

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme Amendment C401: Mt Duneed Community Care Accommodation Facility

Witness statement of Rob Lytzki

1. Name and address

Robert Glen Lytzki,
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2. Qualifications, experience and area of expertise

1. Grad. Cert. Family Therapy & Counselling, Dip. Alcohol & Other drugs, Dip. Mental Health Cert IV Assessment & Training.
2. I am employed by Foundation 61 as their Chief Executive Officer and have been part of the organisation since its inception
3. I believe I can speak with some authority based both on lived experience of both addiction and recovery from addiction and from the training and experience I have gained during the last 15 years leading the program at Foundation 61.

3. Other significant contributors

4. Hal Bisset AM, B Sc (Hons), Dip Ed, BD, Chairperson Foundation 61, Partner & Director Affordable Housing Solutions Pty Ltd, Partner & Director Ward Bisset Consulting Pty Ltd, 35 years' experience in the not-for profit and charitable sector including strategic planning, business planning governance training, leadership and advice to government's at national, state and local levels.

4. Instructions

5. The Panel has requested an explanation of its existing facility in Williams Road Mt Duneed.
6. The Williams Road facility can accommodate up to 15 men and would have an average occupancy of 13.
7. Williams Road has 6 staff including:
 - i. CEO= (1.0EFT)
 - ii. 3x Support Staff= (2.8EFT)
 - iii. 2x Admin Staff= (1.0EFT)
8. The staff are normally supported by approximately 35 volunteers. During the restrictions on movement brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic volunteer access has been restricted to just one person on each overnight shift subject to the volunteer practicing strict self-isolation. Volunteer roles normally include:
 - i. 24/ 7 live in support
 - ii. Health services (fitness, yoga)
 - iii. Art and crafts
 - iv. Living skills – cooking, gardening, parenting
 - v. Recreational activities
 - vi. Group work – therapeutic, psycho-education, information
 - vii. Vocational education and training
 - viii. Assistance with financial, legal and other issues
 - ix. Practical assistance with transport, shopping, etc.
 - x. Some property maintenance.
9. Each program participant in addition to a private bedroom has access to the following shared facilities:
 - i. Shared bathrooms – one per four residents
 - ii. Large commercial kitchen and dining room – participants (on a roster basis) prepare and serve common meals
 - iii. Two large living areas – TV room and reading / games room
10. In addition to indoor recreation areas there are multiple recreational and group work areas including:
 - i. Gymnasium
 - ii. Carpentry workshop
 - iii. Metalwork / mechanical workshop
 - iv. Horticulture paddock (two acres currently under development)
 - v. Classroom
 - vi. Art therapy room
 - vii. Vegetable garden
 - viii. Volleyball court
 - ix. Walking track

11. In addition to the residential facilities there are office facilities within the structure of the residence including:
 - i. Office accommodation for 6 staff – this includes a reception area which is positioned as the first point of contact coming onto the property
 - ii. Counselling room – providing space for private conversations with staff and visiting clinicians
 - iii. Overnight suite for night staff
12. The Williams Road facility is surrounded by agricultural land use with the nearest farmhouse being 250 metres north. A number of other farmhouses and equestrian centres are approximately 1 kilometre away.
13. Foundation 61 receives referrals from across the State but only accepts voluntary admissions following relevant detoxification treatment – this ensures that all residents are willing participants.
14. The assessment process involves a face to face interview with the applicant and contact with referees. Assessment criteria include:
 - i. Stated desire to complete the six-month program
 - ii. Willingness to abstain from all Alcohol and non-prescribed drugs during their time as a participant
 - iii. Suitability to be a part of the current group in the program and their ability to interact with others
 - iv. Physical and psychological ability to take part in all aspects of the program including group therapy and counselling
 - v. Willingness to abide by the program's guidelines, including a staged approach to weekend leave
 - vi. Agreement to being supervised in the program including presentation to external appointments (e.g. medical) and group outings
 - vii. Adhering to visitor and family visitor guidelines
 - viii. Positive attitude towards participating in and adding value to the community atmosphere and wellbeing of themselves and others
 - ix. Willingness to focus on their own recovery process and to be supported in developing goals for their re-entry back into the wider community
15. Foundation 61 is not a Detox Clinic or a Psychiatric Centre. Any applicants requiring these services are referred to these programs and linked with relevant support networks throughout Geelong.
16. The men's program is designed to provide a positive and safe space for individuals to recover from their addictions, gain personal insight and support while upskilling and reconnecting with families and developing pathways for a healthier future.
17. The induction of a new resident includes provision of a Participant's Handbook that includes Resident Rules, Safety Information, Program Guidelines, Complaint Procedures and a negotiated Case Plan.

