

*Presented by*



**Humane Clinic**



# *Just Listening Community*

## 6 MONTH EVALUATION REPORT

MAY - NOVEMBER 2021



**Humane Clinic, Just Listening Wamangka Tarntanyaku yuwanthi. Humane Clinicrlu, Just Listeningrlu. Kurna Miyurna yaitya yarta-mathanya, kauwi-mathanya tampinhi. Ngadlurlu Purkarna pukiana, yalarra tampinhi. Ngadlurlu Kurna Miyurnaku yaitya, parnuku tapa purruna puru purruna, kuma parnuku tuwila yartangka tampinhi. Ngadlurlu tampinhi kumartarna Yaitya Miyurna warrunangku iyangka pudnima**

*Humane Clinic would like to acknowledge the Kurna people as the traditional owners of the lands and waters of the Adelaide region on which the Humane Clinic and Just Listening operates. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect the Kurna people's cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional connection with their land, waters and community. We also acknowledge and respect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Indigenous peoples that may visit or be represented at the centre.*

## HUMANE CLINIC

Just Listening Community six monthly evaluation report May – November 2021

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Just Listening is a project of Humane Clinic, in partnership with Community Health Onkaparinga



**Humane Clinic**

Community Health Onkaparinga



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*This report is offered with thanks to the incredible leadership group at Humane Clinic without whom Just Listening could not operate. The Leadership group not only seeks to offer Just Listening in its daily work with the community but also to one another and this has been an underpinning principle that has allowed Just Listening Community to become a reality.*

*We also wish to thank from deep within our hearts the volunteers who have shown such courage in seeking to offer themselves in the service of the community. As well as the many individuals who have shown strength in believing in the need for, and value of, alternatives to the mental health system – from donations of the building, finances, and practical support to individuals with whom we have so valued honest human connection and input.*

*Finally, we wish to acknowledge the courage and strength of each individual who has walked through the doors of Just Listening Community to seek connection at a time when they needed just that. Their inner wisdom of knowing has given us the opportunity to come together as a community – not as a system.*

## Executive Summary

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The Just Listening Community is a project conceived and delivered by Humane Clinic with the support of Community Health Onkaparinga, Fay Fuller Foundation, the Hackham Community Sports and Social Club, Suzanne Elliot Foundation, and other private donors.

This report provides explanation of the Just Listening approach, delivery of the Just Listening Community as a genuine alternative for people experiencing distress, some evaluation data, key learnings, and future considerations derived from the first six-months of operation. While a 12-month evaluation was originally planned, such has been the success, learnings, and evolving innovation of Just Listening Community, the leadership team at Humane Clinic has made the decision to release this report offering a six-month evaluation.

In the first six months of service delivery (May to November 2021) Just Listening Community was open for a total of 311 hours over 81 days. During this time there were 215 individual visits from community members. All 215 visitors were offered one on one listening and human connection by trained Just Listening volunteer staff.

Key learnings from the first six months of operation were:

1. Community members visiting Just Listening experience justice in having their story heard in the context of meaningful human connection - this can reduce distress
2. Just Listening volunteers experience the mutual benefit of human connection when offering to listen – this makes them feel empowered and part of a community
3. Supporting volunteer supervision and continued skill development through Just Listening groups has been crucial
4. A safe reflective environment without disciplinary action helped volunteers to improve the practice of Just Listening
5. Applying Dissociachotic framework leads to a safe environment for all
6. Emotional distress is a response to our experiences of unsafety and the misuse of power in our homes, in the community and within systems
7. Just Listening is a cost-effective model for responding to people in distress and can deliver savings for mental health systems
8. Just Listening is a unique concept and a genuine alternative

These learnings have borne future considerations regarding expansion of service delivery in the context of cost effectiveness in comparison to other mental health services, and the potential for the model to be applied in workplaces, regional and remote communities, with young people, and in a therapeutic residential setting.

## Introduction

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The Just Listening Community is a psychotherapeutically informed alternative to accessing the hospital emergency department (ED) or other mental health services for people experiencing emotional or mental distress, in whatever way that distress may be expressed. Just Listening seeks to offer justice to a person's story and experience of living through the process of listening with the intention of meaningful human to human connection.

