

## **Tips for an effective character reference to accompany a simple guilty plea**

A character reference is a statement made by a person with a good reputation in the community who knows you. A character reference can help show that you are an honest person, or it can help the court understand your situation. For example, a character reference can help show that you were acting out of the ordinary when you allegedly committed an offence.

### **Who should you ask to provide a character reference?**

Examples of people to ask to provide character references include:

- Former or current teachers
- Former or current employers
- Religious leaders
- Neighbours
- Anyone who has helped you in a counselling or rehabilitation program

If you have undertaken a rehabilitation program, you can ask your parents or friends to write a character reference if they have noticed a change in your attitudes, addictions or behaviour as a result of rehabilitation.

When you ask someone to provide a reference, make sure you tell them about the charges you are facing.

### **What should the character reference include?**

The character reference should include:

- How long, and in what capacity, the writer has known you
- That the writer knows about the charges you are facing
- Whether the writer thinks the crime is out of character
- The writer's opinion of you in the capacity in which he or she knows you (e.g. whether you have been a good student or a polite neighbour)
- Any positive changes that the writer has seen as a result of rehabilitation
- Anything else that the writer wishes to add about your character

### **Who should it be addressed to?**

The reference should be addressed to "The Presiding Magistrate" and signed by the writer.

**Template for a character reference – You will need to adapt it so it fits your individual circumstances**

[Date]  
[Referee's name]  
[Referee's address]  
[MOUNT GAMBIER SA 5290]

Mount Gambier Magistrates Court  
To the Presiding Magistrate,

I have known [your name] for the last [number of years]. I know [your name] through [relationship with you, e.g. work, school, treatment program].

During this time I have found [your name] to be an honest and trustworthy person. I have trusted [him/her] to [e.g. look after pets, babysit children]. **OR** In the time I have known [him/her], [he/she] has been a good [employee/student/patient] who has dealt with me honestly.

[Short paragraph about family or employment history, and person's character]

[Your name] has told me [he/she] has been charged with [name of the charge].

[Short paragraph supporting your version of the events, and why the event may have occurred.]

[Statement of regret, e.g.] [He/she] has told me [he/she] is embarrassed about the incident and does not normally behave in that manner. [He/she] also said [he/she] was willing to pay [for the damage caused, e.g. broken glasses to be replaced].

Yours sincerely,

[Referee's name]