching from the towns of Blanchetown and Morgan in the west, to the junction of the Victorian / New South Wales / South Australian borders. The region's population of 40,500 is diverse and rich in culture, having over 30 nationalities. The Murray River provides the structure of the Region, defining the landscape and providing for the key regional industries - tourism and primary industry. Half of South Australia's grapes and 90% of the citrus and stone fruit are grown here.



Regional Coordinator Cheryl Fazzalari-Molloy at community event celebrating Law Week in the Riverland

In December 2006 I accepted the position of Regional Coordinator for Victim Support Service (VSS). When I initially commenced, the focus was to address regional needs. Firstly I met with stakeholders to gather information as to what the region needed regarding support and services for victims of crimes. I found that community education and development around the issues of rights for victims of crime, and access to services would be of benefit to the general community. With that in focus, I organized an event for Law Week /Family Week in 2007. I organized a gathering in the main street of Berri, with 25 government and non government organisations participating, along with the full SA Police Band to entertain the crowds. This was an excellent opportunity to give exposure to community members the range of services available within the region. Each year since then, I have organised a major community event where people can, at their leisure, become aware of not only VSS but other services to address their needs.

The position of Regional Coordinator within a regional area is an extremely diverse role. People from all walks of life approach the service requiring information, not only about being a victim of crime but also general information as to who can assist them. I feel very



Outside of the Berri Office

fortunate that the human service organizations within the region are exceptional at working with each other to support the local community.

Over the last 5 years I have been involved in many and varied committees within the region and the state, including:

- Riverland Community Legal Service Inc, Chairperson
- Riverland Domestic Violence Action Group, Vice-Chairperson
- Law Week Committee, regional member
- Riverland Rape and Sexual Assault Network
- Riverland and Mallee Youth Sector Network
- Riverland Drug and Alcohol working group
- Renmark Paringa Community Centre Inc, Vice Chairperson

Along with attending Field days and Expos within the region, and guest speaking at various other services / groups, I have also been fortunate to attend the Indigenous Court Conference in Mildura in 2007, National Victim of Crime Conference in Hobart, and to present at the National Victim of Crime Conference in Adelaide in 2008.

The role of Regional Coordinator is an ever growing role. During 2011 this has expanded with the introduction of new services / programs. With VSS introducing the Staying Home Staying Safe program, and the Riverland region being selected recently for the role out of the Family Safety Framework, multi-skilling is a necessity for this role. Overall, this Regional Coordinator position is an extremely rewarding and challenging role.

*Cheryl Fazzalari-Molloy  
Regional Coordinator; Riverland  
2a Ahern Street, Berri  
Phone: 8582 2801*

# Southeast



*Volunteers with Regional Coordinator, Virginia Hill and Manager, Regional Services, Jodie Sloan*

It has been a busy time here in the Limestone Coast in the past few months with the very successful domestic violence conference 'United Against Domestic Violence: Engaging All Men In Prevention', being held in Mount Gambier with almost 200 attendees. Additionally, the Launch of the report 'The Way It Should Be' attracted over 100 people from a range of government and non-government agencies as well as community members. The report highlights the need for a dedicated sexual assault response service in the Limestone Coast. A Reference Group comprising members of key agencies has recently been formed to progress the establishment of the service.

A support group for women whose children have been sexually abused is presently being conducted by VSS over an 8 week period in collaboration with South East Community Health. The 'HOPE' group is a combined effort with guest speakers from SAPOL, Mental Health and Community Health all contributing to the program. In the past we have run this group for women survivors of sexual violence and this time decided it was timely to conduct a group support program for parents.

Family Safety Meetings have commenced in the Limestone Coast. Conducted on a fortnightly

basis they provide the opportunity for designated agencies to meet in order to create an action plan for supporting families at high risk of experiencing domestic violence. VSS is one of the designated agencies and attends the meetings as well as providing administrative support to the group.

The 'Staying Home, Staying Safe' program has been strengthened with the employment of two staff to conduct home security audits. We welcome these staff into the program and expect that their inclusion and the promotion of this initiative will enable us to upgrade the home security of more women and children experiencing domestic violence.



*Outside of the Mt Gambier office*

We continue to enjoy our location in Mount Gambier Court House. It is over 4 years since we made it our home and we value the close association that we have with the Courts Administration Authority and the opportunity to work closely with the DPP Witness Assistance Service and provide support to victims and witnesses in all the courts.

*Virginia Hill  
Regional Co-ordinator; South East  
Mount Gambier Courthouse, 41 Bay Road, Mt  
Gambier  
Ph: 8723 2968*

## Training for Victim Contact Officers

Victim Contact Officers (VCO) are sworn police officers based in the major metropolitan and many country police stations. Staff at Victim Support Service (VSS) have a very close working relationship with this fantastic group of officers. They are frequently our "go to" person in SAPOL when we need advice and information about policing matters. SAPOL represents the source of about 45% of the referrals made to VSS. I attended one of their training sessions on 21st September where we regularly review our working relationship and keep each other informed about developments. The main matter for discussion was the Memorandum of Understanding that is about to be signed off by the Commissioner and the Chief Executive of VSS.

