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The Court Liaison Service (CLS) assists people with a mental illness who have been charged with less serious criminal offences and are to appear before the Local Court. The CLS can assist magistrates in identifying whether a defendant may have a mental illness and give advice to the magistrate as to whether it is appropriate for the Court to deal with the defendant through a mental health diversionary program instead of imposing a criminal sentence.

Samantha McCameron is the Clinical Nurse Consultant for the Court Liaison Service which is based at the James Fletcher hospital site in Newcastle. The Service was initially established with the help of John Sharples, in 1997. Although based in Newcastle, Samantha also **assists other courts in the Hunter New England Health area** via fax or telephone when required.

Court Liaison Service Newcastle
Samantha McCameron – Court Liaison Nurse
02 4924 6804 or 0423 298 982
(Monday – Friday)

Referrals to the CLS are made from Corrective Services, Legal Aid, Probation and Parole Service or by the Magistrate after the person's first appearance at court. The families of prior CLS clients may contact the CLS for assistance in court matters. 60% of referrals to CLS are from the justice system (Legal Aid, Probation and Parole Service, Corrective Services, judiciary) and 40% of referrals are made from the mental health system (mental health case managers or hospital clinicians).

Useful Phone Numbers

NSW Police Assistance Line
131 444 (general enquiries and station contact details)

Legal Aid Commission
(Newcastle) 02 4929 5482
(Tamworth) 02 6766 6322

Civil LawAccess NSW
1300 888 529
www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au

Aboriginal Legal Service
(Newcastle) 02 4926 1571
(Tamworth) 02 6761 3766
(Armidale) 02 6772 5770
(Taree) 02 6551 392
(Moree) 02 6752 5700

Probation and Parole Service NSW
(Newcastle) 02 4929 3921
(Tamworth) 02 6766 7444
(Armidale) 02 6772 2073
(Taree) 02 6552 7599
(Moree) 02 65724088

Magistrates may make bail conditions requiring persons charged with minor offences who have been diagnosed with a mental illness to report regularly to CLS and follow their directions in relation to the defendant's therapeutic care and treatment. The CLS can assess the defendant and determine the priority of other health issues that need to be addressed, for example, drug and alcohol problems. The Magistrate may also direct that the defendant be taken to a hospital for an assessment.

Court Liaison

If the Magistrate is of the view that the defendant is a mentally ill person the magistrate may dismiss the charges and release the defendant into the care of a responsible person¹ and may impose additional conditions such as requiring the person to attend for further treatment or assessment. As part of these conditions the court may request that the CLS continue to monitor the person's engagement with services and compliance with treatment, usually for the length of the order. CLS may work with mental health case managers to monitor and assist with medication and counseling.

CLS works with people with a wide range of mental health issues. People with dual diagnosis problems (drug and alcohol, and mental health problems) may also be referred to the CLS for support.

CLS are not involved with people with mental illnesses who have committed serious indictable offences before either the District Court or Supreme Court. In these matters the Court will need to determine whether the defendant is fit to stand trial for the offence. These offenders are generally held as a forensic patient in the custody of Justice Health and admitted to a prison hospital.

¹ You Are Not Alone: Support, Advocacy & Complaints NG8

After Hours Community Mental Health Team Hunter Region

24-hour emergency mental health phone line - 1800 655 085

Health Link (24-hour information service) - 1800 063 635

Hunter New England Health Complaints – 1800 605 172 (during business hours)