18. Foundation 61 utilises a Case management approach including the following best practice elements:
 - i. Comprehensive assessment (facilitated by day to day contact and observation)
 - ii. Individual plans for treatment, life and living skills development, etc.
 - iii. Referral to appropriate services as required, which may be provided on-site, or externally
 - iv. Support, information and advice, and assistance to access services (e.g. legal, financial, health, mental health, vocational and educational support services)
 - v. Liaison with other services (case coordination)
 - vi. Monitoring progress
 - vii. Exit planning

19. Foundation 61 employs a 'strengths based' approach which focuses on the inherent strengths, resilience, and skills that men already possess, and build on these for future success and problem-solving. This approach shifts the focus from 'the problem' to an approach which empowers men by drawing attention to the positives that exist within and around them.

20. The program at Williams Road is designed to reintroduce residents to a disciplined lifestyle that prepares them for reintroduction into normal living patterns – this includes set times for meals, group work, counselling, education, recreation, chores and personal time.

21. The program includes:
 - i. Individual counselling including cognitive behavioural therapies, trauma informed therapy, dialectical behavioural therapy, and motivational interviewing
 - ii. Therapeutic group work including relationship building, mentoring, parenting, psycho-education and the 12 Step Program
 - iii. Vocational and life skill based education and training to prepare residents for reintegration including work readiness, communication skills, independent living skills and specific skills such as horticulture (Foundation 61 is a 'Learn Local' registered educational provider through the Adult Council of Further Education)
 - iv. Physical fitness training
 - v. Engagement with family members to rebuild the immediate support network that will support residents on re-entry into normal life

22. The safety of all participants, staff, volunteers and community members is of utmost priority. Steps taken to ensure safety are:
 - i. Facility staffed 24/7 by experienced employees or volunteers
 - ii. Foster a mutually supportive environment that encourages group regulation of aggressive behaviours
 - iii. All family visitors are assessed and monitored to ensure the positive and supportive culture of Foundation 61 is maintained
 - iv. An emergency Management Plan has been developed and all staff and volunteers are made aware of required responses including the calling of emergency services as required

23. Visitors to the site are managed and monitored:

- i. The delivery of goods is minimised by the use of volunteers to collect goods
- ii. The use of trades is limited to trusted professionals known to the organisation
- iii. Volunteers are vetted before allowed access to the site and undergo both induction and a probationary period
- iv. Professionals (medical) are generally accessed off-site with the exception of psychologists who are vetted and known to staff
- v. Other visitors (such as politicians, Council staff, other health professionals, funders) only come on site by appointment and are escorted during their visit

24. Visiting hours for family and friends are limited:

- i. Visiting hours are between 12pm and 4pm Saturday and Sunday
- ii. Each resident is allowed visitors on only one of those days each week
- iii. Each resident is allowed only two adults and two children visitors at any one time
- iv. All visitors are required to report to Reception on arrival and sign in
- v. Visitors may be refused entry if they refuse an alcohol or drug test or fail such a test
- vi. All visitors are required to remain in common areas during their visit
- vii. Staff and volunteers supervise all common areas during visiting hours
- viii. Staff and volunteers have been trained in how to respond if an incident occurs during visiting hours

25. During the 15 years of operation at Williams Road there have been no incidents caused by visitors that have required an emergency response.