The Just Listening Community can be accessed by any member of the community over the age of 18. Those entering the space can remain completely anonymous if they wish. To support and respect people's anonymity, no specific or identifying data is collected aside from keeping a tally of the total number of people who walk through the door and are listened to. Informal feedback is often received verbally from people as they exit the Just Listening Community, reflecting the value of the service as a real alternative to ED for people experiencing unsafety or distress in our community.

The Just Listening Community prioritises the person and their story over the needs of the service or the needs of professionals. Reducing the medicalisation of understandable human distress is a positive step towards resolving the ever-increasing encumbrance of mental health services in people's lives.

The Just Listening Community is delivered by community volunteers who have completed specialised training in the Just Listening approach. Development of the Just Listening approach, training, and management of the service, staff, and volunteers is delivered by the multidisciplinary leadership team at Humane Clinic. Just Listening Community does not receive public funding and operates by virtue of the support of Humane Clinic, private philanthropic contributions, and public donations.

Just Listening Community is a non-coercive and non-pathologizing approach that has now demonstrated its proof of concept over 6 months of operation.

## Background

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Just Listening Community was conceived following a screening of the social action documentary *Healing Voices in Christies Beach* in 2016. Over 150 people attended the screening and the community conversation that followed.

In 2019 Humane Clinic in partnership with Oryx Cohen and PJ Monahan convened the five-day event *ReAwaken Australia*. *ReAwaken Australia* focussed on 'creating community and meaningful action to shift paradigms in mental health, trauma, and addiction' and brought together 120 people from around the world. One of these meaningful actions was the development of the [ReAwaken Manifesto for Compassionate Change](#), authored by Oryx Cohen (2019) in consultation with *ReAwaken* attendees. The Manifesto has been adopted as the value statement for Just Listening Community.

Humane Clinic has driven the development of the Just Listening Community as a genuine community led alternative for people in emotional distress and brings together a range of theories and concepts to deliver an evidence-based approach.

Moving away from the reliance on any individual profession, Just Listening Community is about returning power to the community and moving away from potentially harmful traditional mental health services, as identified by the former United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Dainius Pūras,

*"Coercion, medicalization and exclusion, which are vestiges of traditional psychiatric care relationships, must be replaced with a modern understanding of recovery and evidence-based services that restore dignity and return rights holders to their families and communities." (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2017)*

Seeking to apply learnings from alternative models operating in other settings, Just Listening Community has incorporated the four recommendations found in PriceWaterhouseCoopers' economic analysis of St. Vincent's Hospital's Safe Haven Café service (2018).

## Key activity timeline

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- **29<sup>th</sup> April 2016:** Idea conceived following screening of Healing Voices at Christies Beach
- **12<sup>th</sup> April 2019:** ReAwaken Manifesto for compassionate change created
- **1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2020:** Humane Clinic funds staff to work on development and set up of Just Listening Community
- **March 2020:** Humane Mental Health Centre building purchased and donated to Humane Clinic to open Just Listening Community
- **March 2021:** Building works on Humane Mental Health centre completed
- **March 2021:** First cohort of Just Listening volunteers complete six-week training
- **12 April 2021:** Humane Mental Health Centre officially opened by Erin Thompson, Mayor of City of Onkaparinga
- **27<sup>th</sup> May 2021:** Just Listening Community opened
- **June 2021:** 2nd cohort of Just Listening volunteers complete six-week training
- **August 2021:** Just Listening Community opening hours expanded after initial two months of service delivery
- **September 2021:** Third cohort of Just Listening volunteers complete six-week training
- **27<sup>th</sup> Nov 2021:** Six months of Just Listening Community being open to the public

# The Just Listening approach

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Just Listening is a psychotherapeutically informed approach based in various complimentary theoretical frameworks that support volunteers to offer deep listening to any person who visits. The practice philosophy of Just Listening is foremost guided by the psychotherapy approach of Humane Clinic. The intention of Just Listening is to offer justice by listening to a person and their experiences (story). Unlike many other models there is no formulation, plan, or intervention. Offering justice in listening to a person's experience of living is considered the sole purpose of the approach. In the Just Listening Community's first 6 months of operation this process has been demonstrated as an effective response to human distress.

