



Are you ready for me?

A project designed to understand the
needs of, and improve service responses for
‘Women Leaving Correctional Services’

Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM)

Refuge Outreach Action Response (ROAR)

Western Sydney



Executive Summary

The project was undertaken to improve our understanding and service response needs of women leaving correctional services, a relatively new client cohort for DVSM and our ROAR service. We recognised that to provide a client centric, best practice services, we would need to have a better understanding of this group, how the service system responds and how we can learn from and improve our own response.

The project was conducted through a combination of desk-based research, interviews with DVSM staff, specialist service providers and Corrective Services NSW. A workshop was held in March 2016 that built on the knowledge of the organisation and contributed to sense making and analysis of the research gathered.

The NSW Department of Family and Community Services Specialist Homelessness Services Program Guidelines (2014) identify that 'people leaving correctional facilities are more likely to experience difficulties in accessing employment opportunities and mental health services, which can increase the risk of homelessness and recidivism'. We also know that there are risks faced by former prisoners, and that they are 12 times more likely to die in the first 4 weeks after release than their peers in the community (Kinner, 2016).

The picture for the vast majority of women who enter the prison system is one of socio economic disadvantage. Of the women entering prison every year 30 per cent of them are Indigenous, and 16 per cent are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Women in prison are often victims of domestic violence with 66 per cent of women in prison having been involved in at least one violent relationship (WIPAN, 2012). These women experience numerous ongoing effects such as trauma, substance use, physical and mental health problems, homelessness, and social isolation. The result for many is that they cycle in and out of the criminal justice system in a cycle of violence, trauma, substance use, social disadvantage and criminalisation. (WIPAN, 2012)

Women exiting the criminal justice system face a plethora of challenges and risks which are barriers to their successful reintegration back into the community. Through the course of this project, members of the Sightlines and ROAR team undertook over 20 meetings and interviews with a cross section of stakeholders and frontline ROAR staff. What we learnt through these interviews is that in order to support women leaving prison DVSM will need to:

- **Be in touch early.** Pre-release engagement is critical in building rapport with the client. This takes time and is central to ensuring we are able to work with clients to help them address their needs for a successful transition and prepare them for leaving prison.
- **Be consistent, build trust and credibility.** Trusting relationships are fundamental to successfully working with women exiting prison. Trust takes time and is built through consistent case management with a single case worker.
- **Be 'Response Ready.'** ROAR staff need to be ready to respond quickly and effectively to a woman approaching release. It will mean we have relationships within the prison system;



strategies and pathways in place to secure sustainable housing; and staff will have knowledge and networks that enable them to respond to a range of complex issues.

- **Have Clear Case Collaboration.** DVSM needs to develop a co-ordinated service response founded on strong partnerships with other specialist organisations, organisations who are client centred and who are experienced in working with women leaving correctional services.

Cross cutting these four necessities is our recognition that if we are going to be able to support the percentage of Indigenous women exiting prisons then our organisation must develop a cultural competence that guides our work. This will be a long process developed over time by building on and developing new relationships with the Aboriginal community in Western Sydney. Trust and mutual respect with individuals will enable the organisation to work with these women effectively.

It is important to recognise that ROAR's 'approach' to supporting women leaving correctional services is in its early stages of development. There is considerable experience, passion and commitment within ROAR staff and DVSM management that means the organisation is well placed to build on effective ways to work with these clients now and into the future.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation

Domestic Violence Service Management would like to acknowledge and thank the following stakeholders and contributors to this learning and work;

- Women in Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN) – Lana Sandas
- Marrin Weejali – Catherine Dennis and Lesley Strickland
- Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) – Kelly-Anne Stewart
- Community Restorative Centre NSW (CRC) – Mindy Sotiri
- arbias – Rebekah Loukas
- Legal Aid NSW – Anisa Malhas
- NSW Department of Family and Community Services – SHS Western Sydney District
- Homelessness NSW – Dougie Wells

Sightlines would like to acknowledge the ROAR Team throughout this project, in particular for;

- sharing the highlights and challenges of their day to day work.
- sharing their individual and team reflections.
- being open to questions and to new learning.
- being engaged and committed to continuous improvement for all clients.

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Project Background

Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) is a public benevolent institution which aims to empower clients to make permanent positive changes to improve their safety and wellbeing. We do this by providing a range of services to prevent and support recovery from Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) and/or to access safe, secure, stable housing homelessness.

DVSM delivers three separate services from different locations across NSW including:

- Refuge, Outreach, Action, Response (ROAR) – Blacktown and the Hills – Western Sydney
- Moving Out Moving On (MOMO) – City of Sydney
- Wilcannia Safe House

Refuges Outreach Action Response (ROAR) assists

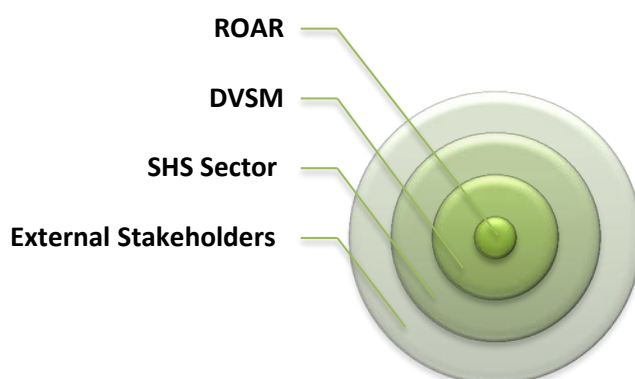
- Women and Children escaping Domestic and Family Violence
- Women exiting institutions
- Homeless Men with Children
- Homeless families with pets

Sightlines, the Professional Services Division of DVSM, provides capacity building internally to DVSM's client services and to external organisations through consultancy services.

ROAR staff with the support of the Sightlines team undertook a project within the Western Sydney area to understand the needs of, and improve service responses for Women Leaving Correctional Services. At the commencement of the project ROAR was already supporting this client group, however it was recognised that more could be known, understood and delivered, now, and in the future.

Project Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders for this project are the ROAR program staff and DVSM as an organisation. However it is recognised that this project may provide valuable insight to the broader SHS sector and other external stakeholders working with Women Leaving Correctional Services. As a result this project also makes recommendations towards these groups when there is a direct link to the work of this organisation. DVSM will share the learnings of this project with these key target stakeholders.





What's the problem or need?

Women's imprisonment rates in Australia have been steadily increasing both in terms of their rate of imprisonment and as a proportion of the total prison population. Women are currently being imprisoned at almost four times the number they were 20 years ago (WIPAN, 2014). 65 per cent of women in prison perceive that their current sentences were linked to drugs in some way (Devon Indig, 2009) with shorter periods of incarceration for remand and sentence. Many women in NSW prisons are cycling in and out of the criminal justice system.

Women exiting the criminal justice system face a plethora of challenges and risks which are barriers to their successful reintegration back into the community. There is significant evidence that women exiting the criminal justice system are at higher risk of homelessness (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2014) and former prisoners are 12 times more likely to die in the first four weeks after release than their peers in the community. (Kinner, 2016)

A high number of women in prison have issues including mental illness, drug and alcohol dependence as well as past childhood and adulthood abuse including sexual and physical abuse and violence. Many of the women exiting prisons are mothers and face a range of additional responsibilities that have been complicated by their incarceration particularly if their children are under government care. (WIPAN, 2014)

In order for DVSM to meet the needs of women exiting custody it will be critical for the organisation to understand the complex needs of these clients and develop our service provisions in a manner that enables us to effectively respond to these women.

"Family violence is experienced in the childhood and early years of many women in prison and can disproportionately affect them in their adult life. Women can be imprisoned as a result of the direct and indirect effects of family violence: some women might commit crimes as a result of a history of childhood violence or other trauma or under duress or coercion from a violent partner. Their partner may pursue them while they are in prison or they may be at risk of violence when they leave. Women in these situations need support while they are in prison, to help them overcome the effects of trauma and avoid re-offending.

Understanding the circumstances that contribute to the incarceration of women who have experienced family violence is important, in part because it casts light on the specific difficulties they can face in prison. The Commission recommends that further efforts be made to identify women prisoners with a history of family violence, so that they can be offered support to deal with trauma and other effects of violence. Serving time in prison can disrupt efforts to promote recovery from previous family violence. More therapeutic initiatives and support programs that can support victims' recovery from family violence are needed in prisons. The continued provision of a wide range of programs for female prisoners by Corrections Victoria in the prison environment requires both adequate funding and continued support.

On release from prison, victims of family violence often experience risks to their safety and recovery, in addition to the challenges experienced by all prisoners." (Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016, p. 37)

What did we want to do about it?

The project was undertaken to improve our understanding and service response needs of women leaving correctional services, a relatively new client cohort for DVSM and our ROAR service. We recognised that to provide a client centric, best practice services, we would need to have a better understanding of this group, how the service system responds and how we can learn from and improve our own response.

The purpose of this project was to identify the service needs of women (at risk of homelessness) who are leaving correctional services in Western Sydney to access secure housing services and to prevent experiences of DFV and homelessness; and to support DVSM staff and sector stakeholders to use this evidence base to improve service design and delivery for these clients.

The project was conducted through a combination of desk-based research, interviews with DVSM staff, specialist service providers and Corrective Services NSW. A workshop was held in March 2016 that built on the knowledge of the organisation and staff and contributed to sense making and analysis of the research gathered. The workshop process and content has informed recommendations for this report.

Project Methodology

Desk Based Research

- Women in Prison Report (WIPAN)
- The Long Road to Freedom: Women affected by DV and the criminal justice system (WIPAN)
- Aboriginal Women with dependent children leaving prison project (Eileen Baldry, Jackie Ruddock and Jo Taylor)
- SHS Practice Guidelines
- Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)
- Framework for Multi-Agency client transition planning to reduce homelessness (NSW Govt.)

Stakeholder Interviews/Presentations

- ROAR Team
- DVSM Team
- Women in Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN)
- Marrin Weejali
- Corrective Services NSW
- Community Restorative Centre NSW (CRC)
- arbias
- Legal Aid NSW
- NSW Department of Family and Community Services – SHS Western Sydney District
- Homelessness NSW

Workshop

- Testing research with experience
- Building understanding and empathy
- Transfer of Knowledge
- Build relationships with expert facilitators (WIPAN and Marrin Weejali)
- Enable DVSM Management and ROAR Team to formulate our approach
- Clarify and articulate where to next

Are you ready for me? (Project Report)

- Information, Learning and Analysis
- System and Pathway Maps
- Documentation of ideas and reflections
- Next Steps
- Recommendations



What did we explore?

Who are women leaving prison?

When trying to understand who are the women leaving custody it is important to acknowledge that these women have a unique identity and set of experiences prior to their incarceration; that their experience through the criminal justice system (and often back into) has an influence on them as individuals; and that on release they will have range of complex needs that will shape the appropriate service response.

The picture for the vast majority of women who enter the prison system is one of socio economic disadvantage. Of the women entering prison every year 30 per cent of them are Indigenous (compared with per cent two per cent of the general population) and 16 per cent are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Women in prison are often victims of domestic violence with extensive research that identifies a specific link between domestic violence and criminalisation (WIPAN, 2012). According to WIPAN 66 per cent of women in prison had been involved in at least 1 violent relationship with 45 per cent indicating that they had been a victim of abuse from a partner or spouse in the 12 months prior to their incarceration.

It is widely acknowledged that Domestic and Family Violence results in a range of long-term effects. For women in the criminal justice system Domestic and Family Violence is an additional complexity which together with trauma, substance use, physical and mental health problems, homelessness, and social isolation creates ongoing and cumulative effects. It is important to note that Indigenous women experience higher rates of family violence than non-Indigenous women.

