

MAYORS MESSAGE 461

The Prime Minister's visit to Ceduna and the Far West Coast.

In what we believe was a first ever event we had a visit from the Prime Minister - The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull together with The Minister for Indigenous Affairs – Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion, The Minister for Human Services – the Hon Alan Tudge MP and The Member for Grey – the Hon Rowan Ramsey MP.

The main purpose of this most welcome visitation was to review the progress of the Cashless Debit Card Trial which began in mid-March in our area. The Prime Minister was very available and freely mingled with local people. He indicated that he was here to listen rather than to lecture and certainly took a very keen interest in the views of all participants.

The general opinion was that the card has been an extremely worthwhile initiative with early statistics being very encouraging indeed with figures indicating that the trial has achieved some outstanding outcomes.

Some results that we were able to share with the distinguished visitors were;

- *Apprehensions for public intoxication down 54%.
- *The highest expenditure on the card is in grocery stores and supermarkets.
- *A 75% decrease in Acts intending to cause harm.
- *An 85% decrease in discharges from services at risk of harm.
- *A 23% decrease in interventions where alcohol was involved.
- *And a 38% decrease in numbers of clients requiring intervention due to alcohol.

There are areas where statistics indicate other problems – for example the number of persons being assisted through the mobile assistance patrols has increased however this is due to amended hours and active patrols, which was not the case prior to the trial.

The new Street Beat service has proved to be a vital improvement which has resulted in at least three interventions where lives may have been in danger without medical intervention.

It is very much to the credit of the Australian Government, the Prime Minister and members of his team that we received this level of interest and support. We particularly thank Rowan Ramsey our local member for helping to arrange this visit.

During a recent visit to Canberra to attend the Press Club address by Mr. Andrew (Twiggy) Forest local community leaders met the representatives from the East Kimberley region which is also participating in a trial of the Cashless Debit Card.

In common with us they also reported that their trial process is indicating similar progress to what is happening in our area. One of the really great things about this process is the quality of the leadership coming from the Aboriginal communities who should be proud of what they are achieving

The case for extensions of both trials appears to be very strong indeed.