



Virtual Tour Transcript

Contents

OUTSIDE	1	INSIDE COURT.	5
INSIDE, GROUND FLOOR	2	LEVEL TWO	7
LEVEL ONE	3	DIRECTOR'S OFFICE	8
REGISTRY	4	CONCIERGE SECURITY	9

The City of Yarra



OUTSIDE

Welcome to the Neighbourhood Justice Centre, Australia's first community justice centre.

The NJC is located right in the heart of the City of Yarra in Victoria, Australia, and has been serving the local community here since 2007. The City of Yarra was chosen as the most suitable site for a community justice centre in 2007, because its suburbs had some of the state's highest crime rates.

Yarra also had – and still has – the state's highest concentration of public housing, as well as high rates of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Let's go inside and take a look around.





INSIDE, GROUND FLOOR

The NJC was deliberately designed as a community centre that has a court, rather than the other way around. So its court is out of the way, up on the first floor.

After stepping into the NJC, the first things visitors notice are the open spaces, natural light, colour and plenty of seating. There's also a rotating art exhibition that's organised by a local neighbourhood house. So, people who use the Centre get to see work by artists from the local community.

People come to the Centre for a number of different reasons. They might have a matter in court, an appointment with Community Corrections, a lawyer or one of the treatment and support services staff, or they could have organised to use a meeting room.

The Centre's meeting rooms aren't just available to NJC staff. They're also used by over 4000 community members every year for education, training, social services, programs and meetings.

The Information Team is located on the ground floor and they're often the first point of contact for clients who have appointments or are looking for directions to the court upstairs. The Information Team respond to phone calls, emails and to local residents who walk in looking for help, wanting to use the phone or just have someone to listen to them.

There's also a children's room with plenty of toys and activities. Parents can spend time here with their children, like if they're waiting for a matter to be heard in court.

There's also an outside courtyard area for people who want some fresh air and sunshine.

We'll take the stairs up to the Court Floor next – but there's also a lift for anyone with special access needs.



LEVEL ONE

When people come up to the first floor to visit the court, the first thing they see is the Centre's in-house canteen, which is aptly named Just Delights (renamed Just Bites in 2019).

The Just Delights canteen is just one example of how the local community can be incorporated into a justice centre. Just Delights is managed by a local neighbourhood house and staffed by local residents who receive training in hospitality and food-handling.

Their chef works in the Centre's kitchen preparing hot lunches four days a week. People coming to court assessed as being in need can have a free meal from Just Delights on the day of their court matter.

Staff and anyone else visiting the Centre can buy their lunch at the canteen. Free tea, coffee and milo are also available to all visitors.

REGISTRY

Depending on what kind of matters are being heard in the court on a particular day, the waiting area outside the courtroom can be bustling and full of people, or relatively quiet.

Like the rest of the building, there's lots of natural light in the waiting area, and plenty of spaces where people can sit and wait and have discreet conversations – or get personal support and non-legal information from one of the Court Network volunteers.

The interview rooms on the court floor are available for lawyers and other NJC staff to meet with their clients and for court users to have private conversations. Instead of a booking system, the rooms were designed to be glass-fronted so it's clear whether they are in use or not. If a room is empty, it's available.

This digital screen just outside the courtroom is called MyCase and it was inspired by an airport lounge departures board. MyCase is Australia's first court user messaging system.

After people check in at Registry, MyCase connects them with information about their court case via

their smart phone. It lets them know who they need to see before their case will be ready to proceed and at what stage their matter is up to.

The decking to the right provides people with an opportunity to get some fresh air or eat their lunch outside while they're spending time at the Centre.

Like other courts, Registry at the NJC performs the important function of organising and co-ordinating court proceedings and supporting the court and all court users, including clients, NJC staff, lawyers and police.

There's a couple of ways Registry at the NJC differs from other courts:

- Instead of people's names being called out on a loudspeaker when the court is ready to hear their matter, lawyers and support staff are paged. The lawyer then locates their client and accompanies them into the courtroom.
- Also, as the first point of contact for people accessing the court, Registry staff can let them know of the treatment and support services available at the Centre and refer them if need be.





INSIDE COURT

Let's have a look inside the courtroom now. There's just one courtroom at the NJC and it's a multi-jurisdictional court hearing around 4000 cases each year.

Multi-jurisdictional means the court has different functions on different days.

Three days a week it's a magistrates' court, hearing criminal matters and civil matters including family violence, personal safety, licence restoration and bail applications. It also sits once a month as a Children's Court hearing criminal matters – and once a month is Aboriginal Hearing Day.

The rest of the time, the courtroom is used as a tribunal. Residential tenancy, guardianship and civil matters are heard when the court sits as VCAT, which stands for the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Also, the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal, or VOCAT, makes decisions about providing financial assistance to victims of violent crime.

With a view overlooking the neighbourhood, the position of the court room reminds people that no matter why they're in court, they're still part of the local community.

There's one magistrate at the NJC who

presides over all Magistrates' Court matters, Children's Court and VOCAT.

