

Court Support Pilot Evaluation: Auckland HELP

The Pilot

The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) contracted the Auckland Sexual Abuse HELP Foundation Charitable Trust (Auckland HELP) to provide a psychosocial Court Support pilot service from 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019.

The pilot service aimed to support victims/survivors of sexual violence going through the criminal justice system by providing psychosocial support to address their emotional, mental, spiritual and social needs.

We're minimising trauma for people. Helping the person manage the potential re-traumatisation is our core task... And that's informed by the context of sexual violence. (HELP staff)

Delivery of the Court Support Pilot

A Court Support Counsellor (CSC) with specialist trauma-care expertise and knowledge of the Court's operations and systems provided client centred-care, emotional and holistic support, psycho-education, and advocacy throughout the entire criminal justice and Court process.

Victims/survivors told us...

- The CSC made them feel supported, heard, believed and validated, empowered and comforted to continue with the Court process.
- Before their trial, they were well-informed about the criminal justice process, prepared to enter the system with realistic expectations about Court procedures and reassured that their families were well-informed and cared for during trial preparation.
- The pilot helped them to cope physically and mentally with Court processes before, during and after their trials.
- They learned about and used psychosocial strategies to manage anxiety, depression and negative thoughts, connected with appropriate ongoing support services, and learned about strategies to manage ongoing life and experiences after Court.

Criminal justice stakeholders told us...

- The Court Support pilot provided a valuable service within the

criminal justice sector.

We have to make sure that our victims are fully informed of all the outcomes... to understand what has happened... Having HELP on board I know [CSC] will have had that conversation... So that's a useful resource for us. (Justice sector stakeholder)

- They were able to focus on their responsibilities knowing their clients were well supported.

A victim was on the stand for [X] days in the end, and the victim's mother was needing a lot of support as well and so [CSC] took care of all that... We knew the victim and her family were taken care of. (Justice sector stakeholder)

The Pilot highlighted that...

- The length of time clients needed support was influenced by different Court processes and could be long. Pathways through the justice system were complex. Clients required support before, during and after trial.
- Embedding the pilot within an independent specialist sexual harm service provider helped victims/survivors to access wider and holistic sources of support.
I'm professionally trained to do this; I have a specialist skillset...This role is embedded to support people going through that [court] process because re-traumatisation through the criminal justice system is very high. (HELP staff)
- Auckland HELP built and developed strong relationships and networks with stakeholders across the criminal justice system, other providers and agencies.
- The Court Support pilot model provided support that helped the clients manage the justice process and filled a gap in client service provision within the criminal justice system.
It's not just about preparing them for [how] the trial is going to be. It's having someone that's validating and normalizing [their experiences as well]. (HELP staff)

Expansion and transferability of the Court Support Pilot

The evaluation findings provide evidence to support the continuation of the Court Support pilot. Expansion of the service is recommended as demand over the course of the year exceeded the availability of the Court Support Counsellor.

Duration of support required, the holistic nature of support and the need for a skilled workforce need to be considered in developing a funding model for Court Support services.

The key elements needed to expand the service include:

- Shared understandings between key stakeholders within the criminal justice system that victims/survivors require support to navigate the complexities of the system.
- A communications strategy to raise the profile and awareness of the Court Support service with key stakeholders and with the high volume of new staff within organisations in the criminal justice system.
- Provision of Court Support as a default part of the trial process to ensure all victims/survivors presenting at Court have support in place.
- Workforce development to ensure Court Support staff are qualified, experienced in trauma-care and knowledgeable about all components of the criminal justice sector. These skills are required to build meaningful and trusting relationships and confidence to advocate for and support clients.
- Acknowledgement and understanding that the shortage of a skilled workforce and other factors make recruitment of qualified and experienced staff difficult.
- Development and growth within kaupapa Māori and Pacific services, and strengthening cultural capacity/capability within mainstream organisations.
- Integration within a wider service that provides the necessary backbone infrastructure, ethical and conduct guidelines, networks and professional accountability to ensure quality service provision.

Next steps

MSD will continue to fund Auckland HELP to deliver a psychosocial court support service during 2019/2020.

Over the next 12 months MSD will be working to develop the service further. MSD will be focussing on what a national service model would look like and how that could be delivered.

Thank you

Malatest wishes to thank the clients who shared their experiences of journeying through the criminal justice system and its impacts with us. Thank you also to HELP staff and the criminal justice sector stakeholders who shared what it is like to work with victims/survivors of sexual harm as they journey through the justice system.