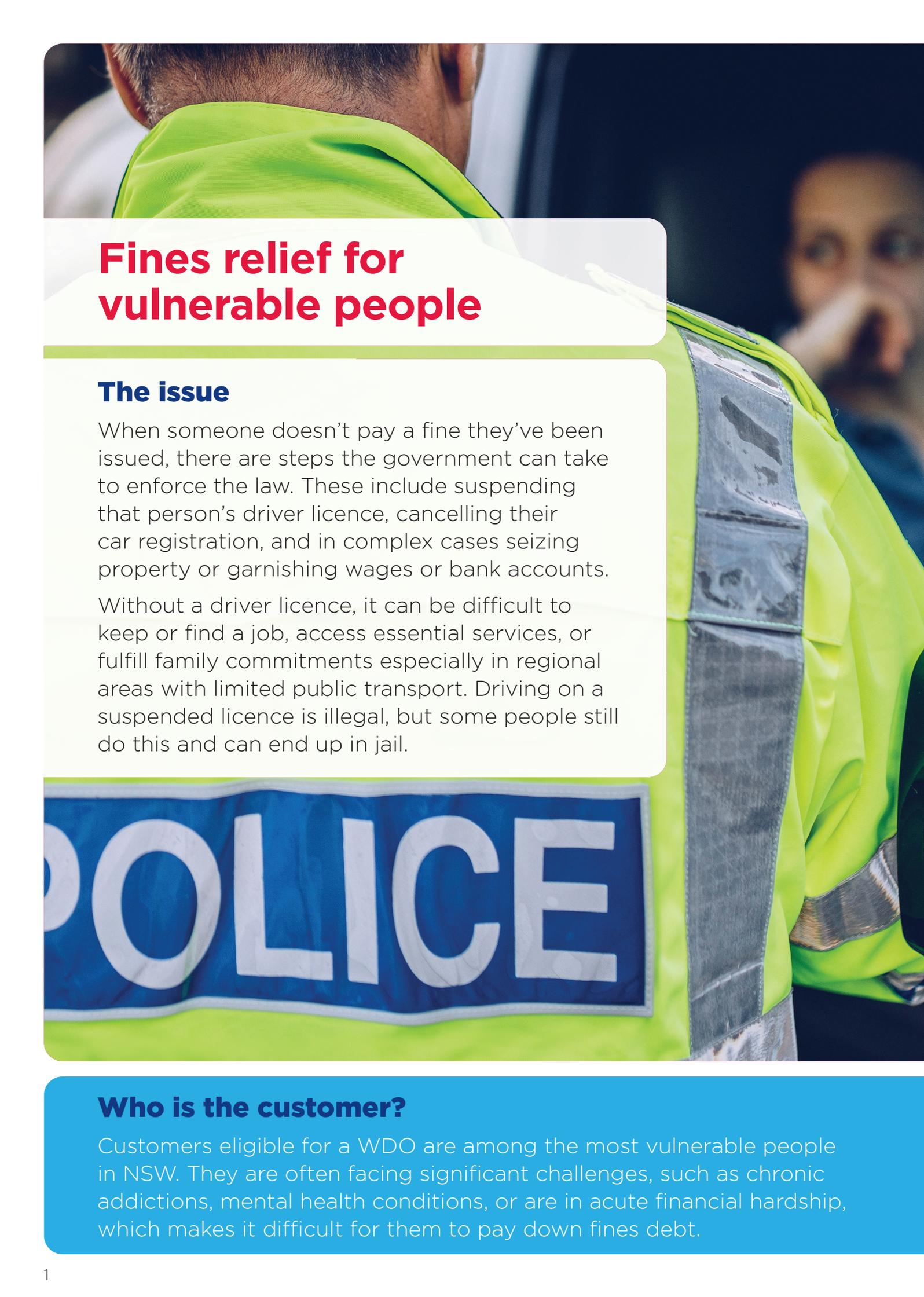


The Work and Development Order (WDO) Scheme

Fines relief for vulnerable people

A CASE STUDY



A person wearing a high-visibility yellow-green uniform with reflective silver strips. On the back of the uniform, there is a blue patch with the word 'POLICE' in white capital letters. The person's head is turned away from the camera, showing the back of their head and neck. In the background, another person is partially visible, looking towards the camera.