*David Kerr  
Manager, Professional Services*

# A Survivors Story

I am a child sexual assault survivor and attempted suicide survivor, and although this sounds like a horrific life lived, I have to say I am alive and happy because of the support I received once I knew the support was there. I am one of the lucky ones as I have a great support network within my family. But once I had made the decision to take my case to the authorities, I really did not know what sort of support was available or how to get it. I had no idea what I was in for.

I had found out that the man who stole my innocence had also taken another little girl's innocence and I knew we weren't the only 2 victims from when my incident happened to this incident. I knew it was not possible for only 2 incidents in 25 years. So I contacted the Child Safety line and explained my situation and they informed me to contact the police. Some people may have had a bad experience with the police and / or the legal system but I am grateful for the effort and support I received through my 2 year court case which took place in Alice Springs, NT.

I am thankful to the police officer who took my statement. Explaining my assault in detail for the first time in my life was one of the hardest things I have ever had to explain. As much as I had dealt with past, I still

struggled to say out aloud what had happened to me. So thank you to the police officer who made every effort to capture my testimony and not once looked upon me in judgement. To be sitting alone telling a complete stranger of the story of my life I had no intentions of ever telling anyone, and feeling safe and secure is beyond description.

I am thankful to the Sexual Assault workers, both here in Port Augusta and in Alice Springs, for their understanding and confidence. I held my ground throughout my court case because of the support they hand out like candy. Having to travel for court proceedings placed extra strain on me and my family, and they never hesitated to see me at a drop of the hat or call me to see how I was going.

I am thankful to the detective and solicitor who won my case. No one will ever understand my appreciation for these 2 people for the dedication and persistence, the hard work and the time and effort they put in to fight for me. It is something I will never, ever forget. I am a single mother of 3 boys although I am supporting 5 boys. I am about to take on a Diploma in Management and I work full time with a legal service as a program facilitator, developing programs for other people like me who have lived a traumatic life, and want to move on and do something positive with their life and be happy.

I have to say I am alive and happy because of the support I received once I knew the support was there

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE RESOURCE CENTRE?

Welcome to the Resource Centre. Here we offer some of the latest books in our collection. You are free to borrow any of these items if you are a member of the Borrowers' Club. Phone or email us to find out about free membership. You can search our catalogue at <http://db.dircsa.org.au/dbw/vssqbe.htm>

### Self Help

**Smart Parenting for Safer Kids: helping children to make smart choices and stay safe - a practical guide for parents and parent educators.** Briggs, Freda. 2011

How do we protect our children from abuse by a stranger? Prof Briggs shows us how to bring up resilient children, and to make smart choices in life. She outlines the dangers in modern life, how to protect against sexual predators, how to choose safe child-care, how to keep your children safe while they use the internet, and how to arrange safe student exchanges. **(Cp01)**

**Rise: how to choose resilience in times of adversity, live well, and cultivate joy in the everyday.** Poulson, Ingrid. 2008

In this inspiring book, the author, a psychologist, encourages you to develop your resilience, self esteem and self confidence. She herself was a victim of violent crime - her father and children were murdered. She is now courageously devoting her life to helping others to regain their self identity after traumatic events, and shares her own method of survival. **(Hc08)**

# Service Excellence

The Service Excellence Program is a quality management framework, overseen by the Department for Families and Communities. It sets out standards of good practice in management operations and service delivery in the human services sector with an aim to achieving better outcomes for both clients and the community as a whole.

Victim Support Service (VSS) spent the best part of two years working towards accreditation under the Service Excellence Program – a long and detailed process of self-review under the categories of 'Leadership & Management', 'People, Partnerships & Communication' and 'Service Provision' which culminated in a two day external assessment.

Particular strengths noted during the assessment include: the active involvement of staff in strategic planning; a strong culture of teamwork; training and support for volunteers; a focus on staff training and good supervision regimes; well structured recruitment and induction processes; an enthusiastic staff group with a good mixture of experience.

It is with great pleasure (and relief!) that I am able to announce that VSS successfully achieved accreditation at Certificate Level of the Service Excellence Program on 23 February 2011 and during a recent visit to the Adelaide office by VSS regional staff, Sue Sansome of the Service Excellence Program attended the office to present the certificate.



*Sue Sansome, Department of families and communities with Sarah O'Brien, Service Excellence Co-ordinator*

Sarah O'Brien  
Service Excellence Coordinator

## 2011 Annual General Meeting



*New Board Member John Cobb with Birgitte Sorenson, Chairperson VSS*

Victim Support Service (VSS) held its 2011 Annual General Meeting on 26 October at the Adelaide Town Hall Meeting Hall. Approx 40 people attended the meeting, including members, volunteers, inter-agency colleagues and staff. Once again the meeting was chaired by Birgitte Sorensen, Board Chairperson. Reports were presented by VSS Treasurer, Amanda Noto, Birgitte Sorensen and Tony Waters, VSS Chief Executive.

