

MONASH UNIVERSITY EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FOR SUPPORT OF PRISONERS AND EX-PRISONERS:

WHITELION, MELBOURNE CITYMISSION, PRISON NETWORK MINISTRIES, PRISON FELLOWSHIP AUSTRALIA, VICTORIA.

Preface

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In 2006 representatives from four community sector organisations, Melbourne Citymission, Whitelion, Prison Network Ministries and Prison Fellowship Victoria - Australia commissioned researchers from the *Monash University Criminal Justice Research Consortium*, to undertake an evaluation of prison transition programs conducted by each of the four agencies. The research team included Associate Professor Chris Trotter, Associate Professor Rosemary Sheehan and Dr Bronwyn Naylor, together with Ms Lisa Bumpstead who assisted with interviews. The evaluation was funded by the Helen McPherson Smith Trust and supported by an Advisory Committee.

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of transitional support programs and develop an evidence base that would assist the agencies to advocate for transitional support for people exiting prison.

The report highlights the most effective approaches in delivery of pre and post release programs and interventions. It underlines the importance of programs that provide holistic support to people exiting prison, pro-social modelling, and assistance to develop problem solving with a focus on goals settings. The report also acknowledges the significance on the worker client relationship in achieving positive outcomes.

Partnerships between services are also recognised as critical to the success of these pre and post release programs. The authors also argue that these programs should be offered to medium to high risk clients.

Melbourne Citymission, Prison Network Ministries, Prison Fellowship Victoria - Australia and Whitelion commend this evaluation as it contributes much needed evidence to support the development of pre-and post release programs for this highly disadvantaged and stigmatised population.

Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an evaluation of four prison transition programs offered by voluntary agencies in Victoria. For the evaluation staff working in the programs were interviewed with a view to gathering information about the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and possible ways they could be improved.

We also interviewed a sample of clients from each service. The aim of these interviews was to gather data about client participation in the services and the clients' views about the value of the services.

In addition we benchmarked the programs against national and international approaches. Information has therefore been gathered about the key components of the programs from interviews with clients and workers. The programs have then been compared to effective practice principles derived from the research, that is, establishing whether they operate in a way which is consistent with the 'what works' literature.

The final aspect of the evaluation relates to recidivism. We examined the re-offending and re-imprisonment rates of those who have ongoing involvement in the programs and how this compares with general re-offence and imprisonment rates (obtained from Corrections Victoria). While some selection bias is acknowledged it is clear that those involved in the programs have lower re-offending rates than expected based on Corrections Victoria data.

The data collected clearly points to the effectiveness of the programs.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction and aims of the evaluation
2. The programs
3. The policy context
4. Best practice principles for effective work with offenders
5. Methodology of the evaluation
6. Views of the clients
7. Recidivism
8. Views of the staff
9. Future directions

1 INTRODUCTION AND AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation has four aims.

1. The primary aim is to consider the effectiveness of the four prison transitional support programs.
2. The evaluation also aims to consider the social policy context in which the transition programs are offered.
3. The evaluation then comments on the relationships between the organisations.
4. Finally, the evaluation aims to provide the transition program providers and the Helen McPherson Smith Trust with information that can help to sustain the programs into the future.

This evaluation report begins by describing the programs, and then considering their policy context. It then discusses prison transition programs from international, national and local perspectives and discusses some of the Victorian Government policy directions in the criminal justice field and how the transition programs fit with those directions, including the role of voluntary agencies in the delivery of services. The evaluation goes on to consider the current state of knowledge about the effectiveness of prison transition programs and attempts to identify the characteristics of effective programs.

The effectiveness of the programs is then considered. We have considered the issue from four separate angles: staff views about effectiveness, client views about the effectiveness of the services, the extent to which the programs are consistent with international and national benchmarks and client recidivism.

The Monash group was contracted to undertake this project in 2006. There were some initial delays, in obtaining ethics approval from Monash and gaining approval from the Department of Human Services to interview young people. During this period there have been some changes to the programs and a number of developments in the provision of transition services in Victoria. These changes are referred to further in this report.

2 THE PROGRAMS

2.1 Prison Network Ministries

Prison Network Ministries (PNM) is an interdenominational Christian organisation which operates on an annual budget of around \$211,000. It receives \$30,000 per annum from government but otherwise relies on donations. The organization has been operating for around 65 years. It has three part time and two full time staff and a team of about 25 volunteers.

PNM runs a number of programs in the Victorian Women's prisons. These include art, craft and cooking, sports programs, Christian discussion group and chapel services. PNM also runs a 'Fun with Mum' program in the Visits Centre at the prison, on a monthly basis, which provides activities for mothers to participate in with their children. Staff members estimate that they would see about 65 women per week in the prison. They also provide transport for children to see their mothers in prison and at times other family members who have difficulty getting there.

In nearly all instances the first contact made with the women is within the prison, even though on some occasions the contact may be minimal. Information about use of PNM's services is available at both the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) and Tarrengower. PNM reports that there are more than 4500 attendances at the sport and craft programs per year and that more than 60 women were involved in the post release program throughout 2008.

In addition to their role in the prison, PNM has an important role in supporting the women after they leave prison. The arrangements are informal, but documented statistics on numbers attending programs and receiving post release support is provided for Corrections Victoria. Once the women are released the role of Prison Network staff is one of support. Most women that are followed up post release have initially contacted PNM through the programs they run, or through services provided (eg. child transport). However, some are referred to PNM by prison staff or other agencies. To assist with post release support, at the beginning of 2007 PNM commenced a "side by side" mentoring program which involves a number of volunteers. PNM also has a program for the children called "Kidz Matta". A component of that involves arranging and taking kids to and from camps in the school holidays. A large part of PNM's support is provided outside normal office hours and the staff can be contacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. PNM seeks to link women with other appropriate supports and regularly works in conjunction with/or alongside other agencies such as MCM and Flat Out.

PNM operates on an informal basis and choose not to rent office space to keep their costs down. Volunteers meet on a regular basis and specialised training is provided for them throughout the year. Staff meet together each fortnight. PNM's aim is to provide flexible, informal and voluntary support services to the women as needed – in many cases, meeting needs not met by other services. The services offered by PNM were described by the staff as including counselling, mentoring, family work, financial assistance and emotional and practical support.

While some reference is made to the prison-based programs, the focus of this evaluation is on the support and mentoring programs offered to women after they leave prison.

2.2 Prison Fellowship

Prison Fellowship Victoria is part of an international, trans-denominational Christian organisation founded in the United States in 1974 (www.prisonfellowship.org). It has more than 30 centres across the United States, and has 114 chartered national ministries worldwide. Prison Fellowship Victoria was established in 1982 and has an affiliation with the international body, but the local programs have largely developed independently from the international organisation. Prison Fellowship Victoria works with male and female prisoners, but predominantly with male prisoners

Prison Fellowship offers a course known as Lives in Transition (LIT) which has been the particular focus of this evaluation. LIT was operating from the Barwon Prison (where it commenced in 2003) when the evaluation began in 2006, but moved to Port Phillip Prison in 2007. Both are men's prisons.

Prisoners volunteer for the LIT program. LIT provides a series of group educational/counselling sessions for prisoners focusing on topics such as budgeting, decision making, reflection, relationships, character building and goal setting. It also offers practical employment related programs such as a barista coffee making course and fork lift driving and it maintains links with the TOLL employment program which provides employment opportunities for offenders after release. In collaboration with the prison TAFE centre, LIT also offers sessions in ceramics and education as well as opportunities for prisoners to study English and Maths.

The LIT course in the prison is co-ordinated by a staff member employed by Prison Fellowship and sessions are presented predominantly by volunteers. The volunteers are often also mentors and the prisoners have opportunities to choose mentors with whom they feel comfortable. A number of ex-prisoners are involved in the program, both in the administration of the program and as mentors.

