

A Day in the life of...

Charlie Dhamarrandji
Aboriginal Mental Health Worker
Galiwinku (Elcho Island)



Charlie works with the GPNNT Galiwinku Mental Health Team and can be contacted on 8987 9031

How did you become involved in becoming an AMHW? As I have had personal experiences with Mental Health problems in the past, with family and Community members. I think that this experience has helped me to gain a good understanding of Mental Health problems with Yolgnu people. My experience has taught me to separate Cultural influences from the actual illness as we are spiritual people and maintain a strong cultural way of life. Therefore it is important to understand how to apply Mental Health with Yolgnu people, where you must be Yolgnu.

What do you do in your role as an AMHW? My role is to assist people to understand Mental Health problems and some of the things that can make people have a mental health problem; such as alcohol and substance misuse, family problems, violence and stress etc. I address these issues in a 'Yolgnu' way first. I assess whether the problem is more cultural and take appropriate action if need be - Yolgnu way, with family and Community. If there is also a Mental Health problem I assist the Clinic and visiting Mental Health staff in assessing and managing clients. I work in the Clinic and around the Community. I work not only with medications (supervised by RAN) but also educational and awareness work outside the Clinic with groups and Individuals.

What is a normal day like for you? Very hectic! Our Community has a population of 2000 people and we are always busy- even over weekends, at nights and on our days off. It is 24/7!

What are the most difficult parts of your job? When new visiting Mental Health Professionals visit our Community, it can be difficult to get them to understand Cultural understanding of illness, and Yolgnu way of doing things, and its relationship to Mental health assessment.

What do you enjoy most about your job? I enjoy helping people get through their difficult experience with Mental Illness as I have also experienced problems and got through it. That's why I enjoy this job - I like to see people get well, and it comes from the heart. I don't like to see anyone go through the difficulties related to mental health.

How can other Health Professionals best access your services? They can link in through the Clinic, follow my lead in the Community in addressing any Cultural issues or concerns. And work with me when making decisions around the treatment process and when giving medications.

How did you see your role as fitting into the Primary Health Care Team? I see my role working well in the Primary Health Care Team. We work together.

What do you think your job will change in the future? I see my role as ensuring accurate assessment, diagnosis and treatment as well as making people more aware of Mental Health Problems and how to stop it from happening. This will be done by education in the Community, and by applying practical work in patients daily lives - getting them active again.

What would you like to happen? I would like to see a stronger workforce with more Yolgnu people, focusing on being practical in the Community. Doing a lot of Community work to influence being active and a practical recovery process. This could include a balance- Yolgnu way and Balanda way. That is Culture way and Mainstream Mental Health Way - this is, receiving treatment, doing community projects, being active, doing work around the Community, Hunting, Sport and Cultural Practices.