MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Evaluation of the impact of Budget 2019 Investment on Court Support Service Users and Workforce (2024)

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Background

Budget 2019 (Budget-19) allocated $90.3 million for sexual violence services over four years, including the new Court Support Service. The Court Support Service received $6.35 million to provide support for victim/survivors going through criminal court and trial processes. The Court Support Service focuses on addressing the mental, spiritual, and physical support needs of victim/survivors and aims to reduce secondary victimisation and trauma. When the evaluation took place there were 15 providers delivering the service, including three Kaupapa Māori providers. There are now 17 providers delivering the service.

The evaluation focused on the implementation of this new service and outcomes for people who have used the service, Court Support Workers and the wider sexual violence sector. It was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) as part of a broader programme evaluating the impact of Budget-19 on four specialist sexual violence services. The wider evaluation programme focused on how the funding has been used by recipients to build capacity and capability, and to improve inter-agency collaboration and referral pathways. It also focused on the associated impacts for people affected by sexual violence. This document provides a summary of the findings. The full Court Support Service evaluation report can be found on the MSD website.

Methodology

The evaluation employed a Collaborative Realist Approach[1] to explore the impact of the establishment of the Court Support Service. The methods used within this evaluation understand 'impact' to reflect the meaningful changes that occurred in the lives of victim/survivors, their family, whānau and supporters, and frontline staff as a result of this funding. The evaluation received ethics approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. Multiple lines of evidence were drawn on. Methods included:

- An inception hui with sector experts to ensure the evaluation plan was fit for purpose.
- A document review.
- Interviews with six victim/survivors who had used the Court Support Service, 11 Court Support Workers[2] and six Court Victim Advisors[3].
- An outcomes panel hui with staff and sector experts to ensure the findings reflected the experiences of those in the sector.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom (video call) in a semi-structured style and followed an interview guide developed specifically for each type of interviewee. The data were analysed thematically to understand the significant changes brought about by the introduction of Court Support Service.

Limitations

The key limitations for this evaluation included:

- The approach used, alongside the complex funding environment for SV services, makes it difficult to determine whether the impacts and outcomes reported by participants are a direct result of the MSD Budget-19 funding.
- Recruitment challenges resulted in small numbers of participants from Māori, Pacific, disabled and Rainbow communities. No interviews with family, whānau or supporters of victim/survivors were conducted.
- Priority communities, including those listed above, may have chosen to not participate due to a perception that their anonymity and/or confidentiality might be compromised.
- Interviews were conducted by Zoom, which may have excluded victim/survivors and/or family, whānau and supporters who did not have access to the internet, a computer and/or privacy to participate.
- No Kaupapa Māori providers took part in the evaluation.

The full report provides suggestions for future evaluations, emphasising participant recruitment methods and support considerations for studies involving people who are in crisis or who have experienced a crisis.

Key Findings

Staff training and established relationships with the justice system enable staff to provide wraparound support for victim/survivors.

The evaluation found that when Court Support Workers have the opportunity for comprehensive training in the court system and have established relationships with Police, Court Victim Advisors, and other key justice staff, the new Court Support Service provides ongoing wraparound support for victim/survivors as they move through court processes. This wraparound support attends to their holistic needs and can include support related to housing, childcare and/or health. This type of support goes beyond the immediacy of court processes but is vital to stabilising victim/survivors who enter the stressful environment of court.

> "We had to decide whether or not we would do a psychosocial assessment [with victim/survivors going through court], or just Court Support stuff only. And it became quickly evident that we needed to do full wraparound support for a lot of people. Because sometimes the people that are going through a court case would come with, like drug addiction issues or, like really severe mental health stuff or eating disorder or family issues, you know? All those issues, those psychosocial issues".
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> **Court Support Worker**

Having one main point of contact centres the needs of victim/survivors in court processes.

Central to the success of the Court Support Service is that it provides one central point of contact for victim/survivors to access support when they need it. The Court Support Worker can act as a broker to bring together various criminal justice agencies to focus on the needs of the victim/survivors.

[1] Collaborative Realist Approach draws on Realist Evaluation and Collaborative Outcomes Reporting. It is a theory-driven approach that allows for mixed methods (qualitative only used in this evaluation), explores the role of context, and meaningfully involves stakeholders in the evaluation process. A Collaborative Realist approach aims to go beyond the simple question of 'does it work?' or 'what works?' to understand 'what works for whom, in what circumstances, and how?'

[2] Someone whose role it is, in a sexual violence agency, to support victim/survivors through the justice system.

[3] Specialist staff in the justice system who help victim/survivors though the court system, funded by the Ministry of Justice.

Separate support for the family, whānau and supporters of victim/survivors is sometimes provided.

