



VICTIMS and WITNESSES of CRIME COURT SUPPORT Inc.

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Patrons: Professor S. Caroline Taylor AM

*2014 Sydney Mid-West Region Volunteer Team of The Year Award  
2013 Sydney City East Volunteer of the Year Award  
2012 Sydney City East Highly Commended Volunteer Team of the Year Award*

**VWCCS Inc.**  
LEVEL ONE  
DOWNING CENTRE COURTS

**ALL MAIL:** PO BOX A4  
SOUTH SYDNEY NSW 1235

PHONE: **02 9287 7671**

[info@vwccs.org.au](mailto:info@vwccs.org.au)

# IPART REPORT - 22 DECEMBER 2015 TRANSPORT / FARES RECOMMENDATION

## VWCCS Inc - SUBMISSION

20 JANUARY 2016

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**VWCCS Inc. HAS ROOMS AT:**

DOWNING CENTRE LOCAL AND DISTRICT COURTS, PARRAMATTA  
CHILDREN'S, LOCAL AND DISTRICT COURTS, WAVERLEY LOCAL COURT,  
BATHURST AND ORANGE LOCAL AND DISTRICT COURTS

**OTHER COURTS:**  
BY APPOINTMENT

**WEBSITE:**

[www.vwccs.org.au](http://www.vwccs.org.au)  
ABN 34783564316

# VWCCS Inc - SUBMISSION

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***IPART will be recommending to the NSW Government (among many other things), that the public transport fare “cap” for seniors and self-funded retirees should rise from the current \$2.50 to \$9.00. This is likely to have a significant impact on volunteer organizations such as VWCCS as well as its future recruitment of volunteers. To date, the IPART Report has received very little publicity, which is of considerable concern to VWCCS.***

I am the Founder / Director of *Victims and Witnesses of Crime Court Support Inc (VWCCS)*, a court support volunteer agency giving assistance to victims and prosecution witnesses during their justice journey through the criminal courts in NSW ([www.vwccs.org.au](http://www.vwccs.org.au)).

VWCCS has been operating since 2006, providing a unique court support service which does not duplicate any other court support service operating in the New South Wales or Commonwealth criminal jurisdictions. The organization is operated entirely by volunteers of which there are 136 at the present time, and although it is funded in kind by the Attorney General of NSW by the provision of dedicated Safe Rooms at the Downing Centre, Parramatta, Waverley, Orange and Bathurst (Central West NSW) Courts, VWCCS receives no financial support other than some small club grants and a one-off donation from the Scully Foundation. VWCCS' *volunteer* status does not detract from its reputation as a dedicated, highly professional organization operating free of charge for the benefit and care of vulnerable victims and witnesses of crime.

As abovementioned, VWCCS manages 136 volunteers, with 72 at Parramatta Justice Precinct (Parramatta Children's, Local and District Courts), 56 at the Downing Centre who when requested also cover Darlinghurst and King Street Supreme Courts, 2 at Waverley Court and 6 covering both the Orange and Bathurst Courts in the Central West of New South Wales. Leaving aside the 6 volunteers who work in Orange and Bathurst, the rest of our volunteers all travel by public transport to reach their place of voluntary work on a regular basis.

The 6 VWCCS volunteers who share work between Orange and Bathurst Courts may also travel to Sydney for VWCCS' four annual Refresher / Training days. Further, on occasions they may be requested to travel to other regional Courts such as Lithgow, Cowra, Mudgee, Parkes or Forbes to assist victims and witnesses of crime who are called by the Police to give evidence and on most of these occasions will utilize public transport (ie bus or train).

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VWCCS' Submission now points to the following breakdown of ages of its volunteers which may give some indication of the impact of IPART's recommended fare increase should it be accepted. The VWCCS volunteer pool consists of –

- 22 people aged between 60 and 64 years;
- 60 people aged 65 years and over; and
- the rest of VWCCS volunteers are made up of students and those under 60 years of age.

All VWCCS volunteers aged between 60 and 64 will be affected by the proposed fare increases if implemented. Many of the volunteers 65 and over are most likely self-funded retirees given their professional background, and will be affected by the changes if they are implemented. The balance of VWCCS Volunteers being students and those under 60 years of age will also be affected to the extent of any increases arising from other recommended changes.

Because of the nature of its work, the potential drop out rate if VWCCS members stopped volunteering or reduced their commitment due to substantially higher public transport fares, is of major concern to VWCCS as a vital organization assisting victims and witnesses of crime.

To give you examples of the cost to VWCCS' Volunteer Court Support Assistants (CSAs) should the IPART Report recommendation be accepted by the NSW Government, I request you to consider the following:

- Often VWCCS is called upon to assist victims in historical sexual assault cases (NSW District Court). If a particular case requires VWCCS to roster 4 of its CSAs for 3 weeks because of the number of witnesses required to give evidence, it will mean the 4 CSAs will be required to attend court 5 days per week over the 3 weeks bearing their own transport expenses of up to \$9:00 per day for up to 15 days. When VWCCS requests the 4 CSA volunteers to assist, it is understood by those 4 CSAs that they will remain with their appointed client victims / witnesses until they finish giving evidence - continuity of CSA / client is of the utmost importance in such sensitive trials.
- During 2015 VWCCS assisted witnesses in the Coronial Inquest of *Man Haron Monis* (Lindt Cafe Siege) and will be continuing to assist witnesses when it is scheduled to sit for a number of months throughout 2016. VWCCS Roster requires 2 to 3 CSAs per sitting day throughout the Coronial Inquest.

VWCCS is supporting State Government employees such as the NSW Police and Police Prosecutors, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions including Crown Prosecutors, Instructing Solicitors, the Witness Assistance Service and the NSW Justice Department. It is therefore ironic that if the IPART Report is accepted and the Opal Gold Card's fares are raised, the State Government will be seen to *penalize* VWCCS' volunteers financially, and risk losing its services, when in fact VWCCS Volunteers are assisting the State Government free of any cost to it.

It should **not be taken for granted by the NSW Government** that because some VWCCS' volunteers may have the *ability to pay* increased fares it will nevertheless be the case that they will be paying substantially extra in fares to enable them to undertake *free* work for the general community and the NSW Government.

Bearing the above in mind, I suggest this will be viewed not only by VWCCS' Volunteers, but other significant sections of the community as grossly unfair. It is of grave concern to VWCCS, but understandable, that many of its Volunteers may say *no* to such a proposition and either cease their volunteer work or reduce their availability for Volunteer work. In other words, if the IPART recommendation is accepted by the NSW Government, it will have a significant affect on VWCCS' ability to continue its service, or indeed exist.

The acceptance by the NSW Government of the IPART recommendation, would of course be completely inconsistent with the Government's statement that:

***The NSW Government is serious about supporting local community participation and supporting the volunteering community to continue to develop across the state.***

VWCCS trusts that the NSW Government **will abide by its abovementioned statement, and REJECT** IPART's recommendation relating to an increase in the existing cap to public transport fares affecting seniors aged 60 – 64, irrespective of their financial status, and self-funded retirees.



**Pieta Thornton, OAM**  
**President / Director**  
**For and On Behalf of VWCCS Inc**

**20 January 2016**

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