



SHANTY  
CREEK



THERAPEUTIC  
COMMUNITY

*Healing the Spirit*

Dave Warby, October 2013



# Overview

- The Queensland Drug and Alcohol Council (QDAC) was established in 2010 to expand alcohol and other drug services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Far North Queensland.
- QDAC's primary purpose was to establish a modified Therapeutic Community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.
- The program is the first in Australia to be specifically funded by the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) to operate as a Therapeutic Community.



# Brief History

- 2010: QDAC came into being as a subsidiary of the Gold Coast Drug Council (GCDC)
- 2010: The QDAC Advisory Group was formed
- 2010: The QDAC Shopfront was opened in Bunda Street, Cairns
- 2011: The site of the Therapeutic Community was finally decided upon
- May 2012: The Therapeutic Community accepted it's first residents.
- May 2012: QDAC, GCDC and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation of Queensland (ADFQ) merged under the banner of Lives Lived Well

SPEEDWAH RD

30 Mareeba 1 Cairns 33







# Naming

- The Therapeutic Community was initially named “Wadakin” (Place of Healing) in consultation with Traditional Owners of the land
- Opposing Traditional Owners suggested that the name “Wadakin” would attract evil spirits
- “Wadakin” was dropped until a more acceptable name could be found
- The program was named QDAC Mareeba Therapeutic Community in the interim
- All parties agreed on the name of “Shanty Creek Therapeutic Community” in July 2013











Australian Government

## Shanty Creek Therapeutic Community

Funded by the Australian Government

Officially opened on 13 August 2013



# Program Overview

- Currently funded for 20 beds with the potential to increase
- Priority given to ATSI clients
- High prevalence of physiological and psychological health issues
- Program duration of 6 months with the option of a further 6 months in transitional housing
- A shorter program of approximately 3 months can be negotiated in some circumstances
- Bed occupancy for September, 2013 was 84.5%
- Average length of stay for all residents in the program as at 30/9/13 was 8 weeks and 6 days (Range: 4 days – 30 weeks)



# Staged Approach

- Willy Wagtails (minimum of 4 weeks)
- Scrub Turkeys (minimum of 10 weeks)
- Barramundi (minimum of 10 weeks)
- Eagles (minimum of 3 weeks)
- Owls (living out of program)



# Modifications

- Non-hierarchical system – senior residents have additional privilege without traditional status
- A less structured program that is often dictated by “Murri time”
- Minimal in-house consequences
- A strong emphasis on Men’s Business and Women’s Business
- Art and craft as recreation and not as a structured part of the program
- Campfire











# Challenges

- The transient nature of ATSI People
- The influence of Elders
- Sorry Business
- Aftercare
- The ability to recruit and retain appropriate staff



## The Therapeutic Community model of treatment fits well with ATSI cultures

- ATSI people are far more accustomed to all aspects of communal living than their European counterparts
- Community issues are generally discussed at length before being dealt with in a no-fuss manner
- Celebration and ceremony are an inherent way of life
- ATSI cultures are built around spirituality
- ATSI people embrace a holistic view of health and healing