During the course the aim is to match each participant with a mentor. The mentor will then support the men after they leave prison. The mentors then have a role in supporting the men in relation to any issues around, for example, family, drugs or employment. They try to provide emotional support in terms of having someone to talk to about issues the men face following their imprisonment. In some instances the mentors are also able to offer practical support in terms of employment or housing. Contact with mentors is both in person and by telephone, with greater reliance on telephone contact where mentors and mentees live further apart.

In addition to contact with the mentors the men may also maintain contact with staff from Prison Fellowship either personally or by phone. Prison Fellowship staff aim to keep in touch with each of the men who complete the LIT program, following their release from prison.

The program has no government funding and is fully supported by donations and trusts.

2.3 Melbourne Citymission

Melbourne Citymission (MCM) has been offering support to women exiting prison since 1996 when they developed a program focused on helping women with accommodation after their release. They currently offer a number of programs for women offenders, predominantly government funded, including a transitional support and housing program (SWEP and WISP), employment (Women 4 Work) and family support programs (Family Support Service). Recruitment to MCM programs comes through pre-release self-referral or referral from prison and program staff, post-release self-referral, or referral from community agencies or community corrections.

SWEP (Supporting Women Exiting Prison) has three workers and provides housing and support pre and post release. SWEP offers:

1. Short term case management support for women exiting prison who have accommodation,
2. Support to women residing in the Cairnlea (Long Term Secure) Accommodation
3. "Women About" a social and recreational program for women, addressing social isolation and facilitating community integration
4. Personal Development project at Tarrengower Prison which aims to assist women to build self esteem

On-going case management assists women released from prison to stabilise their accommodation, reunite with their children and families and resettle back into the community. The program is supported with \$250,000 per year through the Dr John Singleton Trust Fund administered through MCM Board. The program requires a minimum of two full time workers and funding for brokerage and management of the projects.

The SWEP Recreation Program acknowledges that while housing is important it is also important to help offenders deal with their social isolation. The 'Women About' program offers opportunities for women to attend an outing or participate in art and craft activities and to bring along family and friends. The women are subsidised in the activities but generally pay half the actual cost of the activities. One of the aims of this program is to reduce isolation and help women to develop friendships. The staff in the program are often involved in assisting the women with relationship issues or helping to mediate disputes with their family or others.

Since 2006 the state government *Better Pathways* strategy has funded gender specific programs such as WISP (Women's Intensive Support Program) offered through partnerships provided by Melbourne Citymission, VACRO and the Brosnan Centre. MCM is the lead agency in this program. WISP has nomination rights to 13 transitional housing properties provided by the Office of Housing for the use of women exiting prison in Victoria.

MCM also provides a women's employment program again funded through the *Better Pathways* strategy. This program has evolved from CSEPP (Correctional Services Employment Pilot Program) to Women 4 Work (W4W). W4W provides pre and post release employment support for women exiting prison and women who have received community-based correctional orders. The service provides an Employment Expo in the prisons to encourage women to consider work options and meet potential employers. It also provides a one-to-one service for women in the prison for assistance in finding jobs and undertaking interviews.

Family Support Services are based at the DPFC offering advocacy and support to mothers to maintain contact with their children whilst they are in custody. Family Support facilitates contact with carers, DHS and other relevant parties to ensure that, where in the best interest of the children and mothers, contact is facilitated and supported. This program is funded by Corrections Victoria.

This evaluation is focused on the personal support offered by MCM to women following their release from prison particularly through the SWEP and WISP programs.

2.4 Whitelion

Whitelion assists young offenders, most of whom have been involved in the youth justice system either through placement in youth training centres or on community orders. Whitelion staff support young offenders pre-release, and during their transition into the community and as required thereafter. Employment is one particular focus area, with work readiness and vocational assessments often commencing pre-release. Whitelion is funded through a mix of government, philanthropic and fundraising sources

Whitelion is not a crisis intervention service. It offers a suite of ongoing support programs to help young offenders transition into their communities, and young people can keep coming back.

Whitelion offers programs including a post-release service that assists young women with their transition from custody into the community through female-only activities and support that encourages independence, community connectedness and personal development.

Various mentoring programs are also offered, incorporating one-to-one mentoring relationship and group programs. The aim of the custodial mentoring program is to match people up with trained, volunteer mentors before release and continue with the relationship through the critical transition period and beyond.

The Sports Role Model Program involves footballers and entertainers visiting youth justice centres and engaging with the young people on an individual or group level, often continuing post-release.

Whitelion's target group extends beyond youth justice to highly vulnerable and high-risk young people, who are often in, or preparing to leave, residential facilities or foster care, or experiencing factors such as homelessness, that put them at risk of contact with these statutory systems.

3 THE POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 International Trends

Over the last two decades the number of people imprisoned in English speaking countries such as Britain, New Zealand, Australia and USA have continued to rise. Although numbers have risen for both men and women, the rates for women are lower than for men, but have been growing more rapidly. In the USA for example the number of women prisoners increased from 5.7 percent to 6.9 percent of the adult prison population from 1990 to 2003 (McIvor 2008). Between 1996 and 2006 the numbers of women in prison in Australia increased by 90 percent while the numbers of male prisoners increased by 39 percent to 7% of the prison population (McIvor 2008).

Responses to these rising rates of imprisonment have varied from country to country, and between different sectors of the community in each country.

Many politicians and members of the media have called for a tough, punitive approach to dealing with offenders. It is sometimes argued that the increasing numbers of people sentenced to prison represent a response to public opinion, although there is also evidence that the public are skeptical about the value of prisons (Allen & Hough 2007).

Other more constructive responses to rising rates of imprisonment have focused on preventing people from becoming imprisoned in the first place, or preventing recidivism and fostering social and economic participation through pre-release or post-release programs. Central to these pre and post release approaches is the emphasis on discerning 'what works' to reduce offending rates.

There has been an increasing development of community based programs and treatment programs for offenders, often with the aim of diverting offenders from prison. The numbers on probation or community based supervision have also grown. While in some cases these programs have developed along punitive lines many English speaking countries have also seen a growth in treatment programs.

Alongside this development of pre-release treatment programs increasing emphasis has been placed on discerning who benefits the most from these pre-release services, and at what point in their period of incarceration. Accordingly there has been a growth in risk assessment and risk assessment profiles based on the notion that high risk offenders warrant more attention than low risk offenders and that actuarial risk assessment profiles can better determine risk levels than traditional interviewing methods. There has also been a growth in cognitive behavioural programs and in group treatment programs. In the United Kingdom the concept of accredited programs has been introduced in an attempt to ensure that programs are consistent with 'what works' principles.

There has also been increasing interest in recent times in relation to women offenders. As mentioned earlier, while the numbers of women in prison and in the criminal justice system remain relatively small in comparison to men, there is an increasing focus on issues facing women offenders. An international

journal, *Women and Criminal Justice*, has been launched, and Monash University hosted two conferences in Italy, in 2005 and 2007 devoted exclusively to the discussion of women offenders. A recent high profile British government report suggested that the treatment of women in the criminal justice system requires “a radical new approach, treating women both holistically and individually – a woman-centred approach” (Corsten 2007). It was argued in this report that these holistic services were best delivered through agencies such as women’s centres, on a voluntary rather than mandated basis.

3.2 Trends in Australia

Consistent with international rates of incarceration Australia has also seen rising rates of imprisonment – from 111.6 per 100,000 in 1990 to 169.4 per 100,000 in 2007. Victoria has the lowest rate, but it increased from 69.9 to 104.6 per 100,000 during the same period.