## Core Concepts

Volunteers are trained in the following core concepts and skills over a 6-week period. The development of the practical skills involved in Just Listening are prioritised in the training. Volunteer education is supported by ongoing 'supervision' and reflective practice to develop the values and skills of the model.

**Just Listening:** *Providing a rationale and practice of listening as an umbrella approach encompassing the following elements ([Humane Clinic, 2022](#)):*

**Compassion Informed Approach:** The lens through which we hear another person's story in human-to-human connection without deferring to *models of mending* that obscure the person, the context of their distress and our ability to offer mutuality. This approach has been developed by Matt Ball, Rory Ritchie, Bec Wheatley and Berny Maywald (Ball, 2021).

**Dissociachotic:** Provides a framework of understanding the way a person presents their experience of distress, inviting the listener to recognise their role in the process of another person's distress (Ball & Picot, 2021; [Humane Clinic 2022](#)).

**Suicide Narratives:** Demonstrates that suicide is an understandable response to human distress that can provide healing for both the individual and the community. Suicide Narratives provides an alternative to risk assessment led approaches towards suicide ([Ball & Ritchie, 2020](#)).

**Power Threat Meaning Framework:** 'Summarises and integrates a great deal of evidence about the role of various kinds of power in people's lives, the kinds of threat that misuse of power pose to us and the ways we have learnt to respond to those threats.' ([Johnstone & Boyle, 2018](#))

**Emotional CPR:** An internationally recognised approach that supports people to respond to another person in an emotional crisis by three simple steps: Connecting, emPowering & Revitalizing ([Myers et al, 2021](#)).

The evidence base supporting the Just Listening model is further informed by the work of: Gans and Redler (2001); Laing (1960); Mosher, Hendrix & Fort (2004); Schwing (1954); Travelbee (1972); Guerin, Ball & Ritchie (2021); and the principle of right understanding in the context stated by Ahjan Sumedo (1992).



## What happens when you visit Just Listening Community?

When you arrive at Just Listening Community you are welcomed by the Shift Leader who introduces you to the space and the intention of the service. You are then introduced to a Listener (volunteer) and invited to choose the place you feel most comfortable within the environment to share your story. Our location in Christies Beach includes both open and more private indoor spaces, as well as outdoor spaces.

No intake paperwork is undertaken, consistent with the anonymity and confidentiality offered at Just Listening Community. This prioritises your story, as opposed to the needs of the service. An important principle here is that requiring paperwork to be completed when a person arrives creates disconnection and therefore increases the potential for unsafety.

You are welcome to be listened to for as long as you need within the opening hours.

You are free to end the connection when you feel it is right for you and are encouraged to return as often as you wish.



An outdoor listening space at Just Listening Community



## Six-month evaluation data

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The following data demonstrates the achievements of the Just Listening Community in the first six months of service delivery (27 May to 27 Nov 2021).

### HOURS OPEN:

**311 HOURS**  
(OVER **81 DAYS**)

### VISITS BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS:

**215**

### VOLUNTEER NUMBERS:

**60 CERTIFIED LISTENERS**  
**41 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS**

### SUPERVISION FOR VOLUNTEERS:

**212 JUST LISTENING GROUPS**  
(**106 HOURS**)

### TRAINING:

**80 ATTENDEES APPLIED**  
**3 TRAINING COHORTS**  
(EACH COMPLETING SIX WEEK PROGRAM)

### NUMBER OF PEOPLE DEEMED TOO HIGH RISK OR IN NEED OF MORE ACUTE SERVICES:

**0**

The Just Listing Community began delivering services on 27 May 2021. Initially the service was open to the public from 4:30pm to 7:30pm on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. These opening hours were extended after two months, with the service opening from 2:30pm to 7:30pm on Thursdays and Fridays, and 4:30pm to 7:30pm on Saturdays.

