



# ALS

Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited

12 October 2020,

To Whom It May Concern,

## **Reference for Western Sydney Community Legal Centre OzTag program**

My name is James Clifford. I am a solicitor employed by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT (ALS). I manage the ALS' Youth Koori Court (**YKC**) Practice at Parramatta Children's Court.

I write in reference to the **Western Sydney Community Legal Centre OzTag program**.

As is set out in section 1.2 of the Children's Court of NSW Practice Note No. 11, the aim of the Youth Koori Court is to:

- a. Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's, confidence in the criminal justice system,
- b. Reduce the risk factors related to the re-offending of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people,
- c. Reduce the rate of non-appearances by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in the court process,
- d. Reduce the rate of breaches of bail by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and
- e. Increase compliance with court orders by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The Youth Koori Court achieves these goals by delaying sentencing of young people for a period of up to one year (as opposed to the usual two to six weeks), during which participants consent to judicial and community supervision. Once assessed as suitable for the Court, the participant, in conjunction with youth workers, the Youth Koori Court caseworker, Juvenile Justice caseworkers, civil lawyers and family, generates an Action and Support Plan. The plan outlines the goals of the Young Person, and the agencies who have committed to assist the Young Person achieve those goals before being sentenced. In doing so, the Court aims to tackle the root causes of crime, and take into account the full context of the young person prior to sentence.

All of the young people participating in the YKC are highly vulnerable, facing issues of drug and alcohol addiction, exposure to violence and homelessness. They are often also suffering the effects of intergenerational trauma, cultural disconnection, and chronic disengagement from school, employment and services.

***Western Sydney Community Legal Centre OzTag program ('Oztag Program')***

In my capacity representing Aboriginal young people in the Western Sydney area, I have been overwhelmed by the positive response to the Oztag Program. Many current and former Youth Koori Court participants were involved in the program. All of them are from varying degrees of disadvantage. Historically they are suspicious of pro-social programs and accordingly are difficult to engage with Youth Justice, the Department of Communities and Justice and other agencies.

This program has had the strongest success I have seen in terms of engaging these young people. Many have reported to me a sense of connectedness and purpose, and desire to stay out of trouble and at liberty in order to participate in the program. It provides a sense of structure (with the balance between training nights and game nights), camaraderie and discipline. The boys are also very skilled athletes, and the opportunity to show that skill gives them confidence. Many local services are also able to attend training nights and games, and connect the participants in with drug and alcohol counsellors, trauma counsellors, Youth Justice and mentors.

Many youth services struggle with engagement, whether court mandated or voluntary. Often places go unfilled and appointments missed. Sometimes this is due to mistrust, sometimes it is simply due to a young person being too hungry, fatigued and stressed to engage. None of these issues are present in the OzTag program. The participants are eager to attend, and fully engaged when there. They know they can access transport and food, and be in a position where they can participate without shame.

I have observed a decrease in adverse interaction with police for those young people who participate. Police prosecutors have shared similar observations with me. Many of the young people in the Youth Koori Court program have reported to the Court with pride regarding their participation in games and training. We are seeing fewer breaches of bail, fewer young people being unable to be contacted and therefore missing court dates, and fewer breaches of parole, even for young people who are otherwise very vulnerable and difficult to engage. When asked what additional supports they would like, they invariably ask to be enrolled in another season of OzTag.

The continuation of this program is critical. It has proven success in keeping young people fed, engaged, and off the streets at night. Its Aboriginal run, community focused model works.

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I fully support the continuation and expansion of the program.

Should you require any additional information about my observations regarding the program, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

**James Clifford**

Solicitor

Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT

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23 October 2020

Ms Jessica Brown  
Children's Court Assistance Scheme  
Parramatta and Surry Hills Children's Court  
Western Sydney Community Legal Centre

Dear Ms Brown,

**The Children's Civil Law Service supports the 'Native Sons' Oz Tag team initiative**

The Children's Civil Law Service (CCLS) at Legal Aid NSW assists young people with complex and multiple needs with their civil law issues. CCLS has been working with the Youth Koori Court to provide legal support and assistance to many Aboriginal young people who are currently enrolled in the court, as well as many more who have graduated.

Several of our clients recently participated in a winter Oz Tag competition with the Native Sons. As you know, this team was organised by the Children's Court Assistance Scheme and WEAVE.

Through Youth Koori Court we have seen the positive influence playing for the Native Sons has had on our clients.

During Youth Koori Court Reviews, it was remarked:

- how much the boys were enjoying playing in the team;
- how it was a pro-social activity for them to be involved in;
- how they were role models for some of the younger team members; and
- how talented they are.

It was clear that playing in the team gave the boys a sense of purpose and pride, and enabled them to socialise in a positive way and interact with former Youth Koori Court participants who had graduated and stopped offending.

The services involved with Youth Koori Court, including Ted Noffs, WEAVE, Daramu and the YKC court case worker, attended the Native Sons training and game nights to support their clients. This meant the young people had weekly interactions with their support services whilst at Oz Tag.

We are pleased that two of our clients will be graduating from Youth Koori Court in the coming weeks and we consider that playing in the Native Sons team has contributed to their success. They stopped offending and were engaged with services throughout the season.

We fully support the Native Sons Oz Tag team continuing. We wish you all the best in securing funding to ensure the team can continue.

Yours sincerely

Louise Pounder  
**Solicitor-in-Charge**  
**Children's Civil Law Service**  
**Legal Aid NSW**