Fines relief for vulnerable people

The issue

When someone doesn't pay a fine they've been issued, there are steps the government can take to enforce the law. These include suspending that person's driver licence, cancelling their car registration, and in complex cases seizing property or garnishing wages or bank accounts.

Without a driver licence, it can be difficult to keep or find a job, access essential services, or fulfill family commitments especially in regional areas with limited public transport. Driving on a suspended licence is illegal, but some people still do this and can end up in jail.

Who is the customer?

Customers eligible for a WDO are among the most vulnerable people in NSW. They are often facing significant challenges, such as chronic addictions, mental health conditions, or are in acute financial hardship, which makes it difficult for them to pay down fines debt.

What the government did

The NSW Government introduced a world-first scheme to help people who can't pay their fines.

A WDO allows a person to clear their fines by up to \$1000 per month by carrying out approved activities that benefit both themselves and the community. This can include:

- Doing volunteer work for charities
- Completing an education course
- Receiving financial counselling or;
- Undergoing medical treatment, including treatment for mental health issues.

A customer's suspension can even be lifted so they can continue to drive while completing a WDO.



DONATIONS

What was achieved

A WDO allows customers to gain much-needed skills, knowledge and treatment, and connects them to services that help them tackle issues beyond outstanding fines.

Since the scheme was made permanent in 2011:



More than 135,000 WDOs were completed or ongoing.



\$168 million in fine debt was resolved.



More than half of WDOs involved mental health or addiction treatment plans.



1 in 5 WDOs are taken by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.



1 in 4 WDOs are taken by people under 25 years, breaking the cycle of fines debt early.



WDOs improve the lives of some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable customers in NSW.

One customer had been battling serious mental health difficulties over several years.

He had accumulated several fines and increasing debt and was facing his licence being suspended. This customer was a rough sleeper and was living in his car, which he needed to be able to move – suspending his licence would have had a crippling impact on his daily existence. The WDO scheme enabled him to reduce his fines debt, continue driving and importantly to receive therapeutic treatment for his mental illness.



1 Effective collaboration results in improvements for customers



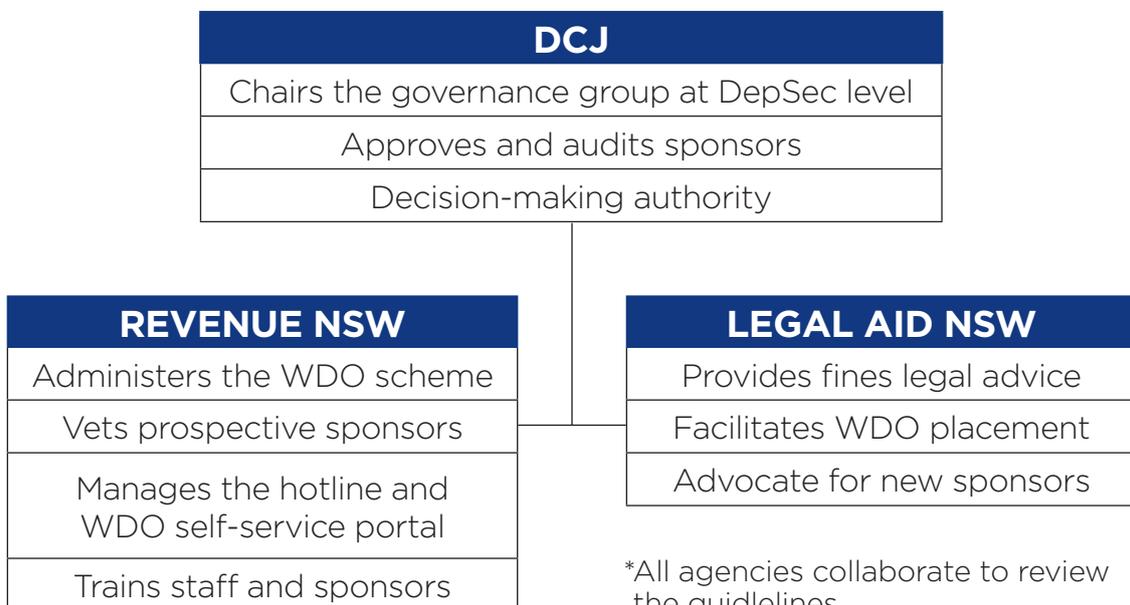
Insights

Challenge To ensure responsible management while improving the WDO scheme.

