

“COUNSELLING
SAVED ME
FROM GOING
TO PRISON”

DAMEC

DRUG AND ALCOHOL MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION CENTRE

The Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC) provides alcohol and drug support services to culturally diverse communities. DAMEC offers counselling to individuals, families and couples overcoming alcohol or drug-related problems. Services are culturally sensitive and provided in a range of appropriate community languages.

Almost 50% of Western Sydney residents were born outside of Australia¹. DAMEC addresses the regional health priority of improving alcohol and other drug dependency rates whilst responding to the cultural needs of the community.

Leon* moved to Australia when he was four years old with his father, mother and two sisters. When Leon was 17 and had just

finished high school, his parents separated, and his father began living with another woman. Leon's sisters were both studying at the time, and, despite also doing very well in his high school examinations, the changes to family life meant that Leon did not continue his tertiary education. Instead, he started work as a removalist with his uncle.

After committing multiple driving offences, including driving under the influence of cannabis and driving with a suspended licence, Leon's licence was suspended for five years. This impacted Leon's ability to perform his job. Around this time, Leon also witnessed the murder of his cousin, who was shot in front of his uncle's house. Traumatized, Leon bought a gun to protect himself. Four months later, he was arrested and charged with illegal possession of a firearm. He was sentenced to three years in prison but was issued a Good Behaviour Bond, which limited his movement to a 500m radius and weekly check-ins at a police station. On release from prison, Leon admitted that his cannabis use had increased due to depression, panic attacks, and grief. He felt confident that he would be re-arrested.

DAMEC provided Leon with five alcohol and other drugs (AOD) meetings and four anger

management sessions. These equipped him with coping skills to process the root causes impacting his wellbeing. Support letters from DAMEC at Leon's court hearings resulted in the reinstatement of his licence and the charge for illegal possession of a gun to be dropped. The judge ordered Leon to do 480-hours of community service.

After the court hearing, Leon phoned and said, *“The counselling helped me a lot. I have seen that counselling is very important. My fear is gone, I stopped taking cannabis, and I am feeling fine. The counselling saved me from going to prison”.*

Organisations such as DAMEC empower people like Leon to recognise the root cause of their addictions and ensure they receive the tools to manage their trauma in healthier ways. The WentWest Commissioning Team works closely with DAMEC to ensure culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Western Sydney have access to quality, culturally appropriate AOD counselling and support services.

For more information about how WentWest supports Western Sydney, visit www.wentwest.com.au.

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of this client.

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), 2016 Census