

Subthemes Related to the Benefits of Police Integration on ACT Teams

Subtheme	Description	Example
Relationship Building theme		
Getting to know clients personally	Clients and staff mentioned that ACT-PI officers took the time to get to know clients personally and that they were compassionate and helpful to talk to about various issues.	“To me they became part of the team because they were there to also assist you, not only in case somebody’s, like, uh, stalking you... they’re not just there for law enforcement, either. They’re there for support, too.” (Client)
Knowing client histories	Clients noted that ACT-PI officers knew their history well enough to be able to assist them in a crisis, going beyond punitive sanctions.	“Like, she’s been through the court systems with them, and she develops a relationship with them, and so she knows if they’re coming off drugs that day, if they’re sick, if they need to get some drugs, if they need to get some food, like, I just feel like she develops real relationships rather than ‘get going, hurry up,’ you know, which is what some of the other cops treat people.” (Client)
ACT-PI officers are empathic, humane and have conflict resolution skills	Compared with their previous experiences with patrol officers, clients stated that ACT-PI officers had relationship building skills and qualities that other officers did not have in the past.	“I don’t know if their training is different or if they’re just different people, but it’s a... I think it’s a different attitude when police come along and are combative rather than when police come along and are friendly, you know?” (Client)
Less stigmatization	Some clients mentioned that they felt less stigmatized by ACT-PI officers and felt that they understood that clients’ erratic behavior was more	“A standard police officer is trained to react in emergency situations and will react and respond accordingly. A psychiatrically involved... trained... police officer, to me, seems like they would have more empathy, right? You know? So

	often the result of mental instability rather than an intent to cause trouble.	simple... they've come closer to understanding and taking away some of the stigmatization of mental health, right, you know?" (Client)
Provide practical support	Clients noted that they felt able to reach out to ACT-PI officers for support in a range of issues, such as legal issues, financial difficulties, and if they were feeling suicidal, and anticipated that they would be supported and treated with respect.	"Well, let's just say, like, I got into trouble with the law, I got in a fight or something. It'd be someone you could talk to and find out what was going on and all that, you know. Someone that would treat you with respect." (Client)
Compassionate limit-setting	Clients mentioned that ACT-PI officers set limits in ways that felt caring rather than abusive.	"[They're] not necessarily bad guys, like aggressive, forceful. Maybe forceful when necessary but not necessarily forceful in a... trying to hurt people kind of way." (Client)
Consistency of police presence	Staff explained that ACT-PI officers have more opportunity to build relationships than other police officers, and in some cases are one of the most consistent people in a client's life.	"There is a relationship that is built with the clients that the clients know the officers as people and not just officers. I've sat down countless times where the officers offer meals and sat down with them and joined them, or we've had coffee or gone for a walk and laughed... they see them differently." (Staff)
ACT-PI officers dress in plain clothes	Staff mentioned that ACT-PI officers dressing in plain clothes rather than uniforms helped to break down barriers to relationship building.	"They're in plain clothes, I think is a benefit because it doesn't put them in a position of power, which I think is really important with this demographic, just with trauma and their experiences with police and stuff, so when they're coming from an equal plane, the relationship piece, our officers work really hard at building, like, really good, therapeutic, non-judgmental relationships." (Staff)
Initial engagement of new clients	Staff viewed the strong relationships that ACT-PI Officers form with some clients before they are on the team as facilitating initial engagement.	"I've seen some of the most street entrenched people go up and give our police officers handshakes and acknowledge them on the street so, I mean, uh, I think that... that if anything it enhances just that relationship and feeling valued, that you're saying "I'm the

