

Brett Whiteley MP

Shadow Minister for Health and Human Services

Dr Vanessa Goodwin MLC

Shadow Justice Minister

Monday, 14 December 2009

Alcohol/drug treatment program faces closure under Labor

- Post-Christmas close predicted for award-winning substance abuse treatment program
- Holyoake's *Gottawanna* program has potential to help 940 Tasmanians in next year
- Closure will impact on successful community and prison programs

An award-winning program for alcohol and drug misuse and other addictive behaviour faces closure at the end of the month after unsuccessful attempts to secure funding from a number of sources, including the State Labor Government.

The *Gottawanna* program, delivered by Holyoake Tasmania Inc and modelled on a similar program operating in Western Australia, was established in 2006 and won a national Australian Institute of Criminology award this year.

The project was initially funded by a Tasmanian Community Fund grant for two years and has been kept alive through 2009 through small bequests and a perpetual trust, but cannot continue beyond the end of the year without ongoing funding.

When launching the program in 2006, Health Minister, Lara Giddings, said *"there was strong evidence the Gottawanna therapy worked"* and it *"would be an invaluable asset in helping to bring positive change into the lives of Tasmanians with addictions"*.

Now, the State Labor Government is turning its back on this program, at a time when there is increasing demand for its services.

In 2008-09, the program provided 463 therapeutic sessions to 125 clients – a 30% increase on the previous year – and 81 education sessions, a 211% increase on 2007-08.

Client numbers over the past six months indicate enormous growth, with predictions of a minimum 50% increase for the 2009-10 year.

Holyoake delivers the program to outreach sites in Glenorchy, Risdon Vale, Sorell, Chigwell, Bridgewater, Gagebrook and Clarendon Vale.

The *Gottawanna* program has the potential to improve the lives of 940 people in the 2009-10 financial year, but may be cut short and close because of the Government will not commit to ongoing funding.

Where will these clients go if this program closes, and what impact will this closure have on street violence, domestic violence, hospitalisations, child abuse and road accidents as a result of substance abuse?

Every day we hear stories of the impact of substance abuse in our communities; Tasmania Police have begun a major project aimed at reducing alcohol and drug-fuelled violence on our streets – Operation Unite.

Yet when there is a successful program operating that addresses addictive behaviours, Labor can't find the funds to continue.

An evaluation of the *Gottawanna* program by the University of Tasmania late last year found the outcomes were extremely positive demonstrating the program produced a reduction in violence and crime.

Based on the reputation and success of *Gottawanna*, Hobart Risdon's prison approached Holyoake to implement a tailored program to prisoners prior to their release to reduce the level of alcohol and drug-related recidivism.

Group sessions are being held twice weekly in the prison and following release, prisoners attend the *Gottawanna* program.

Limited funding from the private sector and TCF will allow the prison program for women to continue until December 2010, however Holyoake is unable to meet additional requests from the men's prison until further funding can be secured.

Programs like this not only invest in the health and wellbeing of individuals and families; they provide cost savings to government in areas of hospitals, human services, families, children, prisons and police.

Without such programs, those with addictive behaviours who want to address them are left in desperate and hopeless circumstances.

For further information or comment please call Sandy Wittison – 0417 528 945