Solution The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), Revenue NSW and LegalAid NSW formed a governance group to manage the WDO scheme and ensure any changes are administered appropriately. A governance group needs:

- Terms of reference for the group’s responsibilities
- Guidelines to administer the scheme and set eligibility criteria
- Audit processes to ensure compliance with the guidelines
- Endorsement at a senior level. E.g. the group is chaired by a Deputy Secretary, and its guidelines were brought into effect by the Attorney General.

The governance group structure

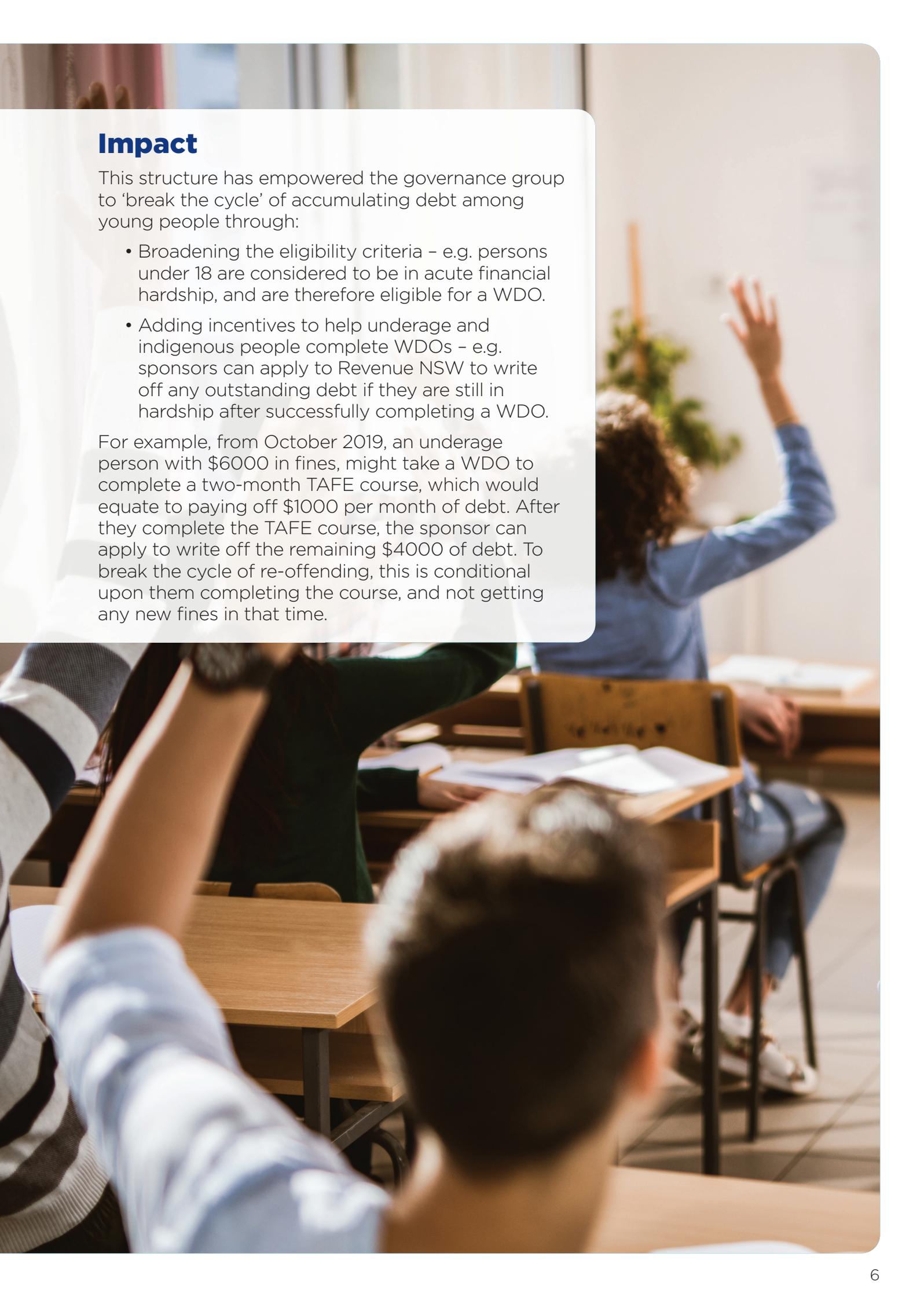


Impact

This structure has empowered the governance group to 'break the cycle' of accumulating debt among young people through:

- Broadening the eligibility criteria - e.g. persons under 18 are considered to be in acute financial hardship, and are therefore eligible for a WDO.
- Adding incentives to help underage and indigenous people complete WDOs - e.g. sponsors can apply to Revenue NSW to write off any outstanding debt if they are still in hardship after successfully completing a WDO.

For example, from October 2019, an underage person with \$6000 in fines, might take a WDO to complete a two-month TAFE course, which would equate to paying off \$1000 per month of debt. After they complete the TAFE course, the sponsor can apply to write off the remaining \$4000 of debt. To break the cycle of re-offending, this is conditional upon them completing the course, and not getting any new fines in that time.



2 Regular communication is essential for effective collaboration



Insights

Challenge The shared responsibility of the scheme caused regular work overlap between agencies.

Solution The operational staff used their initiative and formed a WDO sub-committee, the Sponsor Working Action Group (SWAG). It manages the division and sharing of work to operate the scheme. SWAG meets monthly to:

1. Identify and distribute work to attract new sponsors.
2. Develop educational and communication resources for sponsors, communities and the general public.
3. Engage with stakeholders from regional communities and at events to promote the WDO Scheme.

Impact

Regular communication helped agencies quickly identify when their work overlapped, This approach also ensured they were able to support their shared goals, for example, Revenue and LegalAid have worked with DCJ to prepare a presentation on the scheme.