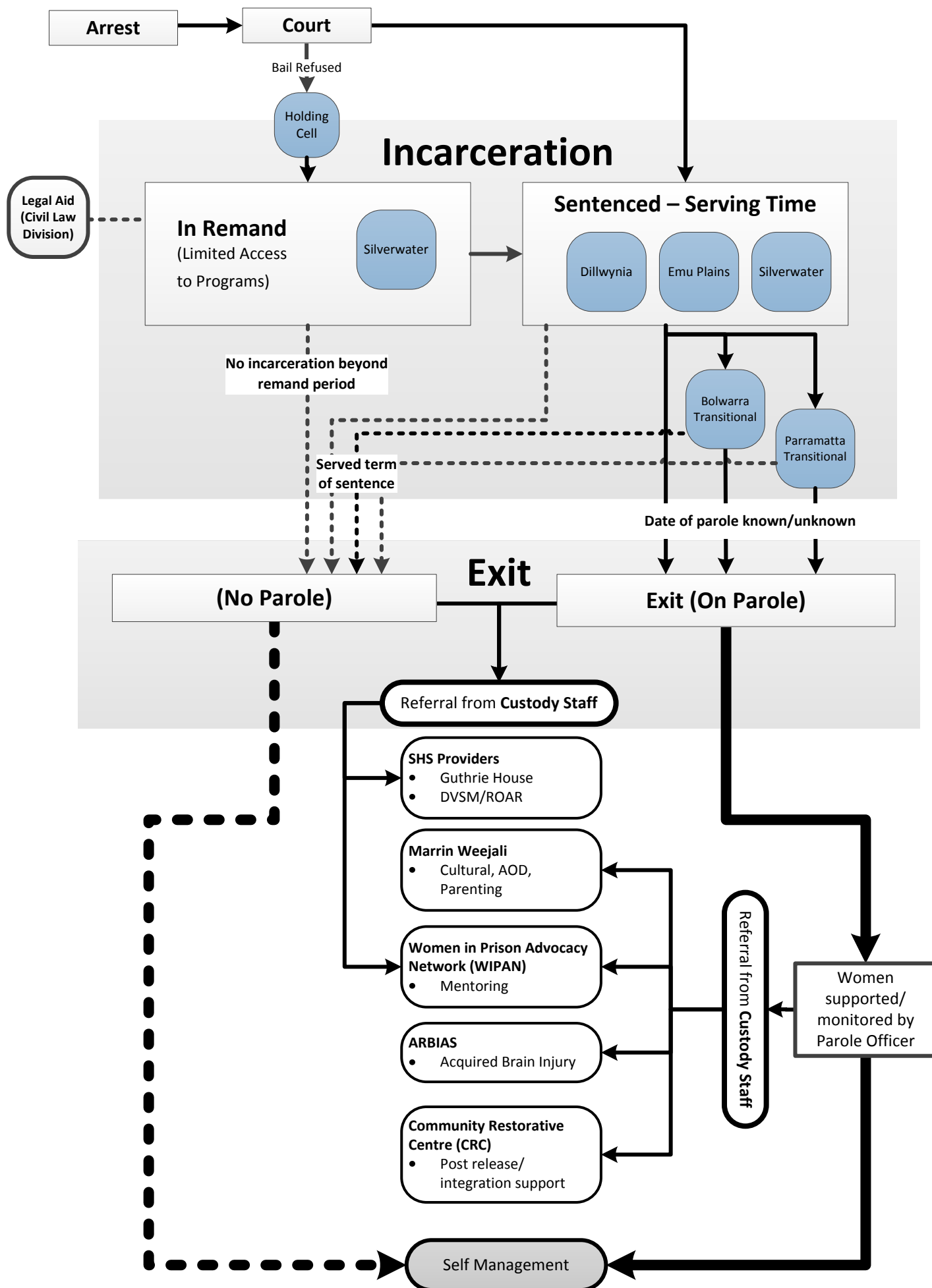
In this context, women's pathways into (and back into) the criminal justice system are typically related to offences at the lower end of the spectrum with shorter periods of incarceration for remand and sentence. As a result women cycle in and out of the criminal justice system and this forms part of a complex cycle of violence, trauma, substance use, social disadvantage and criminalisation (WIPAN, 2012).

Women have higher levels of substance abuse and drug-related offences than men, with 65per cent of women perceiving that their current sentence was linked to drugs (Devon Indig, 2009). Women are also more likely to be homeless prior to their incarceration than men. Refer to [Map 3: Client Cycles, Needs and Patterns' later in this report](#) for a picture of women in the prison system.

Visual mapping of the pathways through the criminal justice system

The multiple pathways through the criminal justice system and the varying experiences through these different pathways are not readily apparent for service staff engaging with this client group for the first time. The following map, '[Map 1 System Pathways: Women Leaving Correctional Services \(WLCS\)](#)' has been developed, as part of the project discussions, to provide a visual representation of the correctives services in Western Sydney and the various pathways that women may travel through the system.

Map 1: System Pathways - Women Leaving Correctional Services



Map 1: System Pathways – Outline of Service Descriptions

Dillwynia

Dillwynia Correctional Centre is a minimum/medium security facility for female offenders. It is on the John Morony Correctional Complex located five kilometres south of Windsor.

Emu Plains

Emu Plains Correctional Centre is a minimum security institution for females situated 60km west of Sydney's central business district.

Silverwater

Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre is a maximum security institution for women and the major reception centre for female offenders in NSW. Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre is one of three correctional facilities make up the Silverwater Correctional Complex located 21km west of Sydney's central business district.

Bolwarra Transitional

Bolwarra (at Emu Plains) and Parramatta Transitional Centres provide support for female offenders approaching release from custody. The centre focuses on Aboriginal women and provides support for women with a history of alcohol and other drugs use to help them successfully return to the community and minimise their risk of re-offending.

Legal Aid

Legal Aid NSW is an independent statutory body providing legal services in many areas of the law to socially and economically disadvantaged people across NSW, including victims of domestic violence. Legal Aid NSW lawyers have been running a service that provides civil law advice and minor assistance to Aboriginal women in custody since October 2014. This service is run in partnership with Corrections NSW and Housing NSW and aims to address barriers to housing faced by Aboriginal women when they leave prison. Lawyers from the Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities in Legal Aid NSW currently attend Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre on Tuesday every fortnight and assist inmates from other correctional centres on demand. The Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities can be contacted on (02) 9219 5057.

WIPAN

The Women in Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN) is a grassroots community organisation committed to advancing the prospects and wellbeing of women and female youth affected by the criminal justice system. WIPAN is unique in its provisions and the diversity of its community as the only organisation in NSW solely addressing the many issues facing marginalised women and female youth affected by the criminal justice system. WIPAN advocates to improve the criminal justice system and delivers an evidence-based practical mentoring program.

CRC

The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) The Community Restorative Centre provides a range of services to people involved in the criminal justice system and their families. CRC is the lead provider of specialist through-care, post-release, and re-integration programs for people transitioning from prison into the community in NSW. All CRC programs aim to reduce crime and break entrenched cycles of disadvantage, offending and imprisonment.

arbias

arbias Ltd provides specialist services for people with acquired brain injury and high complex needs which include alcohol and other drug and mental health issues. They are staffed by employees in the areas of neuropsychology, community facilitation (case management), Occupational Therapy, housing options, professional training and education, flexible outreach and individualised support. arbias is also funded by Corrective Services NSW to deliver the Initial Transition Support (ITS) services to people who have medium- high and high complex needs post release from prison across sites in NSW.

Marrin Weejali

Marrin Weejali provides alcohol and other drug services and social and emotional support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to non-Indigenous clients living in the Sydney metropolitan area, and to people visiting from the country. Marrin Weejali are able to meet the holistic needs of clients, their families and the broader community through their formal partnerships and informal collaborations with a wide range of service providers who deliver services from their centre in an environment of cultural safety

Guthrie House

Guthrie House is a not-for-profit transitional service for women, including women with pre-school aged children in their full-time care. Guthrie House is the only service of its kind that supports women who have a history of alcohol and other drug abuse and current involvement in the criminal justice system. This can include release from a correctional centre on bail and/or community-based sentence such as a Parole Order, Probation Order, Drug Court Order or Intensive Correction Order.



Descriptions of the pathways through the criminal justice system

There is no single pathway that is the “norm” in the prison system. Women in corrective services could have a range of different experiences and understanding these is important knowledge for support services to aware of.

Remand:

People are held in custody on remand if they have been refused bail by the courts. They still have a presumption of innocence yet they remain incarcerated ‘on remand’ while they await their trial (Community Restorative Centre NSW (CRC), 2009). In 2015 the median time spent on remand for NSW prisoners was 3.4 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015) however some prisoners may remain on remand for years at a time. Tightening of the bail laws have meant that more people are being refused bail and then subsequently delays in the court system itself mean that people are held longer on remand before going before the court for their matters. While some women are held on remand for lengthy periods of time, a significant number of women are released in less than 7 days.

In NSW, women on remand are held at the Silverwater Prison which is a maximum security prison. Recent shortages of beds in NSW prisons have resulted in people being held on remand at Emu Plains and Dillwynia. While on remand prisoners are not able to access the main stream prison programs designed to address offending behaviour. Women held on remand are usually kept at the highest classification rating of prison (WIPAN, 2014).

The time a prisoner remains on remand is dependent on the progress of their case through the judicial system and the outcome of their trial. Prisoners may be released from remand directly into the community if they are found not guilty, or if they are found guilty but their time on remand equates to the sentence given, or if they are found guilty but are not sentenced to prison.

Remand creates significant uncertainty for prisoners; it makes it difficult for Corrective Services staff to refer clients to support services often resulting in very short lead times for referrals. This in turn impacts the service response from organisations supporting prisoners on release.

Release on Parole:

Parole is the release of an offender from custody to serve the balance of their sentence in the community. Parole is a form of conditional release that involves a thorough review of information and assessment of risk. Parolees must abide by the conditions of their release. If the conditions of parole are not met, parole may be revoked and the offender returned to custody (NSW Government, State Parole Authority, 2015).

When a court sentences a person to prison for more than twelve months, the court must say how long the person must stay in prison for. This is called the non-parole period. The non-parole period must be served in prison, the rest of the time may be served in the community.



Who Can Get Parole?

If the total prison sentence is less than three years the person is automatically released on parole once the non-parole period is finished. If the total prison sentence is more than three years, the parole board will decide if the person should be released. The State Parole Authority will let the person out if they think they will keep to the rules of parole. Otherwise the person will have to stay in prison until their sentence is finished.

For prisoners granted parole, there are a number of factors (such as length of sentence, available suitable accommodation and time spent in remand) that will determine the amount of notice a prisoner is given prior to their release. In some cases this may be a matter of weeks while in others it may be longer (Community Restorative Centre NSW (CRC)). The uncertainty around this puts significant pressure on custody staff to refer women to appropriate support services. Services receiving the referrals are also under pressure, attempting to put adequate and effective supports in place to match the short notice or uncertain timing of her release from custody.

Transitional Centres:

In Western Sydney there are two Transitional centres which provide support for female inmates approaching release from custody. Bolwara (located at Emu Plains correctional facilities) focuses on Indigenous women and provides support for women who have histories of alcohol and other drugs use. The Parramatta Transitional Centre supports female inmates serving longer sentences who are also preparing for release. This transitional support is designed to help the women successfully return to the community and minimise their risk of re-offending (NSW Corrective Services, 2015). Women in transitional centres are allowed to leave the facility for periods of time to work and to prepare for their transition back into the community.

Indigenous Women and the criminal justice system:

Indigenous women make up 30 per cent of all female inmates in NSW, they are between nine and sixteen times more likely to be charged for an offence than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Indigenous women generally serve shorter sentences than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and are more likely than non-Indigenous women to be on remand. It is therefore critical to develop service responses that take into account the specific factors that are relevant for Indigenous women these include (Bartels, 2010):

- Indigenous women's role as primary parent means that time spent in prison is likely to have more disruptive consequences on family and maternal responsibilities.
- Indigenous women's greater degree of financial dependence upon their partners leaving them more vulnerable to victimisation and may impact their support while in prison.
- Indigenous women's experience of discrimination on basis of ethnicity and gender—their experience and perception of discrimination and gender needs to be considered in the formulation service response.
- The disadvantaged status of Indigenous women based on all key indicators means that they have greater needs than most other groups, requiring 'more intensive and multi-faceted services'.



Experiences of the pathways through the criminal justice system

It is important to acknowledge that every woman's experience in custody is unique and will impact her during prison and potentially long afterwards. A number of factors that can be expected to influence a woman include: her mental health; if she receives support/visits from friends or family; the length of time spent on remand and the experience of that uncertainty; her status as a mother; the care arrangements for her children while in prison; the length of her sentence; and the people that she spends her time with while in prison. All of these factors will impact on a woman's experience and will be important considerations in supporting her on exit.