		same as you are. Just because I'm a police officer doesn't make me different." (Staff)
New perspective on police	Many staff spoke of how positive relationships with the ACT Officers seemed to serve a corrective role for clients who had previously had negative experiences with the police.	"You know, at first you would think that the clients would be not wanting them around, but these officers are street-wise, they know how to talk to people, and our clients figure out they're there for them. They're not the big bad police officer who wants to put them in jail, that's not their role. Their role is to protect them and help them as well as protect society, so they figure it out." (Staff)
Improving Safety theme		
Improved safety making it more likely clients will access resources	Clients and staff felt that ACT-PI officers improved safety for both client and other ACT-PI team members in common office areas, making it more likely that they would access resources at these sites.	"It definitely makes the security guards that are there and, uh, the members of the [ACT-PI teams]... they feel safer, right? You know? Because it's not an easy place to walk into at times. There's very difficult people that, you know, are very, very ill, whether that's drug-induced or not, they're still ill. And they're not reasonable at times, and without that safety net of the police officers, you know, it would be... it would be worse for everybody I think." (Client)
Compassionate limit-setting increases safety in the community	Clients commented that officers were able to improve safety in their community as well, and appreciated that ACT-PI officers would protect them from victimization from dangerous individuals in the community.	"You know, I don't do drugs, I don't drink or anything, but every day I see the impact of that, and it affects me directly, right? In many negative ways. And when the police are there I feel much more safer and, you know, and, like the police are very patient and understanding with people. They're not bullies in any way or anything like that, but, you know, they put their foot down when they need to, right? Which is good, and that gives me a peace of mind and security, right?" (Client)
Increasing staff sense of safety	Staff commented that ACT-PI officers allowed them to feel safer doing their jobs due to ACT-PI clients or people living near ACT-PI clients that may be experiencing psychosis or using drugs.	"If I did not have community officers, officers on the team, and I had to rely on, I guess, more security forces or if I had to rely on, like, peer support... for safety, or to help me work with a situation of conflict... I would probably quit. I would not feel safe anymore." (Staff)

Embeddedness theme

ACT-PI officers are integral, trusted partners	Staff view ACT-PI officers as trusted integrated members of the teams, resulting in better services to clients.	“Our police officers have a huge rapport with us and with our clients.” (Staff)
ACT-PI officers being team members meant communication was a two-way street	Staff saw ACT-PI officer integration as beneficial for a mutual exchange of information between police and ACT-PI teams: teams received police information from the ACT-PI officers, and police received valuable healthcare information from the teams.	“With ACT teams...you’ve got, um, that co-education going back and forth where, um, the culture and the attitudes and the way of speaking and treating people, um, there’s a greater potential for an increase in respect that can occur.” (Staff)
Officers are well integrated into ACT-PI teams	Clients mentioned that officers were integrated well into ACT-PI teams, which they saw as a source of strength.	“They all seem to be of the same mindset, so they’re all working as one, right? The team spirit along with the ACT-PI team... the police working with [the teams] and everything, all together, you know, they’re just one great good team. It would be a terrible day if that ever got broken up.” (Client)
ACT-PI officers can act as point of connection	Clients remarked that officers were able to act as points of connection with other service providers for additional support.	“They have the connections, too, or whatever to get people hooked up with extra support, or whatever, if they need it in certain areas. They’re good at that, I know that.” (Client)
Helpful in communicating with other officers	Clients commented that they appreciated that ACT-PI officers could communicate with patrol officers regarding their mental health status and violence risk, which could provide the necessary context to lower the risk of a negative interaction with unknown officers.	“It was a couple of times I reached out to [a ACT-PI officer] when I was really in a bad shape, and [the ACT-PI officer] made sure when they had to send the police to my place that they were informed on what I was like and, you know, which brought down the stress level for the police, right? That were coming to my place to make sure I was OK. You know, [the ACT-PI officer] was able to say, you know ‘Hey, [client name], he’s not violent in any way and he’s...’ you know what I mean? ‘He’s just sick,’ right, and needs help, right? So, yeah.” (Client)

Prevention Oriented theme

ACT-PI officers identify and prevent harm

Clients saw that ACT-PI officers were able to identify and prevent problems before they escalated, rather than waiting to react to an already adverse situation.

“As a general rule they were a lot more easygoing than I expect them to be. Because, like, I have this... I don’t know what it is... a belief, maybe that they’re an authority, and they’ll, like, force people to do whatever they want. That’s my expectation generally when it comes to dealing with the police, but they seem to be more about preventing harm, or further harm, and more caring than I anticipated.” (Client)

Solution-focused versus punitive

Clients noted that ACT-PI officers were solution-focused and worked in clients’ best interests, versus reacting in a punitive fashion.

“They’re looking for a solution. They’re like ‘you’re homeless, what are we going to do?’ Rather than ‘get the hell out of here, now.’ You know?” (Client)

Help clients stay in their homes during distress

Clients noted that ACT-PI officers were more likely than patrol officers to help clients maintain housing while the client was in psychological distress.

“I think it’s great that they’re on the team, because then if something happens, right, and the client’s not well, say if I wasn’t well, the normal police officers, they don’t really, uh, they don’t really take mental health... they would probably just take them to the hospital and not deal with the problem. Um, one working... one police officer working with the ACT team would be more understandable and be able to solve the problem without having to remove them from their home or make them feel alienated in a way.” (Client)

Embedded officers are more accessible

Staff noted that when officers were part of ACT-PI teams, teams could plan proactively to minimize risk and enhance client care, and ACT-PI Officers could respond quickly in an emergent situation.

