

The Linker Service

Case Study: Centacare

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Bernadette Wauchope, Linker, Centacare

“I’ve been involved with the Linker Service from the very beginning when it was being co-designed. Prior to that I was a financial capability worker at Centacare Port Augusta. Having a diverse skill set has been helpful as a Linker because flexibility is one of the most important qualities you need in this role - you just never know who’s going to come through the door and what skills you might need to help them.

Being a Linker is primarily about relationships. It’s only when you develop a relationship with your client that’s built on trust that you’re able to support them by connecting them with the services they need.

‘It takes time to build trust, and you’ve got to keep showing up, being authentic and honest and non-judgmental. And you’ve got to follow through, always.’

You can’t move forward without that element of trust, and that’s especially true in First Nations communities. I don’t think many people understand the depth of grief that exists in many Aboriginal communities. I have a client in her 30s who lost her son, a very close cousin then two other family members in the space of a few months. A year later, the father of her children died. It’s just one layer of grief upon another, and it makes it so hard to be able to lift your head up high enough to deal with it.

There’s a lot of resilience too. Walking alongside another First Nations client who’s in her 60s, it’s been amazing to see how much she’s changed. She’s now taking on a bigger role in her community, organising another campfire healing, and I would say being a leader in her community. She is so much more confident – it’s like she’s grown two inches taller! What she’s done is incredible.

Being part of a network of Linkers has been so important. Many of my clients have experienced domestic violence which has never been my area of expertise, so to be able to tap into the knowledge of the Zahra Foundation or the other Linkers when we have our community of practice meetings and network meetings, to get that information is invaluable. And the support we give each other as Linkers makes a huge difference. If I’ve had a pretty horrific case, I can ring one of the other Linkers and have a chat.

A lot of people don’t fully understand what we do as a Linker; we’re walking alongside our clients and developing a relationship and trying to understand the complexity of everything they’re dealing with. Whereas most programs, your clients come in, you work out their problems and then it’s, ‘See you later’. Being a Linker is not like that – you’re working with the client in different areas of need and walking alongside the client, supporting them and empowering them so when they are ready they can do things themselves.

Working from the Port Augusta office and traveling to Marree, Copley and Beltana mostly with the Aboriginal communities we work slightly differently and include group events, like the Campfire Healing that we organised with Adnyamathanha Elders and another agency, empowering the women to take leadership roles going forward and supporting each other from the smaller communities in the region.

I love working with Wyatt. The team is really good, and I think they’re so ethical in every area. I can’t speak highly enough of The Wyatt Trust in what they’ve given and what they’ve done.

I'd love to see the Linker Network grow while keeping its uniqueness. My big dream is to try and really get things established in remote communities like Marree, Copley and Leigh Creek to get things happening in those little communities to make life easier there."

David's experience of the Linker Service

"I'm 51 years old and I live in Port Augusta. I've lived here for about 25 years. I've got an ongoing job now, a couple of days a week, being a car detailer which is good because a lot of the other jobs were just contracts.

I actually knew Bernadette from another Program she used to work at and when she started as a Linker she actually reached out and asked if I'd be interested in having a chat about getting some help through this service. And I said yes and it's actually been quite interesting to see what help is out there.

Early on I had a fair few bills, but Bernadette has helped me out a fair bit. So, it's been really good. She's helped me with some things like getting a new fridge and getting things sorted out with my bills.

When I first started, I already had a stable house, but I have my own problems in my own life. So, basically, instead of getting annoyed by trying to talk on the phone to people, I'd go and talk to her about it. And it was good because we would catch up and have coffees and make like little goals, things like make sure that all my bills are paid on time. Then we'd put all these little things in place to make sure things stay on track.

It's really good because in the past I've been on phone calls where people are telling me I haven't paid any money but I know I have paid money and it makes me want to hit my head against the wall. Bernadette is really great because she helps sort things out and she just won't take no for an answer.

Even when there's been a setback or something she's got me in the office and said, 'This is what's going on. But if you wait, we might get something better for you, or let's think about something different'. She always ends up getting an outcome eventually.

'The best part of the Linker Service is that they help you find out what is actually out there and what's available to help you.'

So many people just don't know what's out there. It helps people achieve things that matter to them because it gives us somewhere to start."