"You may think that if you can handle prison you can handle anything, but many ex-prisoners have said that the first few weeks outside were actually harder than the time they spent in gaol. Coping with money problems, dealing with other people, and feeling like you don't fit in can be overwhelming. You may feel depressed and anxious and not want to leave your room." (Community Restorative Centre (CRC), 2007)

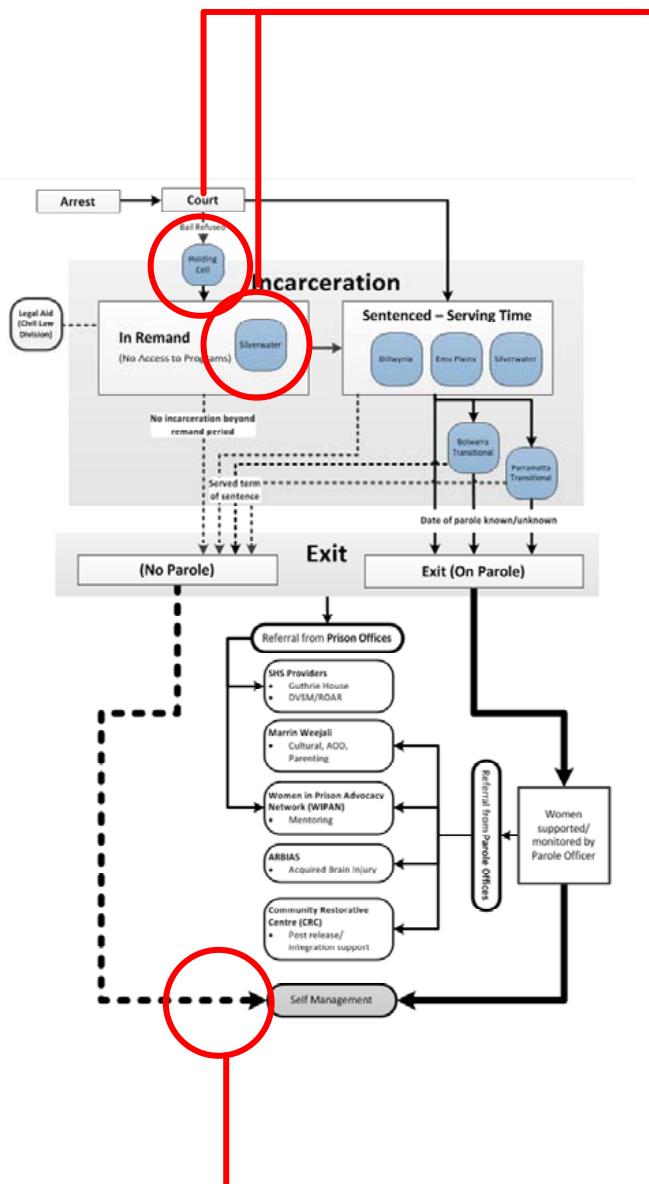
As part of the workshop that informed this report, participants mapped the individual experiences of a woman's incarceration as she travels through the criminal justice system based on four 'real life' case studies of women who had been in prison. The aim of this exercise was to help participants empathise with women who have been through prison in order to better develop an appropriate case management response. These experiences are presented in the following map, '[Map 2 Client Pathway Experiences: Women Leaving Corrections Services \(WLCS\)](#)'.

It is important to note that these are the 'perceived experiences' of the workshop participants, many of which have worked with women who have been in prison.

Map 2: Client Pathway and Experience - Women Leaving Correctional Services (WLCS)

Lived Experiences

Note: These are the 'perceived experiences' of the workshop participants, many of which have worked with women who have been in prison.



What might the lived experience as a woman in Remand be?

Holding Cell

- Recently arrested women may be suffering from drug withdrawal while in a holding cell.
- The arrested woman may be in a state of anxiety if they have been separated from a friend/partner/family or children.
- Clients may be in a state of shock following a violent or traumatic event that led to incarceration.

Remand

- Indigenous women are likely to have a greater level of distrust towards the 'white fella system'. This may result in there being on conflict with the system or not accessing support services available.
- Literacy and numeracy rates among Indigenous people are significantly lower than non-Indigenous people. In prison this creates barriers such as people not being able to complete forms for housing that will secure the tenancy while they are in custody as well as creating barriers to engaging in the judicial system.
- Strip searches can be degrading, humiliating and traumatic, especially for women who have suffered from sexual abuse.*
- Women on Remand face significant uncertainty and loss of control of their future. This could result in significant stress that may lead to self harm or violent behaviour for some women, particularly where mental illness is already a factor.
- Women in custody receive significantly less support (from outside prison) than men do often as a result of the fact that they are the traditional carers but there may not be others to look out for them.
- Client may be moved around to different prisons which will be unsettling.
- Lack of access to educational and rehabilitative services.
- Women identified as being a risk to themselves are put in an isolated cell that is lit 24/7 so they can be monitored.*

What might the lived experience of a woman in the early hours, days, weeks and months of release from correctional services without parole?

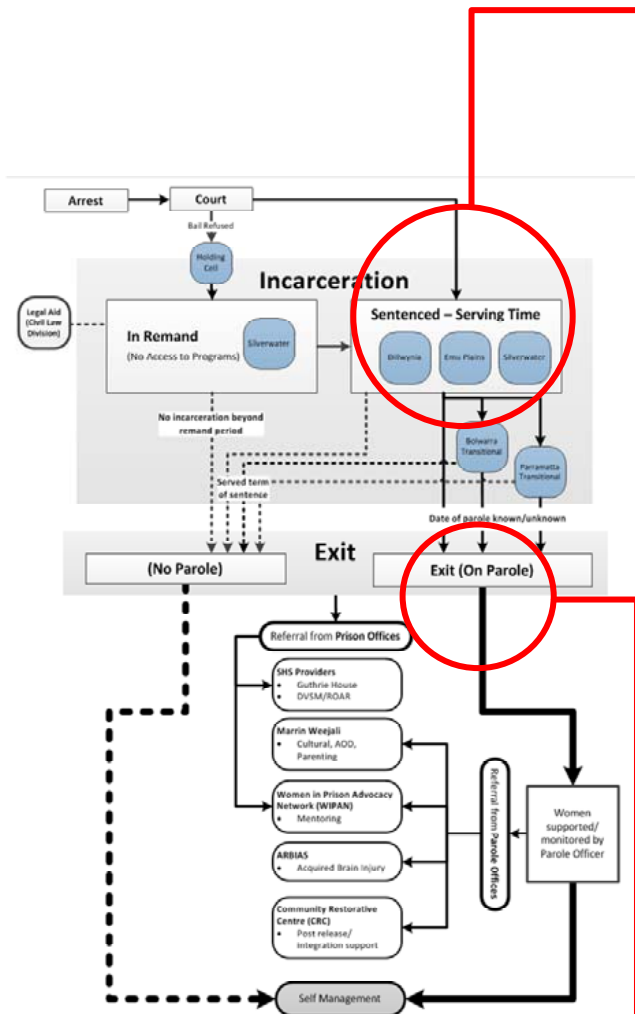
- Women exiting prison are likely to be hopeful that they will be able to get in contact with their children.
- Women exiting prison are likely to be anxious and fearful of what the future will hold. Where will they live, will their family and friends support them?
- Women exiting prison may be institutionalised impacting the way they carry themselves (no eye contact, minimal communication) and may have low levels of trust of people and other institutions.
- Women may find it difficult to adjust to being out of a high security prison environment, without rules and boundaries.
- Ex-drug users may have few networks outside of their old users that may be able to provide the social and emotional support required increasing the risk of using again.
- Aboriginal women may want to return to their rural and remote communities. However, severe lack of support services in rural or remote communities and employment opportunities which could lead to a greater risk of returning drugs and reoffending behaviour.

* CSNSW staff face the challenging tension of balancing duty of care for individuals and for all individuals when managing safety in custody.

Map 2: Client Pathway and Experience - Women Leaving Correctional Services (WLCS)

Lived Experiences

Note: These are the 'perceived experiences' of the workshop participants, many of which have worked with women who have been in prison.



What might the lived experience as a woman in low/med/high security prison be?

- Inadequate access to drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs and harm minimisation programs, could impact the health of women in prison.
- Mothers who are in prison experience difficulties in maintaining their relationship with their children and suffer disruptions to family life, and can lead to their children suffering from emotional and behavioural problems.
- The 'shame' women experience resulting from their incarceration may have an impact on Indigenous prisoners, It can have a real effect on individuals, lowering their confidence, their self esteem and their status in the community.
- Indigenous women prisoners, in particular, can suffer from disruptions to their cultural responsibilities and dislocation from their communities.
- Indigenous women may have a sense of community in prisons given the large number of aboriginal people in prison, although this may have some positive impact it also may result in greater or unsafe drug use.
- Indigenous women receive significantly less support while in prison as a result of higher rates of poverty within their communities, this could mean they have less money in prison and receive fewer visits from family and friends who cannot not afford to travel.
- Difficulties in maintaining contact with families and communities, including contact through visits and correspondence may contribute to mental health issues and anxiety.
- Prisoners may not have adequate access to physical and mental health services.
- Segregation could exacerbate the symptoms of prisoners with mental illness.
- Women serving long or multiple sentences may become institutionalised impacting their ability to live independently in the community.

Bolwarra & Parramatta Transitional

- Prisoners in transitional centres have more freedom, and may be able to leave on 'day release' to work.
- Being in a transitional centre may enable women to begin the process of preparing for their departure by being able to attend meetings with housing, apply for ID, set up bank accounts etc.

What might the lived experience as a woman in the early hours, days, weeks and months of release from correctional services and on parole?

- Aboriginal women returning to rural or remote communities on parole may be less able to access support services found in larger centres. This means they may have an increased risk of returning to the lifestyle that led to incarceration such as using drugs alcohol.
- Women leaving prisons may be at greater risk of exiting to homelessness than men. Prisoners may leave to find they have been evicted from their accommodation and have lost their possessions. This may result in them being listed as an 'unsatisfactory tenant' for government housing and having a negative rating on the private rental market.
- For women with an Acquired Brain Injury or intellectual disability meeting parole requirements can be a significant challenge, particularly if there are not strong family or community supports to help with basic responsibilities, new social and community connections to avoid reoffending.
- Women exiting on parole are not likely to know their release date more than a few weeks out making it difficult to arrange suitable accommodation prior to exiting.
- Mothers exiting prison seeking restoration will be required to demonstrate they are fit to have their children returned, this requirement is a lengthy one that will take time and will likely have a significant emotional toll on mothers.

Who did we talk with?

“Effective transition planning (for people leaving care or custody) requires the provision of comprehensive and co-ordinated support across the service sector to address the range of issues and challenges that people leaving care or custody may face.” (NSW Government, 2012)

Supporting women leaving custody with complex needs will require that DVSM develops a co-ordinated service response founded on strong partnerships with other specialist organisations committed to putting clients at the centre of what they do.

In recognition of this, the project was undertaken with a commitment to:

- Learn from those organisations with a proven track record of working with women leaving correctional services.
- Foster relationships, building on trust and mutual respect with the various organisations and government departments already active in this area of work.
- Share the learnings and benefits of this work with the broader sector.

Through the course of this project members of the Sightlines and ROAR team undertook over 20 meetings and interviews with a cross section of stakeholders and frontline ROAR staff. DVSM took steps to communicate its commitment to share learning from the project with these stakeholders. In addition it made commitments to provide a summary report including key findings and recommendations, a table of who is delivering services, and a table listing all other stakeholder organisations who contributed knowledge and expertise to the project. This project report is designed to document and share the project learnings.

The following organisations played pivotal role in informing the development of this project.

arbias

arbias Ltd provides specialist services for people with acquired brain injury and high complex needs which include alcohol and other drug and mental health issues. They are staffed by employees in the areas of neuropsychology, community facilitation (case management), Occupational Therapy, housing options, professional training and education, flexible outreach and individualised support. arbias is also funded by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) to deliver the Initial Transition Support (ITS) services to people who have medium- high and high complex needs post release from prison across sites in NSW.