26. I am not aware of any concerns from the surrounding community in relation to the Williams Road facility during the 15 years of operation that have required Police intervention.

27. The experience of the last 15 years at the Williams Road facility has significantly shaped the design of both the facility and program proposed for the Women's facility at Russells Road including:

- i. The importance of a human scale for the facility – we think an optimum size for the Women's facility is 8 residents
- ii. The importance of a quiet rural setting – limiting the distraction of urban life is very important for the recovery process as is the engagement with nature
- iii. The importance of a strict program discipline – to rebuild order and stability in the residents' life as a pre-requisite for fitting back into society
- iv. The importance of a balanced program – that embraces physical health, mental health, relational health, life skills training, workforce readiness, vocational opportunities
- v. The importance of re-building family relationships –the sustainability of recovery is increased many times if the primary support network is educated and committed to the recovery process

28. This experience combined with research into international best practice undertaken by John Thomson has been used to draft the Facility Management Plan for the proposed Women's Drug & Rehabilitation service at 120 Russells Road Mt Duneed.

5. Issues raised in evidence and submissions

29. It appears to Foundation 61 that a number of the submissions that did not support the proposed Planning Scheme Amendment to allow the development of the Women's facility on Russells Road assumed that the development will result in a risk to the safety of citizens who frequent the facilities on the adjacent public open space.
30. In relation to the concerns about safety of people using the adjacent public open space we reiterate:
- i. Residents of the facility are required to remain within the boundary of the site unless accompanied by a staff member or volunteer and will remain separate from Pony Club, Dog Club animals and members or anyone not directly affiliated with Foundation 61.
 - ii. The facility is voluntary in nature – all residents are committed to recovery and must have completed a relevant detox program before entry
 - iii. The facility is not a Domestic Violence Refuge – any applicant seeking admission with a current threat of violence will be referred to Family Violence Services in the first instance and linked with external Drug & Alcohol Community Services
 - iv. The facility is not a psychiatric facility – any applicant with an untreated psychiatric disorder will be referred in the first instance to appropriate mental health services
 - v. The facility will be operated in accordance with the Facilities Plan which includes strict guidelines about the presence of visitors on site
 - vi. The facility will have an Emergency Management Plan which clearly documents what staff and volunteers will do in the unlikely case of an emergency – and they will be trained in its application

6. Panel request for virtual tour

31. The Panel invited the Proponent to record a 'virtual' video visit to the men's facility that could be played at the Hearing as part of the Proponent's submission. In doing so the Panel stated they would be particularly interested in seeing:
- access arrangements
 - reception facilities where residents are welcomed and checked in
 - communal internal spaces
 - outdoor open spaces
32. The Proponent is preparing such a 'virtual' video of the men's facility and I will present that at the Hearing and answer any questions the Panel has seeking further clarification or explanation.
33. I will also present a virtual tour of the proposed Women's Facility and explain how each element is proposed to operate.

7. Reliance

34. I have not relied on any tests or experiments in preparing this statement.

8. Declaration

35. I have made all the inquiries that I believe are desirable and appropriate and no matters of significance which I regard as relevant have to my knowledge been withheld from the Panel.

9. Documents and materials used in preparing the statement

36. I have referred to the document commissioned by Foundation 61 and written by John Thomson of Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd (dated 23rd January 2019) and addressing:

- i. Demand for residential rehabilitation services in Geelong
- ii. Service model – Proposed Foundation 61 Women’s Service

10. Summary of opinion

37. It is my opinion that the Proposal developed by Foundation 61 for the construction of a Women’s Drug & Rehabilitation Facility at 120 Russells Road is in accordance with best practice and the real experience of Foundation 61 during the operations of the Men’s facility at 470 Williams Road Mt Duneed over the last 15 years.