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Far North rehab centre's expansion hopes and housing solution

KENNEDY MP Bob Katter has penned a letter to the Minister for Health seeking urgent financial support to ensure that a crucial Far North rehabilitation facility with capability of addressing the region's social and housing shortage issues remains open long term.

The Shanty Creek Residential Rehabilitation facility at Mareeba is operated by Lives Lived Well and Indigenous Business Australia, and is funded by National Indigenous Australians Agency, with the lease of its 11ha property set to conclude in October 2023.

Shanty Creek provides alcohol and drug rehabilitation services, through a 12-week program, to Indigenous people seeking support throughout Queensland, including Cape York and the Torres Strait, with a capacity to house up to 25 residents.

The focus of its program is to provide a culturally safe environment for residents to begin the healing process as a part of a community. The complexities in providing effective drug and alcohol treatment include supporting people in meeting basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical needs, addressing mental health issues and trauma.

In the past three years, more than 270 people were treated at Shanty Creek and clinical services manager Karen Camilleri said the organisation was hopeful of having its funding extended, to expand and add new services including upskilling its staff to be able to offer a variety of training and support to clients.

Ms Camilleri warned that the facility was aging rapidly and desperately needed support that assisted in training and other operational services.

"A number of people attending Shanty Creek Residential Rehabilitation are homeless or being released from incarceration and remain at high risk of future homelessness at the completion of the program which can cause a further delay for reintegration to community living," Ms Camilleri said.

"We propose to add additional program staff to assist residents in 'transition' by intensively supporting access to a variety of community services and treatment delivery options over several months. There is an additional opportunity to implement agriculture and farming education/training access on the site and develop local community member's skills for future



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employment opportunities similar to our existing Nurture program on a sister campus in Queensland.

“The site is quite large for a small program and many buildings require upgrade and repair to be utilised to their best potential. This is an opportunity to provide housing and further access to ongoing treatment at the end of the 12-week program,” she said.

Kennedy MP Bob Katter toured the site on Friday and said the facility and its staff were an important solution to the Far North’s crime and social issues.

“We badly need to extend their contract, they’re doing very challenging work and we have admiration for them,” Mr Katter said.

“These people strike me as people that can, and have done a lot to rehabilitate and train their clients, that make them much more useful citizens than they are now.

“We feel that Shanty Creek can provide part of the solution to the crime problem in Cairns and the Far North. At the very least it would alleviate the enormous social pressures, particularly from overcrowding,” he said.

Background on Lives Lived Well at Shanty Creek:

Lives Lived Well is a not-for-profit organisation working to support people impacted by drugs, alcohol and mental health concerns.

People can self-refer themselves to the services via the internet or by phoning 1300 727 957. A member of staff will contact the person to enrol them into the program most suited to their needs. If the person seeks an admission to the live in facility, staff will guide the person to help ensure they are prepared for residential rehabilitation. In addition to the rehabilitation facility, it offers a free day withdrawal support program from its Cairns office, as well as 1:1 counselling and an outreach service across the region.

In the past three years, more than 270 people were treated at Shanty Creek. Of these people, 71% were men of whom two thirds were aged between 26 and 45 years (36% were aged 26-35 years, while 29% were aged 36-45 years). The top 3 substances treated were alcohol (62%), cannabis (19%) and methamphetamine (16%). Other drugs accounted for 3%.

The services uses GPs, allied health professionals and other services to offer an integrated approach that meets the needs of the people it supports. The service welcomes opportunities for other organisations to partner with us to deliver additional supportive services to the people we support.