We welcomed John Cobb to the VSS Board and Birgitte Sorensen was also elected to serve a third term as a Board Member.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of an Award to Superintendent James Blandford. The Award was presented 'in recognition of outstanding support and advocacy for victims of crime' – particularly in relation to supporting VSS service development in rural areas. Superintendent Blandford was instrumental in the establishment, development and evaluation of the VSS Pilot Outreach program to the Port Augusta Police Station. He advocated within SAPOL for a different partnership approach in country areas in order to improve accessibility for victims of crime in the Pt Augusta and Far North areas. Superintendent Blandford accepted the Award and remarked: "It's a fantastic honour and incredibly humbling to receive an award for just doing my job. Catching the crooks is the easy bit. I'm blessed to find people with the passion, skills, compassion and empathy who dedicate their lives to helping 'repair' people and join them in leading people through the mosaic of the administration of justice. If I had the opportunity to give this back to all the people at VSS, I would."

*Sarah O'Brien; Board Administrator*



*Superintendent James Blandford and Regional Manager Jodie Sloan*

# Community Courts Visit

A Court that has an outlook among the tree tops, looking at Justice from higher ground, is what I experienced on my recent trip to Melbourne.



Inside the Community Court Room

Collingwood Court is the first Community Court in Australia, established in 2007. Community Courts began in New York (USA) in the 90s, as an innovative way to do Justice locally. There are now many community courts in the world: 33 in USA, 17 in South Africa, 13 in the UK, 1 in Canada and 1 in Australia. The successes of the community courts are seen in reduced re-offending, increased offender compliance, increased community work, and working with the community to find lasting solutions for safer communities.

South Australia is planning to have its own community court based in the Onkaparinga area in 2015. To find out more: [www.communitycourt.sa.gov.au](http://www.communitycourt.sa.gov.au).

My first moments at the Neighbourhood Justice Centre (NJC as it is known in Collingwood), I am greeted by smiling security. I am welcomed by reception staff, and introduced to Sheryn & Maree who have expertly facilitated my visit. Maree (Project Officer) goes the extra mile to make me feel comfortable, with a great tour, and a constant stream of introductions to workers. I notice that the whole ambience of the NJC is different from any court house I have visited before. When you enter the building it is open and friendly, it feels bright and clean. There are many meeting rooms and private areas to talk. There is a children's play area. There is a lovely café, "Just delights," staffed with friendly volunteers, who treat everyone with the same dignity and respect; free tea, coffee & water is available and fabulous cappuccinos are provided for a fraction of the usual price.

My experience of the NJC was one of amazement and respect. It is a centre where the community can come for assistance with a variety of issues around Justice, and find treatment and support from a variety of local agencies working from NJC. These services include mediation, legal advice, employment and housing support, counselling and mental health services. Victims' support & family violence workers are represented among these agencies. This one stop shop approach to many services operating from this one site, means that often immediate help can be accessed and delays in service reduced, as services are able to work together.

During my 3-day visit to Collingwood, I witnessed a unique "problem solving" process operated by Jay (the Cambodian-speaking Neighbourhood Justice Officer). This helps people to address difficulties regarding their current matters before the court and assists them to get back on track. An out-of-court meeting is set up, at which the defendant, their legal representatives, and support people discuss the matters at court and tackle the defendant's problems. The actions from this meeting are often taken back to court, and taken into account by the Magistrate.

The highlight of my trip came as I was observing a court matter. The Magistrate asked if a victim of violent assault had provided a victim impact statement. This had not happened. The Magistrate pursued the matter, saying he wanted to know how the victim was, following the incident, before he could make a sentence for the offender. As an observer, I felt in that moment that the victim's story was vital to the court matter. I glanced out of the windows and noticed the tree tops, and knew that justice, here at teh NJC, was really different: it is a place where all people matter, victims and offenders, legals and supporters. I have the impression that Justice here is different, because people are coming together in this community. That every case is looked at individually, by lots of expert eyes and interested eyes, looking to find the best way forward, so that crime doesn't have to be the result again.

As a victim support worker in South Australia I am inspired and excited that in our state we will soon have our own unique Community Court. I believe it is vital for Victim Support Service (VSS) to be a part of influencing the culture and design of the Community Court: a great way to do justice locally for the future.

I am extremely grateful to NJC for welcoming me and allowing me to experience all that NJC offers the community. I am thankful as a worker to my employer, VSS, for having the foresight to make possible such a visit, which has improved my knowledge and insight into how a Community Court can work and be of great benefit to individuals in such a community. I look forward to the future when this knowledge can be put into action.



Gail Elvin with Maree Community Court Project Manager on Court tour

*Gail Elvin; Counsellor*

# Merry Christmas

The Board and staff of Victim Support Service would like to thank our members and volunteers for all their support during 2011. We'd also like to thank the readers of *Victims' Voice* and give special thanks to those who have contributed articles and victim stories.

*May everyone enjoy a happy and safe festive season!*



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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** *Thank you to all our contributors*

Victim Support Service welcomes your feedback. Comments regarding any aspect of our service should be addressed to the Chief Executive.



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