Over the first six months of service delivery the service was open for a total of 311 hours on 81 individual days. During this time there were 215 individual visits from community members to the Just Listening Community. All 215 visitors were offered one on one listening and human connection by trained Just Listening volunteer staff. As visitors are welcome to stay for as long as they feel they need (during opening hours), the length of visits varies depending on the individual, with the longest offering of listening lasting approximately five hours, and the shortest lasting approximately five minutes.

212 Just Listening groups were facilitated for volunteers before and after shifts at just listening. This equates to 106 hours of supervision and continued skill development to support Just Listening volunteers in their role as listeners.

There was a general trend of visits by community members increasing over the length of the six-month evaluation period, as awareness of Just Listening Community increased. Although no geographic data is collected, visitors shared that they had travelled to the Just Listening Community from all parts of the Adelaide metropolitan area, while many resided nearby, others travelled more than 60km to seek connection.

Three separate cohorts of volunteers completed six week Just Listening training programs. 80 community members in total attended across the three cohorts, with 60 trainees (or 75%) graduating as certified Just Listeners. Of these graduates, 41 (or 68%) continued as regular volunteers.



Volunteers connecting during a Just Listening *supervision* group

## Key learnings

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### 1. Community members visiting Just Listening experience justice in having their story heard in the context of meaningful human connection - this can reduce distress

Community members accessing the Just Listening Community have overwhelmingly shared that they found the service to be of value. Many visitors expressed that being deeply listened to without being judged or offered strategies or solutions was meaningful and allowed them to speak about what they felt was important in their story, with the result of a reduction in their distress. Visitors also reported that they valued being able to speak openly without fear of being detained or having mental health services called.

Many community members reported that it was not their first time using the service when arriving at Just Listening – confirming that Just Listening had been of value on previous visits.

“Thanks for listening” is a gratitude often heard as a community member leaves the service.

*“I had good experiences there (mainstream mental health services), until the last time I went there and they said, ‘why do you keep coming here, you have to stop coming, there’s nothing we can do for you’, so I decided to come to Just Listening instead.” (Just Listening Community visitor)*

*“It’s good here, because you get to speak to a real individual, when you visit the mental health system you get the same response from everyone, a system response.” (Just Listening Community visitor)*

*“Yeah! I just offloaded a whole bunch of shit and you just listened, it was great. I feel much better.” (Just Listening Community visitor)*

*“I visited Just Listening after work when I was pretty distressed by workplace issues. I was greeted by a wonderful human who listened with such intention that I could have talked forever. I was so grateful that the listener could hear me and I could speak without threat of being judged or having to explain myself for the way I was feeling.” (Just Listening Community visitor)*

## 2. Just Listening volunteers experience the mutual benefit of human connection when offering to listen – this makes them feel empowered and part of a community

A survey of volunteers at the Just Listening Community overwhelmingly reported that they found volunteering to be of value. Many volunteers commented on the mutual value of supporting another community member and the positive outcomes that this had on their own mental health and wellbeing.

Volunteers reported that the training prepared them to genuinely listen to another person as a therapeutic alternative to mainstream mental health services. They described feeling empowered by listening and responding to individuals within the service. This sense of empowerment was also reported within family, work and community spaces outside of the service.

“Thanks for listening” is a gratitude often heard once a volunteer has reflected in the Just Listening group check in and check out *supervision* spaces. Offering justice through listening is the consistent approach, whether volunteers are supporting one another or supporting community members visiting the service.

Some volunteers access Just Listening Community when not volunteering as a support in their own lives, indicating that Just Listening Community is a resource that doesn't delineate between 'us' and 'them'.

The experience of volunteers is characterised by the opportunity to be present and in support of another community member, as well as finding deep value and connection in the process of being part of a community.

***“Listening to people gives me a real buzz.” (Just Listening Community volunteer)***

***“The Just Listening Community is peaceful and has something special.” (Just Listening Community volunteer)***

***“I am so grateful to be a part of this beautiful loving, compassionate community. ‘Thank you’ would never be enough words to express how I feel towards the Just Listening Community crew.” (Just Listening Community volunteer)***

***“Thank you for offering such a beautiful space for community and the volunteers.” (Just Listening Community volunteer)***

***“It's an honour and a great pleasure to volunteer.” (Just Listening Community volunteer)***

### 3. Supporting volunteer supervision and continued skill development through Just Listening groups has been crucial

At the start of each shift Just Listening volunteers come together for a 30 minute 'Just Listening group' check-in. Volunteers are invited to share how they are feeling entering the space and reflect on their readiness to listen to someone. Volunteers may also wish to use this time to reflect on experiences and learnings from previous Just Listening shifts. Other members of the group offer compassion and connection through Just Listening and eCPR responses.