Centring the needs of victim/survivors through this process also means that some providers provide separate support for their family, whānau, and supporters. Court Support Workers cooperate with Court Victim Advisors to support victim/survivors and family, whānau and supporters with understanding court processes and, in some areas, to enable family, whānau and supporters to have their own support on court days. Having sufficient resources to attend to the needs of family, whānau and supporters was a challenge in many areas.

> "I think collectively for [best friend], myself, and mum, she [Court Support and Crisis Worker] was our rock, because she knew all of what was going to happen. And she knew how important it was for the three of us to get support through it, she knew that it wasn't just an individual thing that [it] affects the whole whānau. And the fact that she took everyone into consideration meant a lot to me, that, that she understood, you know, yes, the assault may have happened to one person, but it doesn't mean it didn't affect the loved ones."
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> **Victim/survivor**

Court Support Workers help victim/survivors to access various supports and place their needs at the forefront.

Court Support Workers often support victim/survivors to access support available through other agencies, such as Victim Support or Police. When the Police or other agencies do not provide resources, e.g. lunch at court, then the Court Support Worker would finance and provide the missing support. Court Support Workers place the needs of victim/survivors first and foremost, and anticipate and prepare for inconsistent support from other agencies, shielding victim/survivors from their impacts.

The Court Support Service needs time to become more established in order to provide a consistent service for victim/survivors.

As a new service, frontline workers were faced with creating resources, forging new relationships with key stakeholders like Police, court staff and other relevant services, and establishing the boundaries of their role. The time spent developing the role and associated resources meant that they were not always able to meet the needs of victim/survivors. Additionally, Court Support Services did not always have the capacity to take on additional victim/survivors. Better training and networking support for Court Support Workers would help the role to become more established and ensure the needs of victim/survivors are better met.

> "One of the challenges that we've got with this is that I am doing the work, and then also trying to establish those sorts of programmes and frameworks while I'm doing it. And then of course, you have to prioritise the doing of it, because you have people with crisis, urgent needs, right then and there. And so, there's this juggle of like, needing to have a good amount of time carved out to [develop resources]."
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> **Court Support Worker**

The new Court Support Service makes it easier for victim/survivors to navigate the court process.

Support from the Court Support Service means that victim/survivors are better prepared for court. This includes better understanding of the court processes, increased skills to manage the anxiety and stress associated with going to court, and having clarity about their wishes and needs.

> "Because when I was in the stand, I was like, holy, that [conversations with Court Support Worker] actually prepared me. And it was that simple. Because you think: 'There's-, surely that's not enough?'. Like I need to do more work. But no, just them [Court Support Worker] saying: 'Tell your truth, take your time'. Yeah, it was all the preparation you need. But I don't know how you would have told me that pre-court. That that's actually all you need."
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> **Victim/survivor**

Court Support Workers support victim/survivors to remain engaged in court processes and provide them with psychosocial, emotional and practical support.

Staff with deep knowledge of justice processes and good relationships with Police, Victim Support and the courts are able to provide victim/survivors with psychosocial, emotional, and practical support that enhances procedural justice. A number of the victim/survivors expressed that they had been ready to withdraw from the court process but the Court Support Worker made it possible for them to stay engaged.

Key Recommendations

A number of recommendations for how MSD should further develop the Court Support Service arose from the evaluation findings. The recommendations emphasised the need for continued development, collaboration, and funding to ensure comprehensive support is available for all victim/survivors. There is also a need for more awareness of Court Support Service and better integration within the broader justice system. These recommendations are presented below and are arranged according to the groups they relate to. It is recommended that MSD:

Victim-survivors

- Ensure alignment between the specifications for the Court Support Worker role and funding to provide holistic wraparound support. Support should be able to start at least six weeks ahead of the court date to several months post-court. Holistic support can vary but may include support to address housing, childcare, transportation or health needs.
- Develop psychosocial support (e.g. information on court processes and emotional support) mechanisms for family, whānau and supporters. These support mechanisms should be separate from victim/survivor supports.

Frontline staff and providers

- Increase funding for the Court Support Service to enable more availability of Court Support Workers.
- Develop a forum for Court Support Workers to share challenges and solutions.
- Work in collaboration with Court Support Service providers to develop best-practice guidelines about Court Support practices which take into consideration Māori and Pacific world views.
- Recognise that this is a new service that requires time to be developed and embedded. Funding should be allocated to ensure time and space for development of the role, resources and training.

Ministry of Justice

MSD should work with the Ministry of Justice to enable the Court Support Worker role to become embedded within court processes. This could include:

- Ensuring that the Police and court staff are aware of the Court Support Service and understand referral pathways into the service.
- Reviewing how court-related funding for victim/survivors (e.g. for transport and lunch-related costs) are allocated.