“We’re also able to get people up to the hospital quickly, um, when they’re decompensating because we have police officers here. If somebody was, um, not doing well with their mental health status and I just said “oh, I gotta get them up to the hospital” the difference is between me waiting an hour for police to come... I can’t put them in my car when they’re like that, but if I have to wait an hour, something bad is going to happen.” (Staff)

Officers’ Authority theme

ACT-PI officers can set boundaries effectively due to authority	Staff mentioned that police authority meant that ACT-PI officers have the power to give consequences to clients. Because of this, some staff stated that clients listened to ACT officers more than other ACT team members.	“With the officers it’s pretty straight and cut and dried, and so they kind of, you know, after having a few dealings, the client knows, ‘OK, well this is how it’s gotta go’ or ‘this is how it’s gonna be’ or whatever, and ‘if I don’t, then these are the other consequences that’ll happen.” (Staff)
ACT-PI officers are skilled at de-escalating situations	Due to their police training, staff viewed ACT-PI officers as skilled at de-escalating situations. This meant that they were able to stop situations from becoming violent, which helped not only the client but others in the vicinity.	“A lot of times there might be, you know, a crisis or right before it gets to a 911 call or something. And of course they have an amount of, as police officers have, training that none of us have, so that’s extremely valuable, you know?” (Staff)
ACT-PI officers can educate clients about their rights and assist in reporting victimization	Several staff observed that the ACT-PI officers provided clients with a non-threatening option for reporting crimes to the police.	“A lot of those assaults would not have gone reported, but when we have a police officer here who’s trusted, OK, let’s go talk about it, not being, you know, under these lights in the police station. Just here or out on the street, “K, let’s get your statement.” So it really bridges that gap, as well.” (Staff)
ACT-PI officers can educate clients about the potential consequences of their actions	Staff described how ACT-PI officers also used the combination of strong relationships with clients and their law enforcement knowledge to explain to clients the potential consequences of activities in which they are engaged.	“I was able to go with police to her apartment, and the police officer was just able to tell her, you know, “these are the risks, this is what’s going to be the outcome, you could be charged,” and the client herself made the choice [to change an aspect of her behavior], so I think in those kind of instances we can avoid some of those police contacts or, like, risk to other people” (Staff)

Subthemes Related to the Drawbacks of Police Integration on ACT Teams

Subtheme	Description	Example
Risk of Consequences theme		
Fear of arrest or forced hospitalization	ACT-PI clients are concerned that police integration could increase the risk of consequences such as being arrested.	“They’re [other clients] not very happy with the fact that ... ACT teams are working with police involvement, because they now... now they don’t have any safety. They’re always at risk of being arrested. They’re always at risk of being put in jail, put on more probation, put on more conditions.” (Client)
Issues around privacy	Clients noted that they did not want other team members to share information about them with ACT-PI officers, possibly due to concerns about illegal behaviour.	“Um, like once in a while I go up to the [ACT-PI] office ..., and, um, a couple of them have said ‘Oh, we’ve heard about you from the team’ or whatever, and that kind of made me feel uncomfortable because people were sharing information about me.” (Client)
Police Stigma theme		
Concerns with being seen as police informants	Several clients shared concerns that other people would think they were “rats” or police informants if they were seen talking to ACT-PI officers. In spite of the fact that they are not in uniforms, clients expressed that others would know they were talking to a police officer.	“I find it to be a problem because people start seeing me talking to [a ACT-PI officer] at McDonalds and they... it brought me problems because people thought I was a rat because I was talking to a cop, so...” (Client)
Disliking police being involved with their care	Clients mentioned not liking police being involved in their care, particularly in cases where police came to their homes or escorted them in officer vehicles. This dislike could be due to feeling stigmatized.	“They just come to my house and give me my injection with [a ACT-PI] police officer, present. I don’t appreciate them bringing police officers to my house”. (Client)