Volunteers also check-out at the end of a Just Listening shift with another 30 minute 'Just Listening group'. This is an opportunity to reflect on experiences during the shift, including any learnings in relation to practicing the Just Listening model.

These groups equate to a full hour of intentional supervision support for volunteers for each shift at Just Listening Community. This supervision support is central to the Just Listening approach. These groups not only serve to support and develop volunteers in the Listener role but also ensure the model is maintained. The process during reflection is to offer justice to the individual in relation to their own experience of listening.

During reflections a rule of thumb appears to have emerged – when a listener reflects that they feel good after listening, we can hear that they have facilitated the Just Listening approach through their description of the process. When the listener reflects that they do not feel good about the process, we often hear they have not facilitated the model and instead have fallen into old ways of 'listening'.

If a volunteer feels they are not able to offer listening even though they are on the roster, they are still encouraged to be on shift, participate in the check-in and check-out, seek connection by hanging out with other volunteers, or be listened to one-on-one by another volunteer in the Just Listening space. Many volunteers have expressed that this is a unique approach they have not experienced in any other workplace or volunteer role.

***“One afternoon we started our check-in and as we each shared our story it turned out every single member of the volunteer group had things happening in their lives outside of Just Listening and expressed that they didn't feel they were able to offer listening today.***

***Once we had all shared this, each volunteer, one by one, said the opportunity to be honest about where they were at and receive support from the group without judgement had made them start to feel different.***

***By the end of the check-in every volunteer had expressed that they were now actually feeling 'up for listening' today. Some even began playfully arguing about who would get to be the first to listen to someone when the service opened.” (Just Listening Shift Leader)***

#### **4. A safe reflective environment without disciplinary action helped volunteers to improve the practice of Just Listening**

An environment of compassion and support is key to facilitating volunteer reflection, learning and adjustment. The Just Listening approach is consistently practiced with volunteers as it is with visitors, in the knowledge that the volunteers as individuals will make meaning in sharing their stories of listening and find their own solutions to better facilitate the approach.

#### **5. Applying Dissociachotic framework leads to a safe environment for all**

The Just Listening Community does not employ any security personnel or exclude individuals from the service due to their behaviour. In the first six months of operation 215 people have used the service. There have been no incidences of violence or aggression, and no ambulances or police services have been required.

One of the central concepts applied in the Just Listening Community is the Dissociachotic framework (Ball & Picot, 2021). Dissociachotic framework provides legitimacy for any presentation of experience by an individual. Initially the concept referred to the 'psychotic' phenomena that a person may describe when reaching out in distress. However, Dissociachotic framework can be understood as any experience, expression, or behaviour that places distance between the primary reality of a person and the threat in human-to-human relationship. The Dissociachotic presentation (e.g. voices, suicide) defends against this threat by creating space in between the person experiencing the threat and the other. This occurs by the person *putting* the Dissociachotic reality between themselves and the other as a form of dissociation (setting themselves at variance to the other). This can include the experience of suicide as well as any other experience and behaviour that a person may become absorbed in.

Dissociachotic framework invites the listener to be in relationship with whatever expression a person offers, not seeking to get rid of or 'treat' away that expression. The approach places deep value on any expression of distress as an invitation to be in relationship with the person in their legitimate reality. Dissociachotic framework places emphasis on the listener recognising their own role in the human-to-human encounter, rather than emphasising and requiring the person in distress needing to change. In doing so, Just Listening volunteers offer Justice to the person in distress to be as they are with or without a change in their presenting expression while narrating their unique story.

#### **6. Emotional distress is a response to our experiences of unsafety and the misuse of power in our homes, in the community and within systems**

All people visiting the Just Listening Community have come with a story to tell. When we listen with intent to offer justice to a person's story, we hear what mainstream systems label as 'symptoms of mental illness' are more meaningfully explained by the individual as a response to what they have experienced in their environment.