At the same time there has been a stated commitment at both federal and state level to rehabilitation programs. Corrections programs are predominantly the role of state governments. Nevertheless COAG (Council of Australian Governments) an intergovernmental forum with representatives of governments across Australia, has often expressed its commitment to rehabilitation. For example they are quoted in a recent Productivity Commission report as saying:

corrective services aim to reduce the risk of re-offending by providing services and program interventions that address the causes of offending, maximise the chances of successful reintegration into the community and encourage offenders to adopt a law-abiding way of life. (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2008 p 84)

The report also identified a number of emerging and ongoing challenges for the future in Victoria, including maintaining and improving community safety by providing better programs for prisoners in custody and more effective integrated support programs for prisoners prior to, and after, release, as well as responding to the particular needs of specific prisoner and offender subgroups such as young adults, those with a mental or intellectual disability, the culturally and linguistically diverse, and indigenous prisoners and offenders;

Similar directions are reflected in the Victorian Department of Justice annual reports. The 2005/06 annual report endorses reducing reoffending through better programs.

The Department aims to ensure that prisoners who are released into the community have the support they need to avoid criminal behaviours in the future. Reducing re-offending involves ensuring prisoners are equipped and supported to engage in productive employment and to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities. The Department recognises that overall community safety benefits from programs targeting the reasons prisoners re-offend. These programs address a range of issues, including violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and sex offending.

The commitment of the Victorian government to providing offender rehabilitation programs through partnerships with the non-government sector is also evident.

The increasing profile of women offenders is reflected in the Victorian Government's 2005 *Better Pathways* strategy, which lays out a comprehensive strategy to address women's offending and recidivism. *Better Pathways* also highlights many of the problems facing women offenders, such as those relating to experiences of physical and sexual abuse, drug misuse, poor educational attainment, poverty and debt, housing, psychological distress, self-harm and relationships with children. The program aims to better understand and address the key issues facing women offenders, particularly those relating to transitional housing, child care, mental health, finances and post release support.

A Women's Correctional Services Framework, developed as part of the *Better Pathways* strategy, guides the future development and delivery of women's correctional services.

3.3 Supporting prisoners on release

Consistent with these views the Victorian Department of Justice has developed several programs in recent years to help prisoners manage their transition from custody to the community.

The Bridging the Gap program was established by the Victorian government in 2001 and aimed to provide transition services for male and female offenders through five voluntary agencies, including Melbourne Citymission, to support high risk prisoners pre and post release. A University of Melbourne (2003) evaluation of the Bridging the Gap programs concluded that program participants had 'better outcomes in relation to drug dependence, participation in treatment programs and accommodation status' (p110). The report suggested among other things that some prisoners need long term support but the focus of future programs should be on shorter term prisoners (up to 6 months), that personal relationships with providers were important elements of the programs, and that links between in-prison and post-prison drug treatment was important. They recommended continuation of the programs. In 2006 the Bridging the gap programs were merged into new multi-agency programs (WISP and Link Out).

An evaluation of the Victorian government CSEPP program (Job Futures CSEPP), an employment program for ex-prisoners was also published in 2005 with a recommendation to continue the program and that prisoners should be provided with continuity of support before and after release. This program was merged into the Link Out model for men with the women's CSEPP program funded by Corrections Victoria and Department of Industry Innovations and Regional Development.

The Transitional Housing Management – Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative is another innovative project and represents a collaboration between the Victorian Office of Housing and Corrections Victoria. This initiative provides a coordinated response and related housing and support for people

leaving prison. During 2005–06, 75 offenders were assisted by living in these properties, while a further 165 received help in finding other accommodation.

The Victorian government is clearly committed to rehabilitation programs for offenders. The need for holistic services is acknowledged and WISP and LinkOut are intentionally holistic. Nevertheless a number of government programs focus on specific issues such as drug use, employment rather than providing holistic and relationship based support services. There is, however, evidence that holistic programs of the type delivered by the four services involved in this evaluation can contribute to reduced re-offending.

4. BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE WORK WITH OFFENDERS

4.1 General principles

There is considerable evidence that transition support programs can be effective in reducing reoffending among ex-prisoners particularly if those programs are consistent with effective practice or 'what works' principles. These principles are summarised in numerous publications (Trotter 2006 for example). There may not be universal agreement on all aspects of what works in correctional rehabilitation and it is not argued that the application of these principles will result in benefits for all offenders in all circumstances. It does seem clear however that in general terms services will be more effective if they are consistent with the general 'what works' principles. In fact Andrews and Bonta (2003) have found in meta-analyses of corrections programs that those which comply with the 'what works' principles are up to 50 percent more effective than programs which do not comply. For this reason, as mentioned earlier, one of the methods we have used in this study of the effectiveness of the transition programs is to consider the extent to which the program are consistent with what works principles.

The research suggests that the more effective interventions are characterised by certain features. The more effective programs/interventions:

- Assist clients to address a wide range of issues which are related to their offending behaviour (criminogenic needs) such as drug use, employment, criminal associates, criminal attitudes, family relationships, finances and housing.
- Address these issues through problem solving approaches which involve reaching agreement between workers and clients on goals and on strategies to achieve them;
- Provide services in a collaborative or partnership manner. The workers/client relationship is an important factor in achieving positive outcomes;
- Provide pro-social models for clients, encourage and reinforce clients' pro-social comments and actions and appropriately challenge pro-criminal comments and behaviour;
- Help clients to understand the role of the professionals working with them particularly their dual helper/social control role;
- Provide services to medium to high risk clients.

4.2 Transition support programs

There is considerable support in the literature for programs which provide support for prisoners after their release from prison. The research suggests generally that transitional support programs for offenders lead to reduced recidivism (Andrews and Bonta 2003). A review by Seiter and Kadela (2003) found that transition programs in the area of employment drug treatment, half

way houses, sex and violent offenders programs were generally successful in reducing recidivism. They did not look at mentoring or general support programs.

There is support for such programs in the findings from our “Women After Prison” study (Trotter & Sheehan 2007). This study involved interviews in prison with 140 women and follow up interviews over a period of 12 months. We found that women who made use of community based services after their release had low re-offending rates. The women also did better if they were offered services that were holistic and intensive and were offered soon after they left prison.

4.3 Mentoring programs

The services which are the subject of this evaluation can generally be described as mentoring services. Jolliffe and Farrington (2007:2) suggest that mentoring may

provide both direct assistance (e.g. helping to fill in job applications or locate appropriate housing) and indirect support (e.g. encouragement or acting as a positive role model). This assistance would otherwise be unavailable to most offenders or ‘at-risk’ youth because of their family and social background.

Jolliffe and Farrington (2007) undertook ‘a rapid evidence assessment of mentoring on re-offending’. They examined 18 studies which included both mentoring and control or comparison groups. The review found that the research on impact on re-offending was limited but that overall mentoring reduced re-offending by 4 to 11 percent (although they point out that the more rigorous studies found no significant impact). They found that while longer programs were not more successful mentoring was more successful if the mentor and mentee met at least once per week and for considerable periods. The more successful programs involved 4 to 8 hours per week contact between mentor and mentee. The programs were also more successful if they were one of a number of interventions such as behaviour modification, employment or education programs, a finding consistent with other studies which suggest that multi-modal correctional interventions are generally more effective (Andrews and Bonta 2003). Jolliffe and Farrington (2007) conclude by saying that while mentoring shows some promise there is a need for more thorough research to determine its effectiveness.

4.4 Faith Based Interventions

The programs being evaluated in this study are available to all offenders regardless of their religious interest or denomination. Nevertheless the staff of both Prison Fellowship and Prison Network are Christian and clearly motivated by Christian values. The research in relation to the effectiveness of faith based programs is therefore of interest to this evaluation.

There is some support for religious based programs within prisons. Johnson (2004) found that prisoners in four New York State prisons who made frequent use of bible studies were less likely to be arrested 2 to 3 years after

release compared to a matched group of prisoners who did not participate in bible studies, although the same positive results were not found for participation in religious seminars. A study by O'Connor and Perryclear (2002) found that prisoners in South Carolina who participated in religious programs or services were less likely to be involved in prison infractions. They go on to argue that this suggests a relationship with rehabilitation. A small qualitative study undertaken by Jensen and Gibbons (2002) followed up prisoners for three years after their release from prison and found that religiosity and shame often played a role in the ability of the ex-prisoners to lead productive lives following their release from prison.

