

Caraniche has been working with young people in youth justice since January 2014. Today, a team of 26 clinicians are evolving their expertise to help change the lives of more young people and the broader community. Samantha has been leading this team since its inception and has been with Caraniche as a Psychologist, Trainer and Manager since 2005.

What's it like working with young people in youth justice?

We work with young people in the Parkville and Malmsbury youth justice precincts, and those serving community based orders. They're aged between 10 and 21. It's a huge chronological and developmental age span. Many of the young people we work with come from traumatic backgrounds and often their neurological, psychological, emotional and spiritual development has been affected.

Our team is excellent at taking their training as psychologists or social workers and applying it in a way that's incredibly responsive to the needs of young people. We adapt our approach to meet the needs of a specific young person every time – your first session of the day will be quite different for the next young person you're working with an hour later. Our work is founded on best practice but the ability to tailor our delivery to the needs of the client is what the team excels at.

We also respond to very different cultures and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and we work with Indigenous Australian and Maori and Pacific Islander young people. So it's crucial that we work well with cultural workers from youth justice and the community, and try to link in with their networks when we can.

Has anything surprised you in your role?

We're learning all the time! Take the idea of 'family'. It means something very different if you've lived in a refugee camp: you might call someone brother because you've slept next to

them for three years and kept each other safe. We've done a lot of work in learning how to understand and respond to the refugee journey, because psychology, psychologists and mental health intervention can be alien concepts to some of these young people.

We also have a large cohort of young people who have had contact with the child protection system, some where they've predominantly grown up in residential care. So the most significant person in their lives is often a residential worker who may have been there for only a few years. We've had to look at our use of language and change the concept of family to 'who's important in your life'.

Have you always worked with young people?

I actually worked in the Royal Air Force for 12 years before migrating to Australia. I did my undergraduate and postgraduate studies while serving in personnel and training and developed an interest in psychology after working at a military hospital.

My first role after leaving the Royal Air Force was as a Psychological Assistant at a youth justice centre. I then became an Outreach Worker at a child and adolescent mental health service for 5 to 16 year olds. I wanted to gain clinical experience because it was my second career and I felt like, as an older person, I had to catch up!



Q&A

With Youth Services Manager, Dr Samantha Beeken



What made you decide to work in forensic psychology?

My masters' thesis was on evaluating restorative justice interventions for young offenders. I've always seen forensic psychology as being able to work with people who offend in a way that by default also supports healing in the community. For me, forensic psychology is about having a realistic ability to intervene and make things better for everybody.

When did you come to Caraniche?

I came to work for Caraniche 12 years ago when I first moved to Australia. I was an Intensive Therapist at Mangoneet Correctional Centre before becoming the Senior Clinician and later Regional Manager of five prisons across Victoria. In 2014 when we won the contract to deliver services in Youth Justice I was thrilled to take this role.

I never stop being a psychologist though. I see everything I do as working for better outcomes for the community and the young people who offend. What I'm always trying to do is help both individuals and systems to respond better. That's critical to why I love this job.

Even though I don't get to work one-on-one with young people – which is what I'd love to do as I'm a psychologist at heart – I can work across hundreds of young people because I'm in a

unique and privileged position as the Service Manager. I never take my psychologist hat off.

My Doctorate in Clinical Psychology explored the treatment of OCD and family systems. At the heart of what I try to do is look after my own system: the wonderful group of psychologists and social workers who deliver the front line services. If they're not healthy, validated and trained, they can't do their best work. I'm also part of a broader system of leadership at Caraniche and we're trying to achieve great things as a business.

You need effective systems to support change in individuals and organisations.

How does your team stay healthy and validated?

There's nothing better than when one of the staff comes in and says, "We've got a letter, call or message from so-and-so and they say, 'I've got a job, I haven't been involved with the criminal justice system for 12 months, and my first baby is on the way'."

We only need one a year. The entire team can live off that – it's literally all it takes! We go really far to share those stories. If we've helped one young person change their trajectory then it's worth all of us being here every day.

It only takes one.

“If we’ve helped one young person change their trajectory then it’s worth all of us being here every day”

– Dr. Samantha Beeken, Youth Services Manager .