



CASE STUDIES

Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment Program (MERIT)

The following case studies highlight some of the presenting issues and varying circumstances of MERIT participants. The identity of participants has been changed and some critical information modified to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

Karen

Karen is 28 years old and has been using heroin for seven years. She has a long history of drug offences relating to her heroin use. Karen appeared before the Local Court in relation to a Break and Enter Offence, when the presiding Magistrate referred her to MERIT for assessment.

Karen was assessed as suitable for MERIT and a treatment plan was developed. During the assessment process, Karen disclosed a history of sexual abuse and episodes of depression. Karen was referred to a psychiatrist for further assessment and treatment in relation to the depression.

Karen engaged well with the MERIT Program, attending support groups and individual counselling sessions with her caseworker. As she had significant debts associated with her drug use, Karen also received financial counselling in an attempt to better manage her money and reduce these debts.

Six weeks into the program, Karen relapsed and started using heroin again. She was placed into residential detoxification for one week. Following detoxification, Karen successfully completed the program and was placed on a Good Behaviour Bond for 2 years.

Eight weeks later, Karen contacted the MERIT team, stating that she had not used heroin since completing the program and had secured part time employment in her local area. She had also stopped spending time with friends who were using heroin and seemed much more positive about the future

Eric

Eric is 25 years old and lives with his partner and two children. Eric has smoked cannabis since he was 16 years old and also has a history of amphetamine use. Eric was referred to MERIT by a police officer following his arrest for Driving Whilst Disqualified and Possession of a Prohibited Drug, crimes which Eric had a history of committing.

Eric was assessed as suitable for MERIT, however, he experienced initial difficulties in committing to the program. He found it difficult to engage in group treatment processes, was disruptive and missed two counselling sessions. Eric later revealed that he had reluctantly agreed to attend MERIT because he thought the Magistrate may 'go easy' if he completed a treatment program.

Following a review of his progress and some clear and honest discussions with Eric by both the Magistrate and the MERIT caseworker, Eric decided to remain on the program and make more of an effort in treatment.

In the 10th week of the program, Eric's attitude began to change and he started to identify the negative impact of drug use in his life. After discussing these effects with his caseworker, Eric began showing improvements, particularly in group and individual counselling sessions.

Upon completion of the program, Eric received a Suspended Prison Sentence (and a Good Behaviour Bond) and appeared more willing to make changes to his lifestyle and drug use, than he had in the past.

George

George, a 33 year old Aboriginal man, had an 18 year history of chronic cannabis use together with alcohol binges for a similar length of time. He is married with 5 children.

George has a extensive history of offending behaviour and has been charged with break, enter and steal offences, malicious damage, offensive language, drink driving charges and common assault.

George was referred to MERIT by his legal representative. He was assessed as suitable and was admitted to a residential rehabilitation program. After completing the residential program, George returned home to his community.

George's family and some friends were very supportive and encouraged him to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings on a regular basis. He also commenced coaching a young men's football team in the local community. George is committed to remaining abstinent from drugs and alcohol, believing he is a much better role model for his children when he is drug free.