A study of services offered to women in and after prison undertaken in Victoria (Trotter & Sheehan 2007) found that the programs the women found most helpful were the support programs offered by chaplains and other religious based programs (e.g. discussion programs). Those women who made frequent use of the religious programs also had lower recidivism rates compared to other women in the study.

On the other hand a rigorous review of faith based units in prisons undertaken by Burnside, Loucks, Adler and Rose (2005) concluded that, whilst it cannot be said that faith based programs have no effect on recidivism, 'no such effect has yet been demonstrated' (Burnside 2005:315). While there is some support for faith based programs in prison little if any research has been done on transition programs offered by religious organisations.

5. METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

5.1 Aim

It was proposed to consider the effectiveness of the four transition programs by reference to (1) clients' views about the services, (2) staff views about the services (3) consistency with best practice or what works principles and (4) recidivism.

5.2 Sample

Almost 100 interviews were conducted with 55 participants in the programs and 17 staff. Twenty-two interviews were conducted in prison, 44 first interviews in the community, 14 follow up interviews and 19 staff interviews.

5.3 Recruitment

Ethics approval was obtained from the Monash Standing Committee on Ethics in Research on Humans, and all of the interviews were conducted on a fully informed and voluntary basis. A research officer attended a number of Prison Fellowship meetings in the prison to provide information to the prisoners, and staff in the community based projects provided information to clients either directly or through posters within the centres. Clients then volunteered for the project by phoning the researchers or by letting staff know they were interested in being involved and staff passing this onto the researchers. Explanatory statements were given to participants and signed consent forms provided on each occasion.

Similarly staff were informed about the project through written statement and by members of the reference group, and volunteered to participate.

5.4 Client Interviews

The interviews with the clients sought their views about the services, what they had found helpful and in what ways they consider the services could be more helpful. We anticipated that this would tell us about the effectiveness of the services from the client's viewpoint and also suggest ways in which the services could be developed or improved. The clients interviewed in the community were seen some time after their release from prison. The Prison Fellowship clients were interviewed an average of 5 months later and MCM clients an average of 7 months. The Prison Network clients we saw were longer term clients and had been out of prison for an average of 22 months and the Whitelion clients had been released for an average of 4 years. The longer time periods allowed the clients to reflect on their experiences with the agencies.

5.5 Worker interviews

The interviews with the program staff were also developed to consider the extent to which the programs were operating according to the "what works" principles, to consider ways the programs could be improved in the view of the staff and future directions for the programs.

5.6 Benchmarks against national and international approaches

The evaluation addresses the extent to which the programs are consistent with the 'what works' principles.

5.7 Recidivism

Similarly the analysis of client recidivism rates provides information about the impact of the services.

5.8 Who is using the services and what is the nature of the demand

The project considers service user demand through discussions with staff. The client interviews provide information about the type of clients who are using the services in particular their risk levels. The evaluation also refers to methods of data collection by the services, and whether common data sets may help in ongoing evaluations and program development.

5.9 Limitations

Forty-five clients were interviewed in the community. We had anticipated doing more interviews, but the process of clients making direct contact with research officers after seeing posters displayed in offices or being given information by the program staff limited the number of volunteers and delayed the data collection. The sample therefore constituted only those clients who were interested in participating and may not have been typical of all clients. Some of the clients had also been in the community for some time when they were interviewed and had had long term contact with the service provider. This may have influenced their views.

6. VIEWS OF THE CLIENTS

6.1 Background

Demographic information was sought from each of the clients in the sample.

Age

As can be seen in the Table below the average age of the clients we interviewed was in the mid thirties with the exception of the Whitelion clients (Whitelion focuses on younger people).

Table 1 Age of client at time of interview

Agency	Mean	N
MCM	34.57	14
Prison Fellowship	36.54	13
Prison Network	37.30	10
Whitelion	22.00	8

Gender

As shown in Table 2 Prison fellowship provides services to men whereas MCM and Prison network provide services to women. Whitelion has a mix of men and women.

Table 2 Gender of Clients

Agency	Gender		
	male	female	Total
MCM	0	14	14
Prison Fellowship	12	0	12
Prison Network	0	10	10
Whitelion	3	5	8
Total	15	29	44

Relationship Status

Most clients were single; only one was married and eight were in defacto relationships. Of the 44 interviewed, 20 had children. In 10 of those cases the children lived with the client (in 9 of the 10 cases with their mother).

Accommodation

Accommodation arrangements varied with 12 clients in transitional housing, 9 in public housing, 9 in private rental and the remainder in rooming houses, caravan parks, with friends and parents. One client was purchasing a house.

Offences committed

The offences for which the clients were imprisoned were serious ones. More than half the women in the MCM and Prison Network programs were imprisoned for armed robbery, robbery, burglary or assaults. Nine of the 11 Prison Fellowship clients who provided us with information about their offences indicated that they were imprisoned for serious violent offences including armed robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and murder. The majority of these interviewed from Whitelion had also committed serious violent offences. The seriousness of the offences is reflected in the relatively long periods of imprisonment they had received as shown in Table 3 – although Whitelion clients were younger and had spent shorter periods in YTC.

Table 3: Period of current/most recent imprisonment (in months) – note that this information was not available on 3 clients

Agency	Mean	N
MCM	15.714	14
Prison Fellowship	49.583	12
Prison Network	13.312	8
Whitelion	7.625	8
Total	23.393	42

6.2 The client interviews

How did the clients find out about the services?

In 43 of the 45 cases contact with the service was first made in the prison and then followed up after prison. The clients indicated that they found out about the services through the prison staff, other prisoners or in some cases, particularly in the case of Prison Network, because they met the staff members in the prison. Most were not aware of other services which they might have gone to. In particular the Prison Fellowship clients felt that no other agencies offered this type of service.

Contact with the Agencies

Most saw a worker from the agency within two weeks of their release from prison. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the transition programs relates

to the frequency and duration of contact. Twenty of the 41 clients who responded to the question indicated that they were currently seeing their worker at least weekly, in some instances even daily. As table 4 shows most of the clients of these services had seen their workers more than 100 times.

Table 4 Contact with the Agency

Report

Agency		How long in total have you had contact with this agency (including while in prison if relevant) (in months)	About how many times have you seen workers from this agency	Average Contacts per month
MCM	Mean	12	38	3.2
	N	12		
Prison Fellowship	Mean	18	100	5.5
	N	12		
Prison Network	Mean	31	178	5.7
	N	10		
Whitelion	Mean	53	164	6.6
	N	8		
Total	Mean	26	110	
	N	42	40	

Why did they continue to seek support from the agency?

When asked why they continued to seek support from the agency the most common response from the clients was that ‘they give me the general support I need’. In other instances they referred to help with addiction, accommodation, employment, family relationships and finances. Thirty one clients also had contact with other agencies, 17 with more than one other agency. These agencies tended to be specialist agencies such as drug and alcohol treatment services, mental health services, material aid services or and corrections.

6.3 Consistency with best practice guidelines

As discussed earlier one of the methods of evaluating the programs was to consider the extent to which they are consistent with 'best practice' or 'what works' guidelines. One way of establishing this is to ask clients about the nature of services they are receiving.

Clear roles

One of the 'what works' principles involves helping clients to understand the role and purpose of the organisation and the service being offered. We therefore asked the clients a series of questions about this issue.

We asked the clients if they were clear about what they and their worker were trying to achieve together and 84 percent (36/43) indicated that they were clear or very clear about this. One client expressed one of the key dilemmas in this work:

Initially I found it hard to work out the differences between a worker and friend. I looked at her and thought are you my friend, or my worker. Yeah, I struggled initially. Then I came to realize that the line between workers and friends is not clear. You meet people in different ways at different times in your life.