The list below represents some of the themes Just Listening volunteers have heard within the stories of fellow community members visiting the Just Listening Community. Informed by the Power Threat Meaning Framework (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018) these experiences are grouped by operation of power and the threat responses that people utilise to survive.



The operation of power leading to distress presented at Just Listening Community	Threat Responses presented by people at Just Listening Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Childhood sexual abuse</li> <li>Cultural and linguistic discrimination</li> <li>Relationship difficulties</li> <li>Rape/gang rape</li> <li>Domestic violence</li> <li>Racism</li> <li>Workplace problems/bullying</li> <li>Isolation/loneliness</li> <li>Power imbalances in families</li> <li>Financial problems/poverty</li> <li>Not feeling heard</li> <li>Let down, mistreated, or harmed by mental health system</li> <li>Impact and/or harm of medication</li> <li>Powerlessness related to medication and prescribing</li> <li>Homelessness</li> <li>Power imbalances with psychiatrists</li> <li>Physical health conditions or fear/anxiety related to COVID-19</li> <li>Sexism and misogyny</li> <li>Discrimination in community and institutions due to a mental health diagnosis</li> <li>Family breakdown</li> <li>Loss of purpose in family or community</li> <li>Death of loved ones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suicidal experiences</li> <li>Altered states (voices, visions, dissociation)</li> <li>Agitation and anger</li> <li>Self-injury</li> <li>Drug and alcohol use</li> <li>Physical health issues</li> <li>Sadness</li> <li>Isolation and loneliness</li> <li>Hopelessness and desperation</li> <li>Confusion</li> <li>Suspicion and distrust</li> <li>Difficulty expressing self</li>   <li>Panic</li> <li>Insomnia</li>   <li>Crying</li> <li>Inability to eat</li> <li>Ruminating, reflecting, interpreting, meaning-making, planning</li> <li>Anxiety and nervousness</li> <li>Grief</li> </ul>

## **7. Just Listening is a cost-effective model for responding to people in distress and can deliver savings for mental health systems**

Over the first six months of operation the average cost per individual presentation to Just Listening Community equated to approximately \$240. Comparatively, the average cost of a non-admitted presentation to public hospital emergency departments in South Australia in 2018-19 was \$667 (Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, 2021).

This equates to a cost saving of 64% for any person presenting at Just Listening Community as an alternative to attending a hospital emergency department.

*(This cost saving is likely to be even greater in real terms, given that the figure for Just Listening Community is calculated from the first six months of operation, during which the service was not at*

full capacity and maintained resourcing to service more individual presentations within the same operating cost. Operating at full capacity the average cost per presentation at Just Listening Community would be considerably less. Additionally, the most recently available data from the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority is more than two years old. The data suggests that the cost of emergency department presentations in South Australia is increasing annually and thus likely to be notably higher for the same period to which costings for the Just Listening Community refers.)

## 8. Just Listening is a unique concept and a genuine alternative

In the first six months of operation Just Listening has defined itself as a unique concept and a genuine alternative to other mental health services in responding to emotional distress.

Some community members said they had decided to come to the Just Listening Community rather than visiting the hospital ED. Others accessed Just Listening after being turned away from, or discharged from, mainstream services. Just Listening Community has also been utilised by community members as part of their support or discharge plan from mental health services.

As an indication of Just Listening Community’s role as a genuine alternative, some people reported that they experience barriers to approaching mainstream services and for the first time felt able to access support for their emotional distress that felt safe.