Clients feeling uncomfortable with police presence	Staff voiced that clients could be uncomfortable with police presence, which may jeopardize the trust between the client and ACT-PI team.	“Clients will speak more freely, um, if there’s no police officer there... I think there could be some perceptions that, like, “I’m not talking to you because the cop’s here.”” (Staff)
Clients could feel stigmatized by police presence	One staff member mentioned that clients could feel stigmatized due to police presence, or that the public may stigmatize ACT-PI clients for this reason.	“I don’t think that we’re criminalizing clients with mental health issues, but it does send for some a message that “maybe you’re dangerous’ when the client’s maybe not dangerous.” ... “I worry a little bit that... we now have police officers... that we’re giving the message to the public, well, “you better watch out.” (Staff)
Escalating Distress theme		
Integration could have inflammatory effect on client behaviour	Staff members expressed concerns that police presence could trigger aggressive behaviour in clients.	“I think sometimes it doesn’t matter how gentle an approach... gentle the officer is, there’s always a potential for escalated violence when you show up with a police officer.” (Staff)
Low Availability theme		
ACT-PI officers not always available enough	Clients mentioned that ACT-PI officers were not always as available as they would like. For example, when they contacted officers for emergency reasons, the officer was already occupied and unable to assist them immediately.	“[The ACT-PI Officer has] too many things to do because there’s always, you know, another person that needs something, right?” (Client)
ACT-PI officers not available enough	Several staff members expressed concern that ACT-PI officers were not available enough, as during the day they are in high command and over weekends they do not work.	“The only downside, I can think of one thing, I wish that we had them seven days a week, because on the weekends we work three people per team instead of twelve or fifteen people, but we still have the same workload and we don’t have police assistance on Saturdays and Sundays and there’s always things that go on Saturdays and Sundays.” (Staff)

Changed Teams theme

Changing the nature of ACT-PI teams

One staff member mentioned that the integration of police on ACT-PI teams made it possible for them to accept more higher-risk clients, which in turn could be changing the nature of Victoria's ACT-PI teams. For example, they raised the concern that this could mean the ACT-PI program moved in the direction of forensic clients, leaving those with mental illness behind.

“The focus of the teams may change to those with more of a criminal violent forensic background, and I am concerned that we might lose out those equally needy individuals who have mental illness, or mental illness and substance use that may not be causing such a societal visible problem, but might just equally need that intensive outreach approach, and I guess I'm a little bit concerned that they may get left behind.” (Staff)

ACT-PI Officer Responsibilities

Officers holding the rank of constable are eligible to apply for the position of ACT-PI officer. Other members of the ACT teams are from the Health Authority, the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, and Community Corrections. The ACT-PI officers report to a non-commissioned officer of the Community Services Division and to the ACT team leader when required.

ACT-PI officers work primarily in plain clothes, covering dayshifts and early afternoons, with some flexibility based on operational requirements. ACT-PI officers function as the law enforcement specialist within the multi-disciplinary agency outreach teams providing assertive case management.

A police officer has been assigned to the original local ACT team since its inception. In fall of 2016, two more officers were added. These three officers (two women and one man) work full-time with all four local ACT teams. ACT-PI officers are written into care plans for a subset of clients who are aggressive, violent, or volatile. In addition, ACT-PI officers also interact with clients who are unstable psychiatrically, who commit criminal offenses or have probation orders, or who are the victims of violence or exploitation. ACT officers assist other staff of the ACT teams in the completion of their duties, including assistance with assessments requiring direct police intervention, often on short and urgent notice. They engage in activities such as:

- Relationship building (e.g., being present, becoming a familiar person through informal interaction)
- Accompanying staff into the community when providing outreach services (e.g., some low barrier housing sites deemed too dangerous by the Health Authority for ACT healthcare staff to enter without an officer).
- Executing mental health warrants when a client is certified under the Mental Health Act and is considered to be in need of hospitalization
- Witnessing medication administration
- Exchanging information with ACT teams regarding client history to assist with risk assessment and care planning
- Advising clients on legal implications of their behaviour and choices
- Providing home support
- Working with the probation officer and other team members to determine how to best meet the needs of clients who are currently under a probation order
- Interacting with and supporting clients who are at risk of victimization
- Checking in on client well-being at the request of ACT staff
- Transporting client to appointments or hospital
- Attending community meetings/ case conferences
- Client reporting or arrest for a new offence or charge

Clients who are stable in the community and who do not interact with the legal or justice system may have little direct contact with ACT-PI officers. Nonetheless, a few aspects of the ACT-PI officers' role, such as creating safety at the ACT offices, affect these clients as well.

In addition to assisting other staff of the ACT teams, ACT-PI officers

- Act as a liaison to the Victoria Integrated Court and providing information and input to the Integrated Court regarding the supervision and activities of the ACT team clients.
- Liaise with client housing sites to support clients with mental health and/or addiction problems.
- Act as a liaison to other outreach teams and clients in the community.
- Provide continual education of police members, community groups, and outside agencies on the role and function of ACT teams.
- Work closely with other Community Service Division resources to identify clients who would be appropriate to receive service from ACT.
- Work closely with the ACT Community Corrections Officer to investigate and submit charges where appropriate against clients.
- Prepare reports and gathering statistics regarding ACT activities.