Community Restorative Centre NSW (CRC)

The Community Restorative Centre provides a range of services to people involved in the criminal justice system and their families. CRC is the lead provider of specialist through-care, post-release, and re-integration programs for people transitioning from prison into the community in NSW. All CRC programs aim to reduce crime and break entrenched cycles of disadvantage, offending and imprisonment.

**Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)**

Corrective Services NSW delivers professional correctional services and programs to reduce the risk of re-offending and enhance public safety. As an important element of the criminal justice system, CSNSW manages offenders in custody and in the community. CSNSW works in partnership with other government and community agencies to ensure that inmates, offenders and their families are supported.

Legal Aid NSW

Legal Aid NSW is an independent statutory body providing legal services in many areas of the law to socially and economically disadvantaged people across NSW, including victims of domestic violence. Legal Aid NSW lawyers have been running a service that provides civil law advice and minor assistance to Aboriginal women in custody since October 2014. This service is run in partnership with Corrections NSW and Housing NSW and aims to address barriers to housing faced by Aboriginal women when they leave prison. Lawyers from the Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities in Legal Aid NSW currently attend Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre on Tuesday every fortnight and assist inmates from other correctional centres on demand. The Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities can be contacted on (02) 9219 5057.

Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation

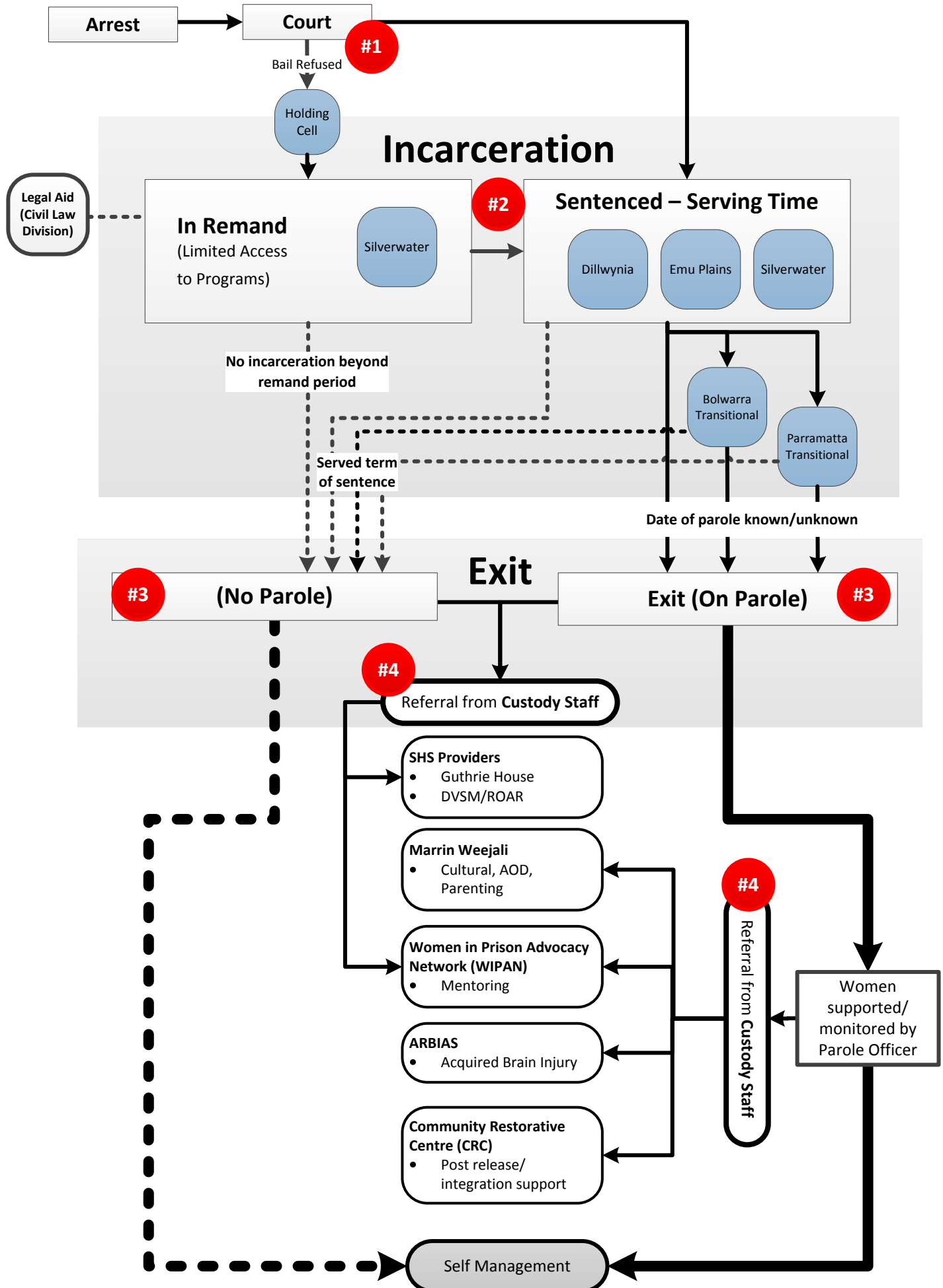
Marrin Weejali provides alcohol and other drug services and social and emotional support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to non-Indigenous clients living in the Sydney metropolitan area, and to people visiting from the country. Marrin Weejali are able to meet the holistic needs of clients, their families and the broader community through their formal partnerships and informal collaborations with a wide range of service providers who deliver services from their centre in an environment of cultural safety

WIPAN

The Women in Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN) is a grassroots community organisation committed to advancing the prospects and wellbeing of women and female youth affected by the criminal justice system. WIPAN is unique in its provisions and the diversity of its community as the only organisation in NSW solely addressing the many issues facing marginalised women and female youth affected by the criminal justice system. WIPAN systemically advocates to improve the criminal justice system and delivers an evidence-based practical mentoring program which; provides gender-responsive social support, and engages women in the community; provides a safe space that is non-stigmatised; fosters a positive self-identity enabling every woman to live the life they deserve to; and supports women vulnerable to reoffending in making choices that positively contribute to the community.

CSNSW funds a number of non-government organisations via the Funded Partnership Initiative which is a competitive tender. arbias, CRC and Guthrie House all receive funding from CSNSW to provide specific services for offenders. Refer to [Appendix 3](#) for the complete list of individuals and organisations we met with.

Map 3: Client Needs, Cycles and Patterns



Map 3: Client Needs, Cycles and Patterns

#1

Who are women entering prison

- Female prisoners constitute 7.98% of NSW prison population (923 women) (CSNSW, 2016).
- 31.9% of female prisoners are Indigenous (2% of the population are Indigenous) (CSNSW, 2016).
- 16% of female prisoners are from CALD (6.9% from Vietnam, 2% from Cambodia) (WIPAN, 2014).
- 29% of women in prison had been sexually abused from the age of 16 (WIPAN, 2012).
- 66% of women in prison had been involved in at least 1 violent relationship (WIPAN, 2012).
- 45% of women in prison reported a partner or spouse had engaged in at least 1 form of abuse in the year preceding their incarceration. (WIPAN, 2014).
- Women have higher levels of substance abuse and drug-related offences than men (WIPAN, 2014).
- 65% Women perceived their current sentence were linked to drugs in some way (Devon Indig, 2009).
- Women prisoners are more likely to be homeless prior to incarceration than men (WIPAN, 2014).

#2

Women through the prison system

- 47% of women have sentences less than 6 months, 73% under 12 months (WIPAN, 2014).
- 59.5% of women in custody in NSW had a history of incarceration (WIPAN, 2014).
- Recidivism rates for women in NSW is 42% (highest rate nationally) (WIPAN, 2014).
- Recidivism rates for Indigenous women is 66.8% (WIPAN, 2014).
- Women's pathways into the criminal justice system are typically related to lesser offences with shorter periods of incarceration. As a result women cycle in and out of the criminal justice system - this forms part of a complex cycle of violence, trauma, substance use, social disadvantage and criminalisation (WIPAN, 2012).

#3

The complex needs of Women Leaving Prison

- 44% of Women reported using illicit drugs while in prison (Devon Indig, 2009).
- The majority (92%) of women prisoners reported having one or more long term health conditions, compared to 81% of male prisoners and 75% of the general population (Devon Indig, 2009).
- 54% of reported as having received a mental health assessment or treatment (Devon Indig, 2009).
- Women experience higher reported rates of past childhood and adulthood abuse (WIPAN, 2012).
- Women are at a greater risk of homelessness post-release. (WIPAN, 2014).
- Women face unique needs in the area of motherhood (WIPAN, 2012).
- Former Prisoners are 12 times more likely to die in the first 4 weeks after their release (than those in the general community), and 6 times more likely in the first year (Ting, 2014).

Women in Prison are generally described as being *"low risk but high need"*

#4

Post Release Support

- A number of post release support mechanisms/programs exist. These are primarily funded by Corrective Services NSW or FACS.
- The not for profit providers have a range of specialisations that frame the support that they provide – these include a focus on AOD, Acquired Brain Injury, housing, social and emotional well being etc. All these services recognise and proactively respond to needs outside their specific 'lens' of entry.
- All service providers including Corrective Services acknowledge that need for these services significantly outstrips the number of places available.
- The referral pathway from custody into the receiving service is a determinant for how early a case worker from the receiving service can make contact with a client pre-release.

Women leaving prison have complex needs

Each of our meetings and interviews shed light on more detail and depth about the needs of women leaving correctional services and reinforced the complex often overlapping needs of these women. A reoccurring topic that appeared was the difficulty that all the organisations had in finding these women transitional, crisis, temporary or permanent accommodation. Many of the organisations identified an unspoken 'stigma' that surrounds this group and makes finding suitable housing difficult. The circumstances with which women entered into custody often resulted in compromised tenancy arrangements and/or outstanding tenancy relinquishment.

Though each organisation had a different lens through which they deliver their work, they consistently reiterated the complex issues that these women faced which included; access to their children, AOD, mental illness, mental disability, Acquired Brain Injury, Domestic and Family Violence, lack of social and emotional support within the community to name but a few.

It was also clear that Indigenous woman faced additional challenges because of their identity, such as institutional racism, intergenerational trauma and disadvantage.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- Women leaving prison have complex needs.
- Housing and homeless is the biggest issue for women exiting custody.
- Many of our Indigenous clients are homeless before they go into corrections, they have a negative classification with the Department of Housing; these classifications are permanent if they are not addressed. The classification are either the result of being behind in rent (which may be linked to their incarceration or if women have left due to DFV) or they may also be linked to damage to the property that may have occurred during a DFV incident
- In the Indigenous community everyone knows everyone; this makes it difficult for people to leave violent relationships. This is a real barrier for Aboriginal women.
- "Shame job": It has a real effect on Aboriginal people; it lowers their confidence, their esteem and their status in the community. It stops people talking about things, particularly about Domestic and Family Violence.
- We are the only service that is funded to specifically focus on people with an Acquired Brain Injury.
- Some women are not just in on one sentence, they may breach parole, and this may trigger a range of court processes that will impact their level of sentence.



A. Be in touch early

Services actively working in prison spoke of the importance of working with women as early as possible prior to their release (ideally 3 months prior). This early engagement enables time to build rapport and trust with the clients which is critical for this group where trust may have been broken in their experience prior to and during custody.

Early pre-release engagement allows services to support clients in a routine and stable environment, where their basic needs are catered for. This creates time and space to build rapport and to plan for how to support a woman on her release from custody.

What was made clear in all our interviews was that being able to meet a client 6 weeks prior to their release (let alone 3 months) was often not possible. This was attributed to the 'churn' of women through the criminal justice system, many of whom are on Remand and with about half of all women in custodial sentences for 6 months or less (WIPAN, 2014).

The stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that this placed great pressure on custody staff making referrals. Also the nature of the parole system meant that supporting organisations may only have a matter of a few weeks pre-release engagement with these women before their parole release date. The situation for women on Remand was identified as being particularly critical, with high levels of need and significant barriers to organisations providing effective support to these women prior to their release.