Mainstream approach	Just Listening approach
People seeking support must wait to be seen without being offered human connection, sometimes for several hours.	All people entering the Just Listening space are greeted warmly and invited to be in connection with a Just Listening volunteer. If all volunteers are busy, then the Shift Leader begins a group space so that no one entering the service is left alone to suffer the risk of disconnection.
All people must undergo an assessment of their distress – a subjective judgement by the professional.	All people are offered respect, love, and dignity by being invited to define their own experience of what is happening for them, or what has happened to them. Justice is offered through another human being listening deeply to their story.
If the person is assessed to be ‘low risk’ then they are not offered immediate support and must leave.	No story is too big or too small, all people and ways of being are equally respected. People are welcome to stay and be in connection for as long as they need, within the opening hours of the service.
If a person is assessed to be ‘high risk’ then they may be detained, subject to treatment orders and forcibly medicated or ‘treated’ under the Mental Health Act.	It is acknowledged that the best way to offer safety is to be in human connection. As a community run service no person is detained against their will. The person seeking support has a right to define what is best for them in that moment, with the support of Just Listening volunteers and the Shift Leader. In the first six months of operation no person entering the Just Listening Community was deemed ‘too much’ or ‘too high risk’. Each person entering the service has received support through human connection. No

	ambulances or police services were required during the first six months of operation.
If a person continues to experience distress and is seeking further support and connection, they may be restricted from accessing mainstream services. Staff may begin to mistreat people who seek support often, seeing them as 'annoying', 'difficult', 'manipulative', 'attention seeking' or 'challenging'.	<b>A person is encouraged to seek support through the Just Listening Community as often as they need, within the opening hours of the service. People returning to use the service again are welcomed warmly. Volunteers often experience happiness and gratitude when a person visits the service again, as it means the person finds the Just Listening approach of value. Volunteers reflect deeply in the check-in/check-out <i>supervision</i> space about their ability to offer justice, connection, and compassion. Volunteers seek to treat all people equally with love and respect, regardless of whether it is their first time using the service, or whether they come regularly.</b>

## Summary

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Just Listening Community has demonstrated the possibility of providing a unique community led alternative for people in emotional distress as an alternative to statutory mental health services. In the first six months of operation the Just Listening Community has produced evidence that people in our community have common human experiences (story) and understandable threat responses to these experiences that offer explanation for what is labelled in other settings as 'symptoms of mental illness'. Just Listening Community has further shown that there is evident value in the justice experienced when a person's story is heard. The non-pathologizing and non-coercive approach has been demonstrated to be safe and provided greater choice in accessing assistance for community members who attended.

The models of continual reflection and development of skills through a supportive volunteer community has ensured the quality and consistency of the service is maintained. Similarly, this has been demonstrated within the leadership approach. At Just Listening Community there is only one approach, that of Justice in Listening and the value of meaning making through a person sharing their story and being heard.

The primary concerns of some community members and professionals prior to opening – of risk and difficulty maintaining volunteer numbers – have not eventuated. The Just Listening Community has proven to be a safe place for those seeking human connection. Risk is managed by offering further humane and compassionate intention to connect. Moving away from an approach to risk assessment that creates disconnection and requires intervention by 'expert' professionals, the risk approach at Just Listening has been to ensure the maintenance of connection. The number of volunteers to facilitate a Just Listening Community three days per week has been achieved with ease. Places on all volunteer trainings have been filled within one week of being offered and a consistent waitlist is in place for future trainings, demonstrating the will and intention of community to support one another.

## Future Considerations:

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1. Additional funding would facilitate a 7 day a week service, offering a cost-effective means of reducing demand on mainstream services in the context of increasing mental health presentations at emergency departments and other mental health facilities.
2. There is evident need for Just Listening to be expanded to a new model of residential facilities for people experiencing ongoing distress, particularly suicidal distress and altered states.
3. The efficacy of a community model based on hearing the origins of people's distress has been proven and bold action is required to revolutionise mental health responses.
4. Just Listening is a replicable model that can be adapted with consideration for local and cultural safety in new settings.
5. Just Listening is a model that can fill a gap in health service provision and provide savings within public health systems through building capacity in community. Just Listening demonstrates the value of community being the first point of contact for any person in understandable distress.
6. Just Listening is a model that can be facilitated in country and regional areas as a cost-effective alternative in the absence of other services due to low population density.
7. Just Listening has potential to be tailored, taught, and facilitated by young people for young people.
8. Just Listening is a model that can be applied beyond health settings – the approach can be introduced in workplaces and organisations to support staff wellbeing, communication and promote productivity.

**“Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot un-educate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours”**

**Cesar Chavez**

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