3 Listening to vulnerable or difficult customers helps identify services they need



Insights

Challenge It can be difficult for staff to help vulnerable customers disclose the challenges they face, so they can connect them to the right services through a WDO.

Solution Specialist staff engage empathetically to build trust with the customer. Staff are experienced at listening for cues to steer the conversation towards understanding the customer's personal and financial challenges, for instance if they struggle with a mental health condition, are sleeping rough, or are experiencing acute financial hardship. This extra support often helps the customer feel comfortable to explain their situation in detail.

Impact

With this information, staff have connected customers to sponsors whose services match their needs. This includes mental health support services, medical treatment, financial counselling, a TAFE course or other education to upskill, or work that interests them through a WDO.

4 Use research and insights to improve your service offering



Insights

Challenge Increasing sponsors in regional areas. Sponsors are medical practitioners, education providers, charities and employers who work with participants to complete a WDO.

Solution LegalAid NSW uses fines debt data to identify regions with high levels of accumulated debt. Staff hold public forums, meetings, and promotional campaigns in these regions to sign up new sponsors. The scheme guideline's clear onboarding process through the sponsor portal and training packs makes it easier for new sponsors to understand and fulfil their obligations.

Impact

- Of the 2,118 WDO sponsors, 51% are now based in regional areas.
- New sponsors, such as medical practitioners, are often already treating a vulnerable customer. By becoming a sponsor, they can use their existing treatment plan as a WDO. Doctors report that patients are more committed to attending sessions and complete treatment with a WDO.
- Establishing new sponsors anticipates customers' needs by giving them a broad range of options to choose from to access the help they need. The WDO is often used as an incentive by sponsors to entice customers to participate in programs that help them, such as drug and alcohol programs.

To learn more contact:

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