



**INTRODUCTION TO QIADP TEAM LEADERS WORKSHOP
THURSDAY 27 MARCH 2008 AT 9.00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM LEVEL 9
BRISBANE MAGISTRATES COURT
363 GEORGE STREET, BRISBANE**

**Judge Marshall Irwin
Chief Magistrate**

I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet. I also acknowledge their wisdom and culture.

I welcome you to this important Queensland Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program (QIADP) work shop.

In his apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples the Prime Minister spoke of embracing a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The core of this partnership for the future is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

He saw this as a future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

This is a future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, and with equal opportunities with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in Australia's history.

The innovative QIADP is one of these new solutions.

It is a solution which strikes at the heart of the causes that contribute to these gaps in life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities – the use and abuse of alcohol.

This is why it is important that QIADP has two streams:

- a criminal stream operating as a bail-based program; and
- a family intervention stream operating through case plans.

In this way it provides the opportunity to reduce indigenous overrepresentation in the prison system and to improve health standards.

As the Minister for Communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships, the Honourable Lindy Nelson-Carr has said:

“It’s hoped that this trial proves successful in helping break the cycles of alcohol abuse and crime affecting indigenous men, women and children – it will not only improve health standards, but will also help rebuild lives.”

Ultimately it is hoped that it will keep more families together. In doing so it will create an environment that will provide role models and incentives for indigenous children to study and become part of the workforce.

The Magistrates Court of Queensland is happy to be one part of this important program.

At Cairns (with outreach to Yarrabah), Rockhampton (with outreach to Woorabinda) and Townsville (with outreach to Great Palm Island) with our partners who are here today – from the Health, Justice and Law Enforcement systems, and importantly the Indigenous elders and respected persons.

It is the adoption of what is often called a ‘whole of government’ approach but which I would prefer to call an ‘holistic’ approach directed to the causes that bring Indigenous persons in contact with the criminal justice and child protection systems that is crucial to its success.

It has been pleasing to be part of the QIADP launches at Townsville and Rockhampton and to hear and see first hand how enthusiastically the program has been embraced.

The personal testimonies given by recovered addicts at the Drug and Rehabilitation Centre at Stagpole Street, Townsville gave great cause for optimism.

This optimism is enhanced by the fact that for this voluntary opt-in program, since it began approximately 9 months ago:

- there have been 183 referrals from both streams; and
- there have been three graduations – 2 from Townsville graduating on 15 January 2008 and 1 from Rockhampton graduating on 19 February 2008.

These graduations are achieved with significant effort because this is an intensive program over about 20 weeks.

It is pleasing that the Rockhampton graduate is a Woorabinda man. He had to be committed to the program because to achieve this he was required to live away from his family for an extensive period.

As you know we are dealing with people who are struggling physically and emotionally. These people are undertaking a life changing experience.

In a presentation to the third national indigenous justice CEO forum held at Brisbane on 21 and 22 November 2007, the inaugural Townsville QIADP magistrate, His Honour Magistrate Osborne observed:

“I have been surprised by the number of recidivist offenders – who could also fairly be described as chronic alcoholics – who have not only ventured onto the program but who have remained on the program for a time. Some have withdrawn from the program before they have completed it and others remain on the program.

Their presence on the program can only be explained because they were motivated to change.

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Having made that decision, they are supported by the stakeholders in the Court process I have described. Early indications are that participants are motivated to change not merely because they may receive a reduction in sentence but that they decide they are no longer prepared to endure the burden imposed on them, and their families, by either chronic ill health or continued involvement in the criminal justice system.”

As Magistrate Osborne also says:

“People who enter the program want to change but do not know how to change. Participants leave the program having experienced a taste of what life is like free of alcohol. We should not underestimate the significance of that experience to the participant. The experience itself opens the window to what life is like without alcohol and itself is a motivation for further change.”

This is so for both participants who have completed and not completed the program.

These early indications of success have come about because of the team based approach of the key stakeholders together with the court –

The elders and respected persons of the indigenous community, police prosecutions, lawyers for the defendants [principally from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service], Queensland Health, the Departments of Communities, Corrections and Child Safety, and the providers of supported accommodation which is available to participants during the rehabilitation phase of the treatment program.

We have reached a point where today is a good opportunity to take a deep breath and to reflect on what we have learnt from our collective practical experiences with the program to date.

I am sure that much has happened differently in practice to what we expected in theory.

It is for this reason that there have already been some changes made to the protocol under which the program has been conducted. I note that these changes and their impact will be discussed today.

The fact that you have all taken the time out of your busy schedules to come together in Brisbane today to discuss your experiences and plan for the future is another positive sign.

To finish on the note I started – the Prime Minister’s apology – I am confident that this workshop will involve the turning of another “new page” and we can “move forward with confidence for the future.”

I wish you well in your important deliberations.