B. Be consistent, build trust and credibility

Building trust and rapport with these women was identified as a key element of successful case management. Frequent intensive contact (daily phone or text and 3 times weekly face to face contact) was broadly recommended within the first 3 months of a woman's release from prison to manage the various risks (reoffending, self-harm and death) to these women and supporting their constellation of needs.

"We can't assume that there is anyone else in this person's life that will help them. The case worker is likely the only person who will provide support in their life." (CRC, 2016)

Clients are likely to need significant advocacy support to navigate housing and to find suitable accommodation. Requiring assistance with 'Housing assistance' forms and accompanying them to meetings with Housing NSW and FACs. Intensity of support and consistency (i.e. ensuring the same case worker meets the client every time, and is available on call) places significant pressure on case workers and organisations in terms of work hours and ensuring a fair/safe work environment. Flexibility was identified as being important in managing this in a sustainable manner that meets the needs of clients, staff and organisations.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- The support in the first 3 months is very high (daily) particularly as their needs are multiple around housing etc.
- Having a strong and stable relationship with 1 case worker is critical, the relational rapport is critical.
- We are out at Silverwater prison fortnightly to meet directly with clients and then continue to work with these clients as they move through the criminal justice system.
- Case workers need to be able to manage an enormous amount of referral fatigue for the women.
- We need to build rapport with the clients this takes time pre-release; however this effectively means that it is difficult to work with prisoners on remand and they are the people who often need the most support.



C. Be 'Response Ready'

Being ready to respond to the complex needs of a woman leaving corrections cannot sit solely with a caseworker, a manager or with the leadership of an organisation. It requires a coordinated response across the organisation that is driven by clarity of our role and our duty of care within the broader picture of the client's needs. In meeting with the various stakeholders active with this client group it was clear that they have all been on a journey to becoming '*response ready*'. Given the constellation of needs of this client group mistakes made by services in attempting to meet these needs will be inevitable. An organisational focus on becoming 'response ready' will reduce these mistakes and ensure that learnings are incorporated into processes and not repeated. The following areas were specifically identified as being important for developing response readiness.

Housing:

Having a clear pathway for supporting women from prison into sustainable permanent housing is critical given the importance of a stable living environment for these women. Organisations working in this space have used a range of responses to address this; from partnerships with community housing organisation through to a strategic mix of advocacy and relationship building to attain priority social housing.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- Housing NSW is able to give 'High Priority Tenancy Reinstatement HPTR' if the client has had to leave their property due to Domestic and Family Violence, or if they have relinquished their property because they are going into custody. HPTR means that they can go back onto the top of the priority list once they have left prison. Whilst HPTR is possible very few women qualify due to the conditions required when a tenancy is handed back.
- Our clients always need support with housing and case management.
- Discrimination against women leaving prison exists and persists amongst a number of accommodation providers.

Knowledge of and connections with prisons:

During a number of stakeholder meetings we were strongly advised to build our knowledge and skills of working in the prison environment, and to be effective in this space we need to build relationships with staff inside the prisons and we needed to develop an understanding of how the correctional services bureaucracy works. This means understanding which staff we need to engage with, learning the acronyms for roles, and understanding how and when to communicate in order to be effective. Developing this knowledge will require DVSM to be proactive and deliberate in building relationships within the prisons.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- You can never be too prepared when working with women leaving custody, you need to go into corrective services and build relationships inside the prisons.
- The Specialist Homelessness Services need to be proactive in spruiking their services in general to the prisons and the groups. This has not happened in the past.
- Sharing information in prison:
 - There is in prison TV that we could use to advertise 'our service'
 - There is an in prison – prisoners committee (inmate development committee).
 - There are Expo days in the prisons - CSNSW hosts Expo Days where external agencies attend the Correctional Centre to provide information on services available in the community. A number of agencies also provide services and advice to people still in custody on a range of issues including housing, immigration, and Centrelink benefits issues.
- It will be important to meet with Managers of Services and Programs (MOSPs) who work in the prisons and potentially attend the parole unit team meeting to share information to the Service and Program Officers ¹(SAPOs).
- Understanding the 'prison context' is key to working effectively with the staff in the prisons otherwise you will get nowhere.

¹ Services and Programs Officers are required to undertake offender assessments for case planning and delivery of programs and services for offenders to reduce the risk of re-offending and support integration into the community. They are part of a case management team and must provide reports to courts and the State Parole Authority as required.
<http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au>



Staff and organisational readiness:

Each organisation we met with had spent significant time thinking and developing systems and procedures within their work that enabled their staff and their organisation to respond to this client with the expertise, professionalism and flexibility required. A number of organisations communicated the need for ongoing staff development and systems to be put in place that ensured that staff could be retained and supported in this challenging work environment. Systems and forms were clearly important in supporting a consistent approach was developed, yet a number of organisations spoke of the need to ensure that these were tailored to specifically meet the needs of the organisation.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- The clients are often coming 'off' drugs they have multiple problems; the work can be very confronting.
- Having highly skilled workers is essential for managing the complexity of client's needs.
- There are tips and indicators that could be useful for case-workers to help them identify if a client might have an ABI.
 - Forgetting things, low motivations, having difficult following steps (cooking), do they cook/prepare meals etc. And how different parts of the brain will affect different elements of people's skills.
 - There are often hospital records that identify that people have had a traumatic brain injury that can help us identify if they have an ABI.
 - For people impacted by AOD, and hypoxia this may makes it more difficult to identify if the client has an ABI.
- Whatever model/approach we develop it will be important to ensure that it is flexible.
- We do a lot of work to advocate/raise awareness of services providers about the realities of working with people from correctives. Myth busting.

Working with Indigenous women:

A number of those we interviewed spoke of the necessity for our organisation to be developing a culturally informed approach to ensure we are able to support the percentage of women exiting prisons who are Indigenous. What was clearly communicated was that this is not something that can happen through one off training or the adoptions of a Reconciliation Action Plan (though these may be good starting points). Developing this cultural competence is a longer deeper process of learning, understanding and celebrating both the richness of the culture, the people and their history; while not losing sight of the deeply destructive impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people and the ongoing and deeply entrenched racism that Aboriginal people face on a daily basis. People talked about the importance of building this understanding over time by establishing and working on connections with the Aboriginal community in Western Sydney that are based on trust and mutual respect that enable the organisation to work with these women effectively.

Key comments from Stakeholders

- Don't over think developing a culturally appropriate service, but ensure that the culturally appropriate approaches are front and centre of people's minds and ensure that your service is flexible.
- Initial networking will be key for working in a cross cultural context
- You can't just learn how to work with Aboriginal clients by doing cultural awareness training. It takes years to build trust and to be trusted.
- I have done so much cultural awareness training that I am not necessary clear on what the cultural protocols are anymore. Training alone is not the answer; it's the doing that builds knowledge and connections.
- When working with Aboriginal people it's important to be friendly, warm (not official) dress in a casual way, but be professional. Being down to earth, being able to connect is important.
- Just being 'aware' that some Aboriginal people may have different cultural needs is important. Not having this awareness will reflect on how the client responds to you.
- Some organisations try to build their organisations cultural competence simply hiring people with specific cultural identify or a specific cultural competence. It would be my preference that we continue to work in a way that builds knowledge and skills of all staff.
- The assessment process is important, it needs to help people to understand what questions they need to ask, so that people can then start to explore how a person's cultural identity is related or needs to be taken into consideration in regards to this work.
 - E.g. just having a 2 bed house for an Aboriginal client will not be enough because you need to have space for their extended family - this is for all Aboriginal clients.



D. Clear case collaboration

Every organisation we spoke with had established a range of different working arrangements with other organisations to enable them to meet the complex needs of these clients. These arrangements included; personal relationships between staff across organisations that facilitated the flow of information or referrals; informal agreements that encouraged the sharing of resources and expertise; more formal MOU's or partnerships that clearly outline how organisations are going to work together for mutual benefit; to deeper collaborations that have developed between organisations over time and result in their working together to achieve a common goal.

Irrespective of the manner in which organisations were working together it was essential for this to take place in order to support client's needs in a manner that is effective. It was recognised across a number of those interviewed that funders had an expectation that SHS's needed to be working in some form of co-operative approach to support women leaving prisons.

For DVSM it will be important when looking at working with an organisation/s to be clear on; what we hope to achieve; what we bring; what we are looking to gain; who this might mean we should be working with (or not working with); and how we might go about working together.

Key comments from Stakeholders

Housing

- Our clients always need support with housing and case management.
- We have a partnership with a community housing provider that supports women exiting prison looking for accommodation in Western Sydney.
- We have a partnership with community housing provider that gives us nomination rights into their properties.
- We have an informal relationship with a specialised crisis accommodation service for women exiting prison, where they work together with them to support accommodation and mentoring.

How to collaborate

- One of the issues would be how services work with each other within a district based approach. This might involve being more pro-active, with the District Homelessness Implementation Groups (DHIG)
- The homelessness services don't know enough about their counterparts in the sector.

Specialist knowledge

- We have a screening tool that helps identify the presence of an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) that we are able to work with you to use this.
- We are open to skill sharing between our organisations as we see the impact of DFV on our clients.

The workshop approach was shaped by four key opportunities identified through our learning and discussions with stakeholders, and is described below in points A - D, and in the diagram that follows. These opportunities underpin the recommendations that ROAR, DVSM, the SHS sector and broader stakeholders can implement in response to this project.

A. Be in touch early

Early pre-release engagement is critical in building rapport with the client. It acknowledges that this takes time but is central to ensuring we are able to work with clients to help them address their needs and prepare for leaving prison. Pre-release engagement enables clients to be supported in a routine and stable environment, where their basic needs are being met.

B. Be consistent, build trust and credibility

Having a trusting relationship with a client is fundamental to successfully working with women exiting prison. When a woman is released from prison she will need daily support to adjust to life on the outside and to safely transition back into the community. This could include phone or text communication each day and three occasions of face to face contact per week. Trust takes time and is built through consistent case management with a single case worker. Trust is more than one client's perception of one caseworker; it is the perception of our organisation by our clients and colleagues in the sectors. While consistency is important we recognise that it can create operational challenges for our organisation. It is therefore important that we are consistent in 'what' and 'how' we communicate particularly in relation to our capacity in order to build our trust and credibility.

C. Be Response Ready

Being 'response ready' will enable ROAR staff to respond quickly and effectively to a women exiting prison. It will mean we have: the relationships within the prison that refers her to our service; clear strategies and pathways to support her into sustainable housing; staff will know how to respond and to work with her if she has an; AOD problem; mental illness; Acquired Brain Injury; needs social and emotional support; or is seeking restoration of her children. If the woman is Indigenous staff will have the awareness and connections to community that enable them to support her with trust and mutual respect. Being response ready means that the organisation will have the systems in place to maintain and update this state of readiness on a regular basis and enables staff to rest and recuperate in a manner that is consistent with our organisations duty of care.

D. Clear Case Collaboration

ROAR's approach to supporting clients will be anchored on the assumption that we will need to work with one or more collaborators in order to support their needs. To do this effectively ROAR will be able clearly articulate what we offer and what support we need. ROAR will need to foster strong relationships that are able to trial and test ways of working together that will achieve the required outcomes for our clients. ROAR will need to develop a range of systems and tools that support collaboration to evolve and change over time as the needs and goals of the client evolve over time.

Moving Ahead – Our Approach

A

Be in touch early

Optimising any opportunity to **build rapport** and direct connection ahead of release

Commencing **constructive conversations** ahead of release where there are less variables requiring immediate response

B

Be consistent, build trust & credibility

Trust and credibility are critical in order to build rapport with women in prison who are inherently distrustful of the 'system'

Being '**consistent**' is key to building trust. It means having the same worker meet the client wherever possible, and only making promises that can be met.

C

Be Response Ready

Build awareness and be **more informed** of the needs and lived experiences of Women Leaving Correctional Services

Be **poised to collaborate** at a client level with relevant stakeholders who can support and provide services to Women Leaving Correctional Services

D

Clear Case Collaboration



It is important to recognise that ROAR's 'approach' to supporting women leaving corrections is in its early stages of development and will require a significant commitment in terms of staff time to progress it to a point where the organisation can feel comfortable working with these clients. It is however important to acknowledge that there is considerable experience within ROAR staff and DVSM management that mean the organisation is well placed to work effectively with these clients in the short to medium term.