Fifty-four percent of the clients said that their worker talked 'about what you want or expect from the service'. The clients indicated that their workers were less likely to talk about 'whether s/he has an authority role' for example whether they would 'have to report offences if you tell them' with only 21 percent saying that they talked about this with their worker. However the comments from the clients help to explain this. One woman working with prison network commented:

I guess it was an unspoken boundary, they're Christian and you know where they stand. I felt it was clear but it wasn't spoken about.

Addressing criminogenic needs

The best practice principles suggest that the services should be taking a holistic approach and working with a range of issues. We asked the clients to identify the number of issues they were working on at the present time with the program and the average was almost 5. We then asked the clients to identify the specific issues. They identified an average of 3.3 per person as shown in table 5.

Table 5 What issues are you currently working on with the agency?

Lack of support	25 (57%)
Housing	25 (57%)
Employment	22 (50%)
Family issues	19 (43%)
Financial	19 (43%)

Drug and Alcohol	18 (41%)
Spiritual/religious	10 (23%)
Mental health Issues	7 (16%)

We then asked the clients how the workers helped them with their issues or problems. These data were analysed and coded manually and a number of consistent themes emerged. Many of the clients commented on the practical help they received from mentors and program staff. For example the clients referred to assistance with signing documents, taking children to appointments, helping sort out bills, and taking them to parole appointments. Some comments from the clients:

For 5 years in prison I had no bank account. VACRO helped with this however a fee made the account overdrawn and L and D (Prison Network staff) helped to sort it out for me

My worker helped me with housing maintenance issues, arranged hospital appointments, transported me to appointments for major things.

The clients referred to their workers just being there and providing someone to talk to when things were difficult.

If something goes wrong she is there. It is hard to find someone when you need them

I'm a talker and I can talk to my worker. I cry, get angry, I get frustrated

Some also referred to being challenged and reinforced by their workers or mentors.

I haven't been great at working on issues. I hide from them and slip into denial. Now I am trying to face up to issues.

Goal Setting

One of the best practice standards involves goal setting. A number of studies have suggested that outcomes are improved if clients have clear goals and if the client develops the goals with the worker's assistance, or if the worker and client develop the goals together. We asked the clients if they set goals with their worker and 90 percent (37/41) of those who answered this question indicated that they did. Forty-nine percent (19/39) said that they (the client) set the goals, 49 percent said that they set the goals together with the worker and only one client indicated that the worker set the goals. In other words there was a high degree of consistency with the best practice standard in relation to goal setting.

The clients were then asked to comment on the things they did to achieve their goals. They referred to a range of strategies including:

enrolling in courses; turning up to appointments; modifying their expectations;; evaluating thoughts; reading material provided by their

workers; seeking housing; using a goal sheet to identify goals and strategies; contacting family members; learning to deal with frustrations; going to a retreat; mixing more with a sister who is a good influence; reviewing a list of goals and strategies; talking to workers about problems and not bottle things up; help children with homework; and cut back drug use.

In all but three instances the clients interviewed were able to identify things that they had done or were doing to address their problems. In only three instances did the clients feel they were at a stalemate or not tackling their problems.

Pro-social and strengths focus

Best practice involves focusing on client’s strengths and pro-social behaviours. We asked the clients if their worker talks about the things they do well and if the worker talks about the things they do badly. This was rated on a five point scale with the most common and mean response being ‘often’ in relation to things done well and ‘occasionally’ in relation to things done badly. This again is consistent with the strengths focus.

The clients also commented that their workers were virtually always punctual, reliable, honest and fair, key practices involved in pro-social modelling. This is shown in table 7 using a 3 point scale to rate the workers.

Table 8 Characteristics of the workers (on a 1 to 3 scale: occasionally sometimes and often).

		Report			
Agency		Is your worker punctual	Is your worker reliable	Is your worker honest	Is your worker fair
MCM	Mean	2.93	3.00	3.00	3.00
	N	14	14	14	14
Prison Fellowship	Mean	3.00	3.00	2.91	2.91
	N	11	11	11	11
Prison Network	Mean	2.60	3.00	3.00	3.00
	N	10	10	10	10
Whitelion	Mean	3.00	3.00	2.87	3.00
	N	8	8	8	8

Total	Mean	2.88	3.00	2.95	2.98
	N	43	43	43	43

As mentioned above best practice also involves appropriately challenging the pro-criminal things which clients say and do. While the research is somewhat equivocal about how this is done there is some evidence that challenging is most effective if it is within the context of a warm relationship and if it involves approaches which suggest more positive ways of dealing with the situation, acknowledges negative feelings or comments, explores why the client feels that way.

We consequently asked the clients what their workers did if ‘you say something that is anti-social or pro-criminal or make excuses for your behaviour or behave in an inappropriate way’. We asked, ‘does your worker do any of the following?’ Table 8 suggests that the workers used appropriate methods of challenging clients.

Table 8 Worker response to clients’ pro-criminal or anti-social comments

Suggest more positive ways of dealing with the situation	35 (25%)
Acknowledge your negative feelings or comments	35 (25%)
Explore why you feel the way you do	30 (21%)
Make it clear s/he disapproves of what you have said	30 (21%)
Criticize you	5 (4%)
Ignore your comments or behaviour	3 (2%)

6.4 General satisfaction

We then asked the clients to rate their general satisfaction with the service. As can be seen in table 9 the clients believed that the service they received was very helpful.

Report

Rate on a scale of 1-10 the extent to which this service helped you - where 1 = has not helped at all; 10 = excellent

Agency	Mean	N
MCM	8.54	13

Prison Fellowship	8.64	11
Prison Network	9.80	10
Whitelion	9.12	8
Total	8.98	42

Similarly when asked to comment on whether the service helped them to stop offending the most common response was considerably. We asked the clients how it did this.

She showed me different ways of thinking, about my physical situation, what's out there for me - helped to realize life is good, not bad. To like my kids, to enjoy life and learn to say no. And to learn how to control my spending.

They helped when I needed it. But you have to do it yourself. I could only properly use the support when I was off the drugs; you have to let them help – you have to want to. The persistence of both workers has been important – otherwise I would still be using. They make you look at what you do - like the value of family.

They've kept me occupied, they had this purple room service where you can just go and do things like cooking and painting, whatever you want to do. Getting me involved in a course.

The clients were asked what they would have done if the service were not available. Forty one clients provided an answer to this question. More than half the clients said that they would have ended up back in prison or YTC or returning to their old habits of drug use, mixing with the wrong people and generally going backwards. Only three said that that they would have been able to find another service and the others were uncertain about what would have happened to them. Several said that without the service they would not have been able to get parole as they would not have had accommodation to go to.

6.5 Client progress

We asked the clients a number of other questions relating to how they have been progressing since their release and since their involvement with the agency.

The clients were asked if they had been involved in offending since their release and 32 percent of those who responded to this question (14/43) said they had been involved in some offending. However 97 percent (36/37) said that their offending behaviour had improved since their contact with the agency.

Fifty six percent said they had been employed since their release whereas most (72 percent) said that they had not been employed prior to their imprisonment. Clients reported that their family relationships were better with partners, parents and children in comparison to before they went to prison. Seventy two percent reported that they mixed less with criminal peers than before they went to prison with only 12 percent saying they now mixed more with criminal peers.

Ninety three percent of the clients (39/42) indicated that they had used illicit drugs in the past. Only 29 percent (12/42) said that they were currently using illicit drugs.

6.6 Comparison with another agency

Another way that we aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs was to compare the experiences clients had with the transition programs to the support they received from another agency at another time.

These agencies were varied but included parole, drug treatment, and family support. We asked the clients to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 the extent to which the service helped them. The average response was 5, much lower than the general ratings they offered for the other transition programs although it is acknowledged that the other programs were in some cases non-voluntary (e.g. parole).

One of the differences between the transition programs being evaluated in this project and the other agencies the clients chose to compare them with was that the clients were less likely to have started their contact with the agency in prison. They did however have frequent contact with the other agency with 16 out of 30 clients who had contact with other agencies saying they saw that agency's staff weekly or more often.

We then asked the clients to comment on which service helped them the most to stop offending and why. Twenty four clients responded to this question and most commented on the benefits the transition programs offered them. The comments from each of the clients who responded to this question are included here because of what they say about the transition services.

They taught me the difference from right and wrong, taught me to take account and be responsible for decisions and choices - Someone 24/7 to turn to (Prison Network)

The christian network got me off heroin. It was the new partner who did not use & Prison Network.

Prison network – I can talk about anything and I don't have to hide anything.

Melbourne Citymission – It's really myself but I asked for the service. I interact with them more.

I would say LIT (prison fellowship) because they are more on-hand with their support and they had a wide range of workers in the group.

Prison Fellowship are the only ones that maintain contact, they keep checking, and they are not doing because they have to they are volunteers.

LIT – I've done a lot of courses over the years, like cog skills and they didn't make sense. This (LIT) was more understanding; they had intent to help. They were all coming in on their own time.

Whitelion. Just being there for me. Having someone there, showing me I can do things.

Whitelion because they helped me get work and the same reasons I said earlier. Because maybe they gave me a different outlook on life and getting back into a routine normal day to day things you know.

6.7 Prison based Interviews with Lives in Transition (LIT) participants

Each of the transition programs involves contact with prisoners prior to their release. Prison Fellowship offers a specific structured course requiring participation in the course in order to be involved in the mentoring program. For this reason prisoners involved in LIT were seen in prison prior to their release for two reasons, first to talk about the prison based program and second to make arrangements to see them after they left prison.

Twenty two prisoners who were participating in the LIT program were interviewed in prison. They had attended an average of 40 sessions per prisoner.

The prisoners were asked to rate the extent to which the program helped them to prepare for their release from prison, with 10 being very helpful and 1 that it had not helped at all. The average rating on this scale was 8. The prisoners indicated that it did this by helping with things such as budgeting, decision making, reflecting on past experiences, talking about challenges on release, setting goals for release, setting up work placements through the TOLL transport company's employment program, meeting with the mentor in prison, hearing from people who have turned their lives around and discussing how to deal with difficult relationships.

We asked the prisoners the extent to which the LIT program provided them with practical measurable skills and the average rating was 7 out of 10. The prisoners referred to learning English and maths, learning to use a computer, fork lift training, barista coffee course, first aid, employment assistance, financial planning and anger management.

We asked the prisoners to rate on a scale of 1-10 the extent to which they had developed a realistic plan for the first weeks and months after release. The average rating was 8 with prisoners referring to plans for housing, work, family relations and meeting with their mentors. At the time of the interviews many of the prisoners were some months from the time of release, however more than 80 percent of those interviewed (17/21) indicated that they had a mentor allocated at the time of the interview and more than 50 (11/21) percent had met their mentor at that stage.

Most of the clients commented on how the LIT program prepared them for release from prison. Some of the comments are included here:

I have been thinking about why I keep coming in, how to beat addictions, and I have seen examples in the course of people who never give up, have a common goal, inspiration, prepared, know what to do.

You become more aware of your previous, stupid behaviour, bad decisions.

They are helping me get a job – through TOLL – who employ ex-prisoners, - driving a ute or a truck I am very happy with this.

Helps you to think about being in and out so often - I am looking forward to having a mentor when I get out on 18th.

The life coaching is good – you write down what you want from life, goals for future. Success – not just money, how to be happy for who you are and what you have.

A lot of my current attitude and behaviour in prison is due to this course. I have met my mentor B and D as well he is also a mentor

They were determined to make sure you got something out of the course. They were satisfied and I was satisfied by achieving the goals set.

I wasn't thinking before about what to do when I get out. They put steps in place to achieve goals.

Made me realize that crime isn't the way and to believe in myself and give me confidence that I can get a job.

They refreshed things - I knew about family and bettering myself but they helped with understanding how to deal with family life and day to day stress.

6.8 Follow-up Interviews

The original aim of the project was to interview the clients within three months of their release from prison and again after one year. In some cases the referrals we received from the agencies were for clients who had already been seeing workers from the agency for more than 3 months, in some cases more than a year, and in those instances we did not follow up the client. In some instances we only saw clients in the latter stages of the project and we did not have time to do follow up interviews prior to the completion of the report. Some clients also could not be contacted on the phone numbers supplied to the researchers at the initial interview. We consequently conducted only 13 follow up interviews. Most of those interviewed were still seeing workers or mentors from the agency.

Again we asked the clients to rate the extent to which they believed that the agency was helping them and the clients once again provided an average rating of 8. We asked again whether the service helped you to 'stop offending'

with 9 of the 14 clients saying it helped considerably or a lot (although 4 said it did not help at all). Eight clients commented on this question:

It was up to me though. They have helped. They helped me get a roof over my head, helped with finances. A lot of people first think of stealing things they need. Now I know there are people to help.

They've given me financial help. If I'm starving someone would be there to provide me with food. I didn't have a lot of contact with the workers but they were good role models. It was along time since I'd been around people who were normal, who didn't break the law and use drugs. They would see me, take me out for coffee and chit chat. They showed me the human side, that life's not rosy for others even though they are on the right side of the law. They made me aware of services – I just remembered they helped with housing.

Just support. Letting me know that they're there. Phone me. They got me into Moreland Hall, counselling. This finished in January this year. They got me movie tickets when I have the kids. I guess I'm over the quota because of the length of time I've been with them. But she said that she's not going to abandon me because I'm pregnant. I don't ask for things, she rings me. I don't abuse it. She says let me know if you need assistance, but I don't always. There are others worse off than me.

At the start it was someone to talk to. We would catch up twice a week if I had to. It made me feel not so alone. My offending had to do with my drug use. I didn't enjoy offending. It was something that was part of my drug use. We talked about my drug use.

Most were pessimistic about what they would have done had the service not been available

I would have been in and out of gaol. Using. Without the support it's hard to take the next step. You need support especially if you don't have it from family.

It's hard to say, when you're depressed and have no money you feel like shop lifting for food. I don't want to re-offend. I've had 21 months of parole hanging over me and a baby on the way. But, I wouldn't let the kids go hungry. I used to have a close relationship with my mother and it's a significant loss that she's not here. When S and L's phone number comes up on the caller ID it feels good to know someone is thinking of you.

If my worker wasn't available I would see another Prison Network worker. I've met them all when I was in prison. I would talk to them. But if the service wasn't available I would be up the 'shit'. This service helps you finish parole, they are there when everyone else stops. There's no time limit to how long they'll help you.

I would have isolated myself more. I would have kept things in more like I used to, there wouldn't have been anyone that I would have been comfortable talking to. I can now say I went to prison without shame.

7. RECIDIVISM

Of the total number of clients interviewed 37 provided signed consents to access their police records. It was clear from the police records that the clients were serious offenders. The average age of first offence was 18, they had large numbers of prior offences and prior court appearances and an average of nearly five periods of imprisonment. The Whitelion clients were of course younger and had fewer priors, but the police records suggest that these are also clients with entrenched criminal history and behaviour.

More than 90 percent of the clients had committed serious violent offences from murder to grievous bodily harm, burglary and robbery. More than half had committed a drug related offence (eg trafficking) and most admitted problems with drug use. In only one instance was the client a first offender (murder) and one individual client had 766 offences recorded against his name.

Police Data

		Age of first offence	Number of prior offences	No of court appearances with convictions	Number of sentences in prison
N	Valid	37	37	37	37
	Mean	18.11	152.19	21.76	4.86

The police records were followed up an average of 30 months after the clients were released from prison. Ten (27 percent) had received a period of imprisonment during this period. The average period of imprisonment was however only 5 months. Another 10 had something recorded again their names during this period.

Type of penalty

	Frequency
Valid Prison	9
suspended sentence	4
CBO	1
ICO	1
Fine	1
Detention	1
Undertaking	2
Adjourned	1

Total	20
Missing System	
Total	

The clients in this evaluation were not randomly selected. They are clients who volunteered to be interviewed in response to notices in waiting rooms and the provision of information from staff (in some cases perhaps also influenced by the \$50 reimbursement for their time). Even though the police records suggest they were a group of high risk offenders they may well have been a group of offenders with better than average prospects. Nevertheless it is interesting to compare the recidivism of other offenders in Victorian prisons. A Victorian Department of Justice publication provides patterns of recidivism among prisoners released from custody in Victorian in 2002/3.

Overall 34.7 percent of the cohort in that study was returned to prison within two years of release. This figure is consistent with previous studies referred to in the document which found that that 35 to 41 percent of prisoners return to prison within two years.

The proportion returned to prison was however 52.6 percent for prisoners who had 4 to 5 prior terms of imprisonment. The figure of 27 percent returned to prison from those involved in the transition programs compares favourably with these figures.

8 THE VIEWS OF STAFF

Interviews were conducted with staff from each of the agencies to gather further information about the operation of the programs, to examine the extent to which they are consistent with the best practice guidelines referred to earlier and to consider their views about the strengths and weaknesses of the program and possible new directions.

8.1 Melbourne Citymission

Clients access the support services provided by MCM on a voluntary, rather than court-ordered, basis. Staff feel that this is a strength of the service and that the voluntary nature of the service helps to build trust with clients.

Even though MCM has access to a group of transitional houses all of the staff in the service indicated that the lack of public housing and private rental housing remains a big problem for service delivery. Some concern was also expressed about the difficulties of servicing clients from all over the state.

MCM works closely with Prison Network. Often MCM will be working with client's housing need and Prison Network provides support such as taking a client to church or the hairdresser.

We asked the workers to talk about one of their clients in an attempt to identify whether they appeared to be using best practice principles referred to earlier. In particular is their role clear to clients, do they focus on strengths and the pro-social qualities of their clients, do they deal with criminogenic needs and do they work in a collaborative manner.

Each of the MCM workers indicated that the clients were given a series of opportunities to learn about the role of MCM. This began in the prison where it was explained what they could and could not do. MCM has a brochure which they use to help explain their role to prisoners. This would then be followed up if the clients saw someone else after leaving prison, with explanation of what the different agencies might do. One worker referred to drawing up a contract to help the client accept the limitations of the worker particularly in terms of the time she had to offer the client.

The workers indicated that as far as possible they try to focus on strengths, addressing client goals such as getting a child back, managing a house or getting off drugs.

I focus on helping the client find her own solution and manage her own life; exploring her strengths, providing information when needed.

We set goals in planning – client identifies her top 3 goals and we sort out how MCM can help, eg driving to appointments. Worker does a review with the client every 6/12 weeks to assess progress – so can see if they are 'kicking goals'.

Also modelling social behaviour – eg when we were in a queue waiting for ages at Centrelink; I modeled patience and politeness; that this is usual and somewhat annoying but not cause for anger or upset.

The 'what works' literature suggests that the more effective interventions are holistic and deal with a range of client support needs. We asked the workers to identify the number of issues they worked with, with their most recent client, and the average was five. Problems mentioned included: parole; housing; finances; drug use; health issues and employment. Each of the workers indicated that the issues were generated by the clients and each of them felt that their clients were showing progress.

8.2 Prison Network Ministries

Although the aim of PNM workers is to link women to other support services, and ultimately for them to lead an independent productive life where they don't require the support of PNM, workers are available to be contacted any time over a period of years should the woman feel she needs to. Availability of workers extends to picking up on release on weekends, taking them to important appointments, helping in times of crisis etc. While clients are not expected to be involved in any religious programs or to be Christian, the staff and volunteers can link clients into church services and communities where appropriate.

At the time of the interviews in 2007, PNM was expanding to a complement of four staff including a volunteer coordinator. PNM now have five staff. In recognising the demand for PNM's services, in expanding there is scope to recruit, train and supervise many more volunteers to assist in the running of their programs. PNM also see the strengths of the service in its freedom to work in the way they wish. They have some concerns that if they were to receive more government funding it might come with restrictions.

The difficulties PNM face, are to some extent, also their strengths. PNM does not keep formal records other than those required by Corrections, and has no office. It is difficult to make claims for additional funding as in many cases, it is only the staff and clients themselves who know what work is being done. On the other hand the cost savings are great and many clients are comfortable with the anonymity of the service. Because of the limited funding however, they are dependent on donations and on volunteers. To meet the demand, particularly given the wide spread of the clients geographically, is extremely difficult.

PNM is involved in planning processes with other agencies. There is a steering committee for Women in Transition at Melbourne Citymission, a pre and post release network for women who meet bi-monthly, involving Flat Out, VACRO and Hanover. PNM also work with case managers and although they have no formal contact with parole, on occasions they will attend parole appointments. One comment was, that more contact with parole staff could be beneficial.

The staff acknowledge the individual nature of their role. They believe the clients understand that role and explain that they are not authority figures, but more a support and encourager who is there to assist them. They are conscious of the potential for dependence and always encourage the client to develop independence.

They try to focus on the client's potential.

They don't have to live like this. You can see potential and build on strengths, modelling a different way to live. You can help clients to do this by taking them to sports events, helping them with their children, linking with other families, using the volunteer network, liaising with counsellors and employers and helping with parenting

The support workers were asked to select one client they were working with and to comment on how many problems they were addressing. On an average there were six, including issues such as accommodation, employment, family relationships, childhood abuse, finances, drugs, parenting, and spiritual issues. Like the staff from MCM, they indicated that it was up to the clients to decide which issues they would discuss, although they try to work with the client from a holistic perspective. Each of the staff who were interviewed, indicated that they felt they were providing an invaluable service to their clients in terms of helping them to develop a new lifestyle, develop alternative networks, and provide a contact for people without support - services which would not otherwise be available.

8.3 Prison Fellowship

Four staff members from Prison Fellowship were interviewed. They generally agreed that the aims of the service are to foster lasting change, to provide positive options to a life of crime, for spiritual development and ultimately to rehabilitate and reduce offending.

They see the strengths of the service in terms of its voluntary nature, its capacity to provide positive options, the opportunities it provides for involvement in employment (for example through prison based forklift driving course), assistance with gaining housing, life skills teaching in the prison and the mentor program. The involvement of ex-prisoners in the program is seen as a strength. The practical advice and assistance offered by mentors, for example filling out forms and support for job interviews is also seen as a strength. Another strength is the relationship which PF has with TOLL Holdings which offer an employment program for ex-prisoners. In many cases the prisoners can go straight into work with TOLL the day after they are released.

The major problem identified by the staff relates to the limited resources. The program can only be offered to a proportion of offenders and is only offered in one prison. They would like to offer it to 10 percent or more rather than to 1 percent of prisoners as they do currently. They would also like to see the LIT course developed into an accredited course so it carries more weight for the prisoners after they are released.

One other issue which is present in each of the three services discussed so far relates to the tension between spirituality and the education role. The staff and mentors do not see themselves as attempting to convert prisoners to Christianity, but each of the staff involved do have a Christian commitment and in many ways they are motivated to do this work from their Christian commitment. The general view is however that spirituality should be role modelled rather than taught or imposed.

Another issue raised by the staff relates to the logistics of getting the mentors into the prison and matching them up with prisoners. This is often difficult simply because of the number of people involved and the co-ordination required.

Prison Fellowship works with other agencies and tries to be involved with planning processes for the clients with whom they are involved. They try to have contact with parole officers, drug counsellors, Whitelion staff and so on. On the other hand there was a feeling that this area of the work could be strengthened and could be more professional and more structured.

The staff feels that the demand for the prison fellowship programs is very strong and they are only able to take about half of those who express interest in the program. They tend to select prisoners who seem to be most committed to change. On the other hand sometimes they compete with industries within the prison. While some prisoners may be interested in doing the LIT program they are unable to do so because they are required to fill places in prison industries.