One of the key differences between the NJC Court and other magistrates' courts is that at the NJC the client sits at the bar table next to their lawyer. Also, NJC legislation requires the magistrate to explain things in plain English so the client understands what's happening throughout the proceedings.

On the wall there's a screen so people can appear in court via audio visual link from another location, from custody, or from the NJC's onsite remote witness room.

There's a number of reasons people might appear in court via an audio-visual link, including convenience, saving on costs and travel time, enhancing safety, minimising emotional harm and in response to legislative requirements about whether people in custody need to attend court in person or not.

There are two holding cells at the NJC for people who are brought in from custody to attend court. These are not overnight cells.

Next we'll have a look inside the Centre's quiet rooms.



QUIET ROOMS

The NJC aims to ensure that everyone feels safe in the building. In any situation where a court user fears for their safety, they can utilize one of the Centre's secure quiet rooms – like this one. In here, clients can wait and meet with staff such as their lawyers or a family violence worker.

In this room, there's a specially designed children's area behind a glass door so that parents can have sensitive conversations with staff and lawyers without their children overhearing.

Now we'll take a look at the top floor.

LEVEL TWO

On the second floor of the NJC there are more meeting rooms which are used by staff, local residents, student volunteers and community groups. There's seating for people who need to wait and refreshments can be made available.

Let's check out the staff area next.

This secure open plan staff area is essential to the integrated services model of the NJC. It facilitates collaboration between the Client Services team, lawyers, mediator, police prosecutors and Community Corrections staff, all working towards improving both our clients' lives and the safety and wellbeing of our local community.

Now we'll head back downstairs, to the ground floor where we started the tour.



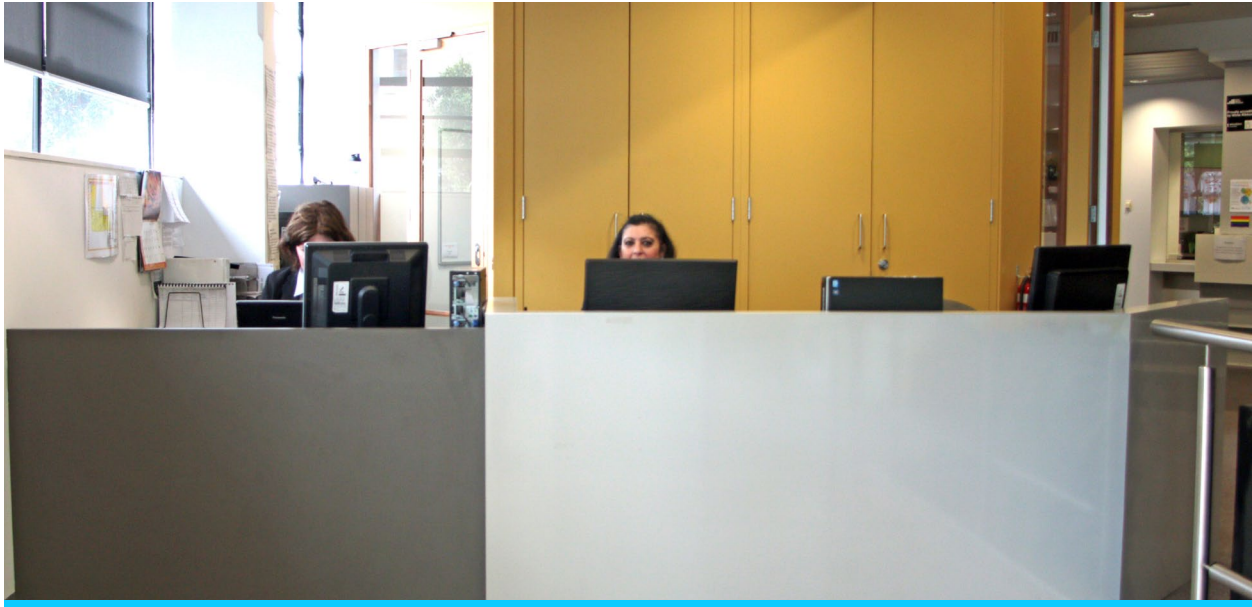


DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

Here we are outside the Director's office, which sits – like the courtroom – behind a glass window. This signals to everyone who comes here that the Centre is run transparently.

Next to the Director in another open-plan office sit teams working on Crime Prevention and Community Justice, Community Conferencing, Strategy and Innovation, Education and Communications.





CONCIERGE SECURITY

Finally, here we are back at the entrance to the building. The desk on the right-hand side, is where the security guards sit. The NJC has a dynamic security model.

There are at least three security staff on duty at all times. They take turns sitting at this front desk performing a concierge function, greeting people, offering assistance and directions, as well as monitoring the CCTV from inside and outside the building.

They also patrol the building inside and out, observe court proceedings through the court's glass entrance and monitor the court waiting area.

Thanks for joining us on this tour of the Neighbourhood Justice Centre. Check out the list of resources we've provided if you'd like some more information and discussion topics.