Next Steps for ROAR as a Service

The following actions outline the 'next steps' that the ROAR team can take to implement the new learning and to sustain focus on and continuous improvement in our way of working with Women Leaving Corrective Services. These 'next steps' are listed below and have been categorised under the four opportunities identified within the project.

A. Be in touch early:

- (1) Work with Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) to develop referral pathways into ROAR that enable staff to start working with women as early as possible prior to their release (ideally 3 months prior).

B. Be Consistent, build trust and credibility

- (2) Develop a referral system that can manage the volume of referrals in a manner that enables staff to be consistent, build trust and build credibility with clients.
- (3) Enable staff to work in a flexible manner that enables them to build trust and rapport with clients. This may include flexible work hours, adjusted workloads that enable staff to manage travel to prisons and additional face to face support for clients.

C. Be response ready

- (4) Clearly identify, based on duty of care, which clients we can/cannot work with and be able to communicate why this is the case to Corrective Services NSW.
- (5) Develop an operating agreement with the Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) that outlines who we can support, the referral process and mechanisms of communications between ROAR and Corrective Services staff.
- (6) Establish relationships with Corrective Services staff in the prisons that we aim to be supporting women from.
- (7) Develop promotional materials that communicate the service we can provide and is targeted at Corrective Services staff and women in custody.

- (8) Develop a culture of learning, reflection and collaboration within ROAR and with our partners that acts as a catalyst for sharing knowledge, fostering collaboration and strengthening our collective approach to supporting these clients.

This could take the form of:

- ✓ Bi-monthly learning exchanges or information sessions with key stakeholders active in this sector including: arbias, CRC, Legal Aid – Civil Law unit, Marrin Weejali and WIPAN.
 - ✓ Quarterly evaluation/reflections sessions engaging stakeholders and women who have left custody that look specifically at what is/isn't working at both a client and systems level and drives service innovation.
- (9) Establish a working group of staff to design and implement a strategy that builds the cultural competency of the organisation to work with the local Aboriginal community in Western Sydney.
- (10) Develop tools, forms and procedures that enable staff to understand the lived experiences of women leaving custody and to support them effectively.

D. Clear Case Collaboration

- (11) Explore possible opportunities of working more formally with WIPAN and Marrin Weejali in a manner that enables a better collective response for this client group.
- (12) Co-design with WIPAN and Marrin Weejali tools and processes that enable effective collaboration and client outcomes.
- (13) Identify other key stakeholders with whom we need to be collaborating in the medium term.
- (14) Develop relationships with a community housing providers that give us nomination rights for our clients exiting corrections

Next Steps for DVSM as an organisation

- (1) Recruit staff with the knowledge, experience and/or expertise required for working with these clients. Where staff with prior experience in working with Women Leaving Correctional Services cannot be recruited, *temperament, resilience* and/or *lived experience* could be important attributes for selection and recruitment of case workers.
- (2) Build this client group into our current and ongoing review of policies and procedures to ensure ROAR staff have the flexibility to respond to client needs in the critical first few months of release.
- (3) Continuously improve workplace health and safety policies and procedure support staff wellbeing and resilience whilst working with this client group.
- (4) Engage with FACS in relation to this project and the proposed response to ensure buy-in and to mitigate any contractual risks that may arise from a potential reduction in total clients supported or cost of support given their complexity and support required. It may be strategic to position the DVSM response as a 'pilot' or 'best practice' model that show cases the role of an SHS provider as a case coordinator for complex clients, and this could be explored with time and learning.
- (5) Ensure that the work and progress of ROAR in supporting women leaving corrections is documented, monitored and evaluated to enable, DVSM to be an active participant in the broader dialogue and debate around women in corrections, domestic violence and homelessness.
- (6) Keep learning through reports such as 'Women as offenders. Women as victims. The role of corrections in supporting women with histories of sexual abuse. (Mary Stathopoulos and Antonia Quadara)' A Report for the Women's Advisory Council of Corrective Services NSW <http://www.correctiveservices.justice.nsw.gov.au> (2014).



Recommendations – SHS Sector

- (1) DVSM to actively share and distribute this report across the SHS sector, including presenting at the Western Sydney District Homelessness Implementation Group (DHIG) and District Operational Group (DOG), and other relevant forums that may support other SHS's to work effectively in this space.
- (2) Initiate a coordinated approach by the services supporting women leaving custody towards Housing NSW and the NSW Housing Federation of Housing Associations in a dialogue aimed at addressing the barrier to sustainable housing for women leaving custody.
- (3) For SHS's to use the 'Are you ready for me' report as a resource to better understand and support women who are homeless and have spent time in custody. With a focus on the following principles; *Be Consistent, Build Trust and Credibility* when working with women who have been in custody; *Be Response Ready* by developing relationships with; and drawing on; the expertise of the organisations sited in this report.



Recommendations – External Stakeholders

- (1) “The Commission recommends that Corrections Victoria refer women to relevant family violence services and inform post-release support services if a prisoner has a history of family violence, so that post-release accommodation arrangements do not place the prisoner at risk. Similarly, planning for the release of male perpetrators from prison should ensure that their family members are not placed at further risk of violence.” (Royal Commission into Family Violence, 2016)
- (2) Explore how the NSW Governments Framework for Multi-Agency Client Transition Planning to Reduce Homelessness (2012) could be used as a mechanism for fostering greater collaboration across participating agencies and overcoming the systemic barriers to effectively supporting Women Leaving Correctional Services.
- (3) Explore opportunities of using the links between Domestic Violence and criminalisation and the current political will on DFV as a way to reframe the debate on women’s imprisonment in order to address some of the underlying factors that contribute to the current growth in the population of women in custody.

“...The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommends that further efforts be made to identify women prisoners with a history of family violence, so that they can be offered support to deal with trauma and other effects of violence.”

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Appendix 1: About DVSM

About DVSM

Domestic Violence NSW Service Management (DVSM) is a public benevolent institution which aims to empower clients to make permanent positive changes to improve their safety and wellbeing.

What does that mean for me?

DVSM understands that everyone has different needs and will make different choices about how they want to navigate challenges in their lives.

DVSM recognises that relationships can be complex and that your decision to start, stay or end a relationship is not simple and is unique and personal to you. Our service is designed to have an emphasis on respect for your personal self-defined needs regardless of your current accommodation choice. Our clients are always at the centre of how we work.

Our focus is to provide different services to help you to keep safe and to make informed choices about what's best for you and your family. We do this by providing services ranging from; temporary respite from a violent relationship; to providing in-community support and referral, and longer term assistance if you wish to leave the violent relationship for good.

Each child's experiences are important and we work with you to support your child's needs, development, wellbeing and potential.

Pets are an important part of the family. Wherever possible we can support you with making alternative arrangements for the safety and care of your pet/s.

DVSM works in partnership with other services to help you can gain access the full range of services you may need to improve or strengthen your safety, health, wellbeing, education, employability and parenting.

DVSM delivers three separate services from different locations across NSW including:

- Moving Out Moving On (MOMO)
- Refuge, Outreach, Action, Response (ROAR) – Blacktown and the Hills
- Wilcannia Safe House



Appendix 2: About ROAR

About ROAR

Refuge Outreach Action Response (ROAR) operates through a client centred approach where we work with you to tailor a response that meets your needs. We can provide you with ongoing support with one of our qualified workers. We can help you access other services you may need and will continue to work alongside you. ROAR is located within the Blacktown and Hills Districts of Western Sydney and we support:

- Women with children who are escaping or experiencing domestic and/or family violence
- Women with children who are leaving custody or other institutions
- Fathers with children and other family groups*

At ROAR, we understand that everyone has different needs and will make different choices about how they want to navigate challenges in their lives. So we provide a range of ways to support your choice including:

- a safe space in one of our refuges
- a safe space in one of our temporary houses
- visiting you in your home if you wish to remain there or support to access other services that can help you remain safely in your home
- visiting you in an alternative space if this meets your needs better, for instance, you may be in a hotel or living with family/friends

ROAR is also a mobile service and will be located in different areas across the Hills LGA. You can get an appointment with this mobile service by calling (02) 96210800 or visiting the mobile service location (for further details about locations and days can be accessed through www.dvnswsm.org.au/where-we-are/roar).

Appendix 3: Stakeholder Engagement List

Through the development of this work Domestic Violence Service Management DVSM Staff met with the following stakeholders.

Organisation	Contact	Position
arbias	Rebekah Loukas	State-wide Manager
Community Restorative Centre (CRC)	Mindy Sotiri	Program Director
Community Restorative Centre (CRC)	Clair McMahon	Transition Worker
Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)	Kelly-Anne Stewart	A/Principal Advisor - Women's Offenders
Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW)	Lucia Boccolini	A/Director, Partnerships and Community Engagement Unit
District Housing Interagency Group (DHIG) - Western Sydney	Toby Dobson	Group
Homelessness NSW	Dougie Wells	Senior Project Officer
Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation	Lesley Strickland	Counsellor
Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation	Catherine Dennis	Counsellor
Mission Australia Housing	Myra Jelenic	Specialist Housing Manager
NSW Legal Aid - Civil Law Division	Anisa Malhas	Solicitor
Round Table - for adults leaving custody	Dougie Wells	Group
Women In Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN)	Lana Sandas	Chief Executive Officer
DVSM staff contributors		
DVSM - ROAR Staff	Amanda Greeney	Regional Manager
DVSM - ROAR Staff	Patricia Maher	Coordinator
DVSM - ROAR Staff	Kelly Parker	Case Manager
DVSM - ROAR Staff	Veronica Falevaai	Case Manager

Appendix 4: Workshop Records - Schedule and Outline - Women Leaving Correctional Services

Workshop Purpose:

The Purpose of the workshop is to bring together staff and key stakeholders to inform the development of a service response and client pathways for Women Leaving Correctional Services that reduce their risk of domestic violence, homelessness and recidivism.

Objectives:

- To build participants knowledge of the realities that face Women Leaving Correctional Services; who they are; their needs and how to effectively support them
- Draw on the experience of participants to design a service model that enables ROAR to support Women Leaving Correctional Services.
- Develop recommendations that will support DVSM to enable staff to work with Women Leaving Correctional Services
- To build relationships that enable ROAR to support these clients.

Facilitators/Presenters:

- WIPAN – CEO
- Marrin Weejali – Two Counsellors
- DVSM – Consultant, Sightlines
- DVSM – Manager, Sightlines

Participants' expectations from the workshop:

What we do want from this workshop?	What we don't want from this workshop?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understand the clients</i> • <i>How to work with clients (best practice/worst practice)</i> • <i>To understand the space and where we fit</i> • <i>As a group to develop our base knowledge</i> • <i>Ascertain our strengths and limitation</i> • <i>To develop connections that can enable us to overcome these</i> • <i>To understand what the end goal of working with this client group is</i> • <i>How to be a good worker with these clients</i> • <i>Unknown bias</i> • <i>To have an open space that we can share in and speak our mind</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A space that is derogatory to other players/stakeholders</i> • <i>Walk away not knowing where to next</i> • <i>This to be the end</i> • <i>People to NOT ask questions, because of who is in the room and any uncertainty about their own knowledge.</i>

Workshop Schedule

Time	Session
Session 1: 9:00 – 9:30	Introductions, background, ground rules and expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions. • Participants understand the project background (how we got here and where too next) • Participants share their expectations for the workshop and know all other participants • Participants contribute to and agree to how the workshop will run.
Session 2: 9:30 – 10:30	Who are women entering prison <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants understand which women are in prison • Their likely lived experiences (before prison) • And how the situation is different/similar for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women. Pathways through Corrections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants have a basic understanding of correctional services • Participants understand the different pathways clients may have through the criminal justice system.
Break 10:30 – 10:45	
Session 3: 10:45 – 11:30	What's it like in the system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants understand what it's like in the criminal justice system for individuals and the Experience of this: types of uncertainty etc. • Their pathway through the criminal justice system • How they are likely to interact with the criminal justice system over time Who are women in Prison <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are their needs • How do we support them? • Using the 'dash board' to develop a case management approach for working with women.
Lunch 12:30 – 1	
Session 4: 1:15 – 3	Developing a case-management response – cont'd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a case management approach for working with women exiting prison. • Who are women leaving prison
Session 5: 3 – 4	Moving this work forward
Closing 4 – 4:15	

Appendix 5: Workshop Records - Women Leaving Corrective Services Case-Planning Activity

The following tables and diagrams are the documented ideas and responses from workshop groups engaging in Session 3 activities. Each group was allocated a different case study; Cheryl, Vanessa, Mary and Chloe to humanise the empathy and planning activity. The different documentation formats reflect the documentation styles of the group and do not suggest a set methodology.