At the time of the interviews more mentors were being recruited to the program. The mentors are carefully selected by the co-ordinator and they are involved in regular training days.

The staff feel that the roles of mentors and staff in the program are clear. The program is voluntary, prisoners get to know the program and the mentors while in prison. Nevertheless the difficulties associated with prisoners understanding the role of the service was acknowledged and this is discussed in the LIT sessions. It is made clear for example that clients should not come to the mentor if they are on the run from the police, that it is not the role of mentors to seek knowledge of offences. The program is based a non judgemental attitude on the part of the mentors, on friendship but a friendship which gives a right to 'level with each other'.

They try to encourage positive socialising with the mentor and non criminal associates. Again those interviewed saw the service as a holistic one which addresses all of the issues or problems which the clients might experience with an average of around 6 problems including peer group, emotional issues, employment, leisure and relationships.

8.4 Whitelion

The staff see the strengths of the program in terms of the ability of young people to choose a role model on a voluntary basis and the links those role models have to the community. They also see it in terms of their ability to work flexibly or in a range of ways to meet the needs of the young people. They are also able to be flexible with the needs of the mentor where this is appropriate. Another strength of the program is its capacity to continue to involve young people in the program until they are 25. This distinguishes it from many other programs.

As for the other services there is a tension between the need for expansion and more funding and the need to maintain flexibility. For example the long term nature of the service might be compromised if more government funding

were obtained. Nevertheless most of the staff felt that the programs could be expanded with more education in and after release in issues like Hepatitis C, opportunities for employment and expansion of the mentoring and role modelling program, including expansion beyond the metropolitan area.

Whitelion works closely with other agencies, both within the YTC and after young people are released. Role models are introduced to young people in the institution and the Whitelion staff co-ordinate this with the institutional staff, prison chaplains, housing workers and other agencies. After release staff members also work with other agencies for example Youth for Christ, Lighthouse and the Brosnan Centre. While they are often involved in meetings with other agencies to plan for young people and clarify roles some of the staff felt that this aspect of the program could be more formalised more active and more strategic.

While the demand for the program is strong it is also dependent on staff in the YTC making referrals. The aim of the program is to provide work opportunities and mentors for young people after their release however negotiations with corporations and finding and selecting suitable mentors can be a time consuming process. Matching the demand with the supply is challenging. While Whitelion does maintain a data base some of the staff felt that there was insufficient information available about the demand for the service and the extent it was being met.

The research officers discussed with staff the way they work with individual clients. Generally they explained that they discuss boundaries with clients in the initial stages and tried to be clear about what they could offer. Prior to meeting with role models the staff would meet and explain what was involved to the young people. When a young person was released they meet on the first day at Whitelion, spend time in centre with the young person explaining about the work program.

Each of the staff indicated that they work on a strengths basis with clients and don't see it as the role of the mentors to be challenging clients. The role models are not there to talk about offences but to talk generally about things of interest to the client. Meetings between clients and mentors are intended to be client led and could involve discussions about anything of mutual interest from a mother's drug addiction to cooking or employment. Goal is to develop the independence of the clients to provide opportunities for employment and to find common ground between the mentor and the client.

The staff do not use risk assessment profiles although they do undertake a risk assessment in terms of employment. None of the staff had worked with the families of their most recent client.

9 Future directions

The aim of this evaluation is to consider the four programs from several perspectives including where the programs fit in terms of government policy and their effectiveness in terms of client responses; worker responses; consistency with best practice principles; and recidivism rates.

The programs can be seen in the context of increasing interest around the world in rehabilitative corrections programs and an increasing body of research which suggests that well run support programs can be effective in reducing rates of re-offending. The programs are also consistent with the state governments' directions for Victoria which emphasise the importance of rehabilitation programs and which also emphasise the importance of partnerships between government, voluntary agencies and the private sector, a feature of each of the agencies in this study.

It is clear from the interviews with the clients that they find the services particularly helpful. They also believe that they make a considerable contribution to a reduction in their offending patterns. In many cases they indicated that they would have ended up back in prison but for the service provided. In particular clients appreciated the availability of workers, their reliability and openness, the practical assistance they offered with issues such as housing, bank accounts and filling out forms and the way in which workers helped them to see things differently.

The workers were also positive about the services which they were providing and felt that they were helping their clients. There is some evidence that client satisfaction and workers view about progress are related to better outcomes for involuntary clients (Trotter 2008) and the views of the clients are therefore encouraging.

The 'what works' literature suggests that certain factors are related to better outcomes for clients in the criminal justice system. The information collected from the workers and the clients suggested that the services provided are consistent with these best practice principles. Mentoring programs seem to work better if they are intensive. The frequency of contact between mentors and clients in the programs was certainly high. Effective interventions are holistic and deal with a range of criminogenic needs. The programs certainly do this with many issues and problems being addressed. Effective interventions also tend to be strengths based, to focus on pro-social aspects of the clients lives and to be clear about role. The interviews with the workers and the clients all suggested that these things were happening.

It is acknowledged that because of the potential selection bias in the study it is difficult to draw conclusions from the recidivism data. Nevertheless the rates of recidivism do suggest a positive effect, as they were lower than rates seen in a study of recidivism rates in Victoria in 2002/3 and only a little more than half that which might be expected for prisoners with 4 to 5 periods of previous imprisonment.

One of the tasks of the evaluation was to point to possible areas for development of in the programs. While the four organisations each offer support and mentoring style programs for prisoners they are very different

organisations. MCM has a developed infrastructure and is a relatively large organisation. Whitelion also has a substantial staff complement. Prison Fellowship and Prison Network on the other hand are smaller, depend largely of volunteers and have minimal government funding. Prison Fellowship staff members operate from an office in Eltham and Prison Network has no offices. The Prison Network and Prison Fellowship programs are more informal and less structured, they have few if any records and they provide a 24 hour service.

It is difficult therefore to talk about general recommendations for development of the programs other than to say that each meets a very clear need and that sustaining and if possible expanding the programs into the future is very important. Nevertheless we can comment on a couple of aspects which might benefit from further development.

1. Data on the number of mentors, the number of clients, the number of referrals, the turnover of mentors, the completion of training of mentors, and the frequency of contact with mentors was not consistently available across the programs. Collection of data of this nature in a consistent format across the programs, while it may add a layer of bureaucracy and formality, would clarify the demand for the service and support arguments for further funding. The intensive nature of the services provided to the clients who we interviewed was very impressive and a more rigorous presentation of this sort of information could only enhance the reputation of the services.

2. Each of the services works with other services. For example there is good co-operation between MCM and Prison Network. Prison Fellowship works closely with TOLL Holdings and Whitelion works closely with a number of organisations. Staff across the programs felt however that planning for their clients could be better co-ordinated. None of the agencies had regular links with parole services for example. Co-ordination of planning and service provision for clients in the criminal justice system can be problematic and a more structured approach to this issue could be beneficial.

3. The programs appear to be dealing with high risk offenders. The 'what works' literature suggests that programs directed towards offenders should focus on high risk offenders and that low risk offenders are better dealt with by generic services outside the criminal justice system. The programs do not generally conduct formalised risk assessments. Risk assessments can however be completed in a short period of time with some accuracy. Risk assessments would help to show that these services are dealing with high risk offenders (certainly a strong argument if further funding is sought). They may also help to ensure that services are going to the most appropriate people.

This evaluation has pointed to the value of the four programs. However while the data suggest that they are effective in reducing re-offending no firm conclusions can be drawn because of our inability to identify a random sample of clients. A more rigorous examination of this issue would involve identifying all people who are referred to the specific programs over a period of time, time spent in the program and a follow up of Corrections Victoria or police records to in relation to this. Access to some risk assessment material would also enhance such a study. Such a study may more clearly demonstrate the value of these services.

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