Note: The photographs used in these case studies are fictitious and do not reflect the faces of the real women represented in these stories. They have been used to support personalisation and imagination through activities and to strengthen the recall of workers when drawing from prior learning in the future.



Cheryl Harris

CHERYL HARRIS



MIN:
574 577

DOB:
10 / 11 / 1981

Cheryl is a 35 year old Aboriginal woman, with no family in NSW.

Cheryl has an intellectual disability with limited literacy and numeracy. She has 5 kids, eldest with father in Melbourne, youngest 4 under NSW FaCS since her incarceration.

Cheryl had an addiction to alcohol prior to incarceration and was in a DV relationship.

Most recent conviction- aggravated assault.

She has been detained at 'Bolwarra Transitional Centre' for 12 months, 2 years in 'Dillwynia' prior to 'Bolwarra'.

Cheryl will be released in June if she can find accommodation.

Cheryl – A case management response

Needs		How to Support	Considerations
We identified	She identified		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money – Bank and start Centerlink • What does she have and can we get it? • Housing, Housing history, needs i.e. does she have kids/ Housing List?/ WA? • Immediate accom friends or family? • Where else can we connect her on her days out? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Met at the prison gates • For us to arrange accom for her first month • Access \$ • When can I see my kids? • Personal and family connections • AA that day or that week? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain rule changes • Explain options and draw pictorially or in a flow chart • Communicate AA information • SMART recovery • Dress for success (WIPAN) (in 6-9 months) • Work with WIPAN mentor to confirm who will do what or include the mentor in case planning? • Access to smith family to access second hand goods to furnish house • Help her make trust worthy connections/counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability/brain injury • Cultural awareness • DV experiences/trauma • Isolated/ easily misled • Illiterate/innumerate • Shame • Addiction • Likely to be under pressure • Health – self medication



Vanessa – A case-management response

Vanessa Smith



MIN:
250 433

DOB:
20 / 12 / 1989

Vanessa is 27 years old. Vanessa comes from Gingie Mission Walgett. Vanessa's Tribe is Kamilaroi. Vanessa has 2 children currently under care of FaCS NSW.

Vanessa was removed from her mum when she was a baby, brought up by her grandparents. She turned to marijuana and amphetamines when she was 14 years old.

Most recent conviction- Armed robbery, 2 accounts of aggravated break and enter, to pay for her drugs.

Vanessa has been sentenced to 5 years. Vanessa has completed 4 years imprisonment.

Vanessa's parole date is being determined now. She will go back home to Walgett. |

Vanessa – A case-management response

Needs

- To see her kids, grandparents, community. For reassurance and to build connections. She also needs an income, housing, to engage with probation and parole. She needs to build her self-esteem. (She will be experiencing anxiety, a sense of going into the unknown, she will need reassurance)
- Vanessa will need support in accessing housing, centerlink for an income, building community connections, accessing health checks, counselling (AOD use and DFV) and also engaging facs to initiate restoration.
- She will also have a range of Immediate needs: such as food, clothing, ID, a phone, travel expense

How To Support:

- Advocacy and referral, building on trust/relationships supporting her holistically – mentoring
- Support filling in applications forms for housing
- Attending appointments with her
- Providing food parcels, furniture, personal items
- Accessing parenting programs

Considerations:

- Cultural awareness, awareness of her institutionalised state, AOD background, separation from her children and how that is managed/what does that look like, not living in the community for 4 years – Shame, other practical support such as setting up bank accounts, ID, Housing register etc
- Realistic in communication, open and honest (open Door) respectful, consciously not a systemic response again.

**Mary Haddad****Mary Haddad****MIN:**
272 973**DOB:**
22 / 03 / 1965

Mary is 51 years old and has 2 teenage boys, Chris and Michael. FaCS placed the boys in care at the time of Mary's arrest.

Mary was charged with the manslaughter of her husband (who was the perpetrator of domestic violence for 20 years prior).

Mary suffers PTSD and has been diagnosed in custody with bipolar, depression and anxiety.

She was on remand at Silverwater for 3 years and has now been at Emu Plains for 4 years. She is eligible for parole in 2 months.

Mary wants to "start fresh" and get her boys back. Her boys want the same.



Mary – A case-management response

Needs:

- Parole Preparation – Client and Worker
- Housing – Transitional supported housing then into long term housing OR Housing with a family member that is safe
- Restoration of children
- Mental health support
- Counselling for trauma
- Basic needs/material aid etc
- Financial assistance (Centrelink)
- Transport for release
- Connections to community
- Parole requirements
- Family relationships and contact
- Reintegration into society outside of prison
- DV support and a healthy relationship program

How to support:

- Support letter for parole application
- Assist in housing application and acquiring supported transitional accommodation OR discussion with potential family accommodation
- Phone call to FACS to organise a case conference to discuss if there is a potential for restoration
- Referral to mental health service
- Referral to counselling service
- Obtain a provide through brokerage basic needs and material aid
- Assist in application for crisis payment and newstart payment or release from centrelink
- Create a bank account if needed
- Obtain ID if have none
- Organise transport from prison to accommodation when released
- Connect her with local community centre or church or any other organisation in local community (could be cultural)
- Explain and reiterate her parole requirements to try and eliminate and reduce the risk of recidivism
- Showing her address and directions of services she needs to access
- Explain the train system, opal cards etc
- Referral to DV support service
- Referral to relationships Australia, choice and change program.

Considerations:

- The time spent incarcerated
- The trauma she has faced and experienced
- Mental health
- Separation from family, community, friends also the isolation
- DV past experiences
- Inconsistency and provision of services whilst incarcerated
- Restoration of children
- Sense of loss of identity and sense of belonging
- Her expectations
- Her wishes



Chloe Stanbrooke

**CHLOE
STANBROOKE**



MIN:
572 573

DOB:
10 / 12 / 1992

Chloe is 23 years old, in a relationship with her co-offender, and has a 4 year old daughter who lives with her mother (with no FaCS involvement).

Chloe endured childhood trauma and turned to Heroin when she was 17 years old.

Most recent conviction- aggravated break and enter.

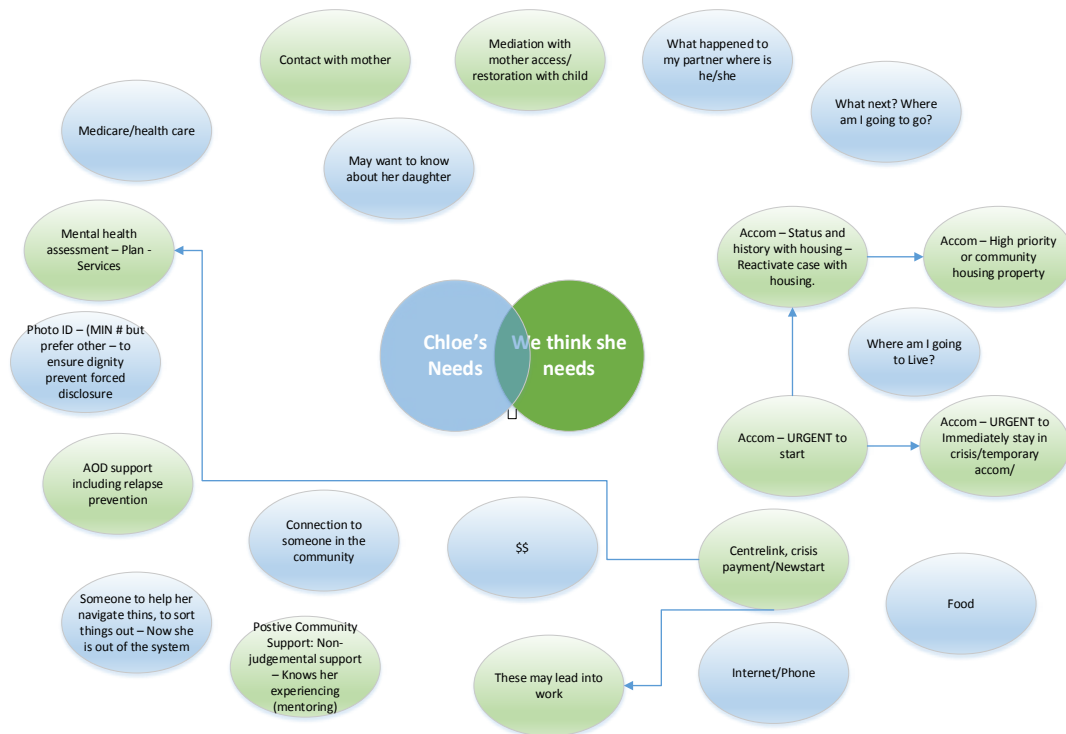
She has been detained at 'Silverwater Women's', for 19 months. She was on remand for 12 of those.

Chloe will be released in 7 weeks.

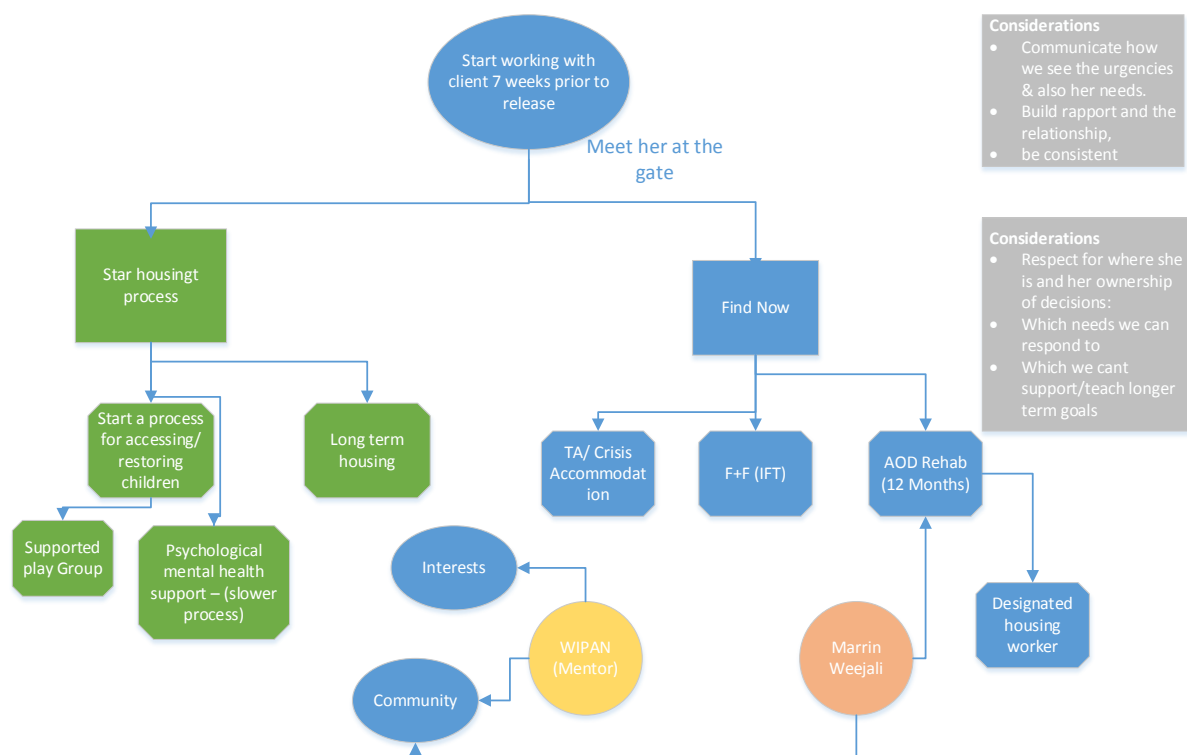


Chloe – A case-management response

Needs:



How to support and considerations:



Workshop Activity: Mary Haddad – Pathways and experiences of the correctional system



MIN:
272 973

DOB:
22 / 03 / 1965

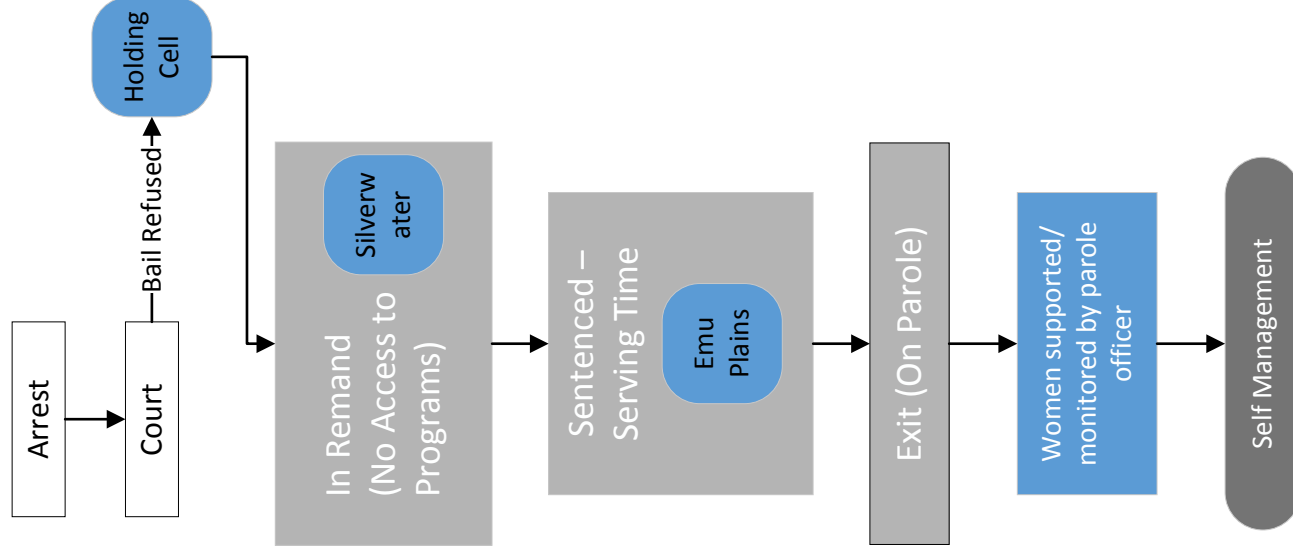
Mary is 51 years old and has 2 teenage boys, Chris and Michael. FaCS placed the boys in care at the time of Mary's arrest.

Mary was charged with the manslaughter of her husband (who was the perpetrator of domestic violence for 20 years prior).

Mary suffers PTSD and has been diagnosed in custody with bipolar, depression and anxiety.

She was on remand at Silverwater for 3 years and has now been at Emu Plains for 4 years. She is eligible for parole in 2 months.

Mary wants to "start fresh" and get her boys back. Her boys want the same.



Holding cell – post arrest

After her arrest Mary is traumatised and suffering from shock after murdering her husband. She is fearful of what has happened to her children and afraid of what is ahead. She just can't believe what has happened, replaying the events the regrets, trying to understand why she did what she did, she is going to lose her children, she was just trying to keep them safe from him...

Court/Remand – 3 years

For Mary the court proceeding and trials seem endless, the uncertainty of the past 3 years has taken a real toll on her and she has very little support, her husband's controlling violent behaviour for the 20 years had effectively isolated her from her family, friends and the community. Mary misses her children and she is stressed, she has lost her identity as a mother, the trial and incarceration in Remand throughout the trial has stripped her of her dignity. She is agitated, anxious and has been diagnosed with PTSD, however the diagnosis has not enabled her to receive the treatment she requires to manage her mental illness.

Sentenced – 4 years Emu Plains

After 3 year on remand Mary has been sentenced and is at Emu Plains. She is feeling isolated again losing the few friends she had made while in Silverwater. The little support she got from family and friends has now almost stopped all together as the prison is outside the city centre and difficult to access by public transport. She still gets visits from her sons but they are infrequent which contributes to her already traumatised state. She is uncertain about what the future holds.

The conviction and the reality of her sentence and the affect on her family weigh heavily on her, she blames herself, her mental health is deteriorating and she is still only receiving limited support.

Parole – Mary is eligible for Parole in 2 months

After 7 years of prison the end is insight for Mary, she is hopeful for the future hopeful that she will be able to get her boys back. But she is anxious and fearful of what the future will hold. Where will she live, will her family and friends talk to her, will they accept her back after 7 years and after what she has done. Prison life has become normal and she wonders if she will be able to survive on her own. She can't stop worrying about if her boys will want to see her?

Workshop Activity: Chloe Stanbrooke – Pathways and experiences of the correctional system



MIN:
572 573

DOB:
10 / 12 / 1992

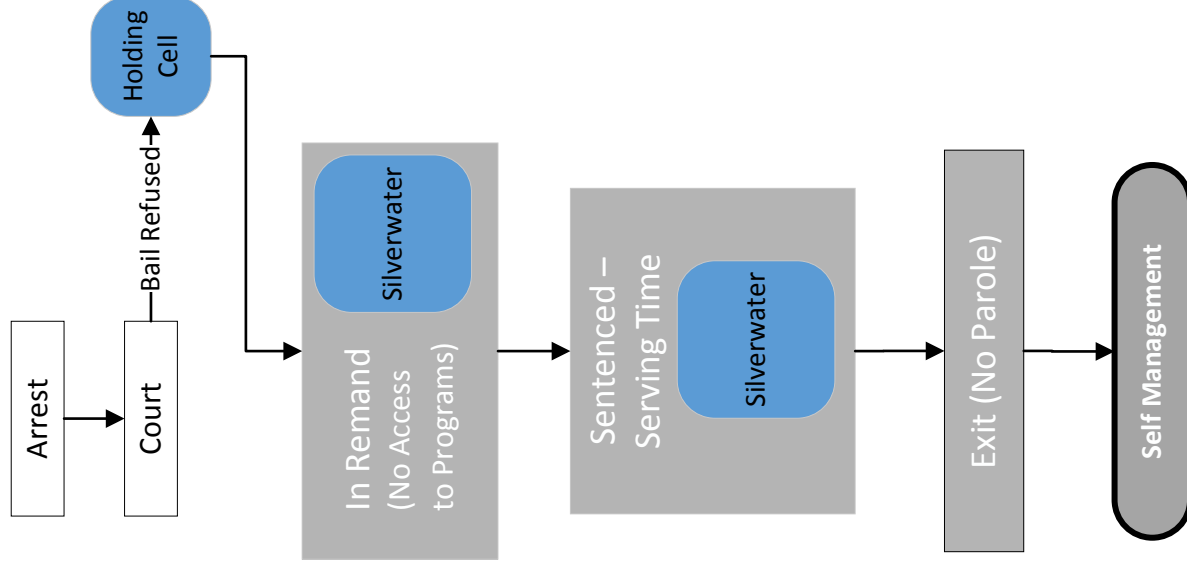
Chloe is 23 years old, in a relationship with her co-offender, and has a 4 year old daughter who lives with her mother (with no FaCS involvement).

Chloe endured childhood trauma and turned to Heroin when she was 17 years old.

Most recent conviction- aggravated break and enter.

She has been detained at Silverwater Women's', for 19 months. She was on remand for 12 of those.

Chloe will be released in 7 weeks.



Arrest

Chloe is in chaos still high from her last hit of heroin.

Holding cell – post arrest

She is experiencing withdrawals from heroin while in her holding cell; she is also suffering anxiety as a result of her separation from her partners during the arrest particularly as she has no information as to what has happened to him.

Remand – 12 Months

While waiting in remand, Chloe faces uncertainty and the mind games of 'what if' but it's out of her control. Her behaviour is becoming more volatile, she has started to self-harm. Prison staff are concerned that she may become violent towards others. They are not sure what is driving this behaviour and don't realise that it is linked to her experiences of childhood trauma which may have resulted in Chloe having an acquired brain injury (ABI) however she has not had any assessment that would have diagnosed this. She is not able to gain a lot of support as she is being moved around on Remand due to the bed shortages and also is not able to access as many services due to their not being offered on remand.

Sentenced – 7 months in Silverwater

Chloe has become institutionalised in the way she relates and carries herself (not making eye with those she doesn't know and trust, keeping her communication with people to a minimum) – she has learnt live in the system.

Release – No Parole

Chloe is finding it difficult to adjust to life on the outside after almost 2 years out of society, she is finding it difficult to adjust to being out of a high security prison environment with out the routine. She is worried about going back to the community and if she will reengage with her old user networks, she is also scared that after 2 years that her network might not be there anymore and she may have no one left.

Workshop Activity: Cheryl Harris – Pathways and experiences of the correctional system



MIN:

574 577

DOB:

10 / 11 / 1981

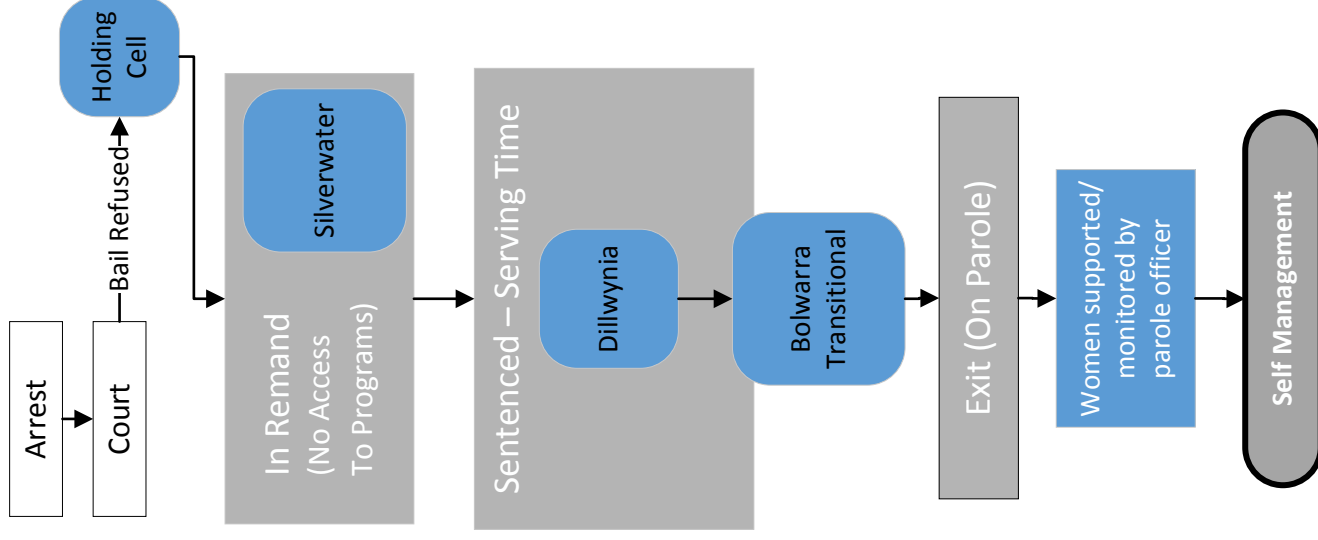
Cheryl is a 35 year old Aboriginal woman, with no family in NSW.

Cheryl has an intellectual disability with limited literacy and numeracy. She has 5 kids, eldest with father in Melbourne, youngest 4 under NSW FaCS since her incarceration.

Cheryl had an addiction to alcohol prior to incarceration and was in a DV relationship.

Most recent conviction- aggravated assault. She has been detained at Bolwarra Transitional Centre for 12 months, 2 years in Dillwynia prior to Bolwarra.

Cheryl will be released in June if she can find accommodation.



Remand – 6 weeks

Cheryl has been acting out violently towards other inmates and to herself and has been put in an isolated safe cell where she was monitored 24/7 in a permanently lit room. The prison guards are concerned for her personal safety. They have no way of knowing that Cheryl's intellectual disability and the stress and anxiety of being locked up have caused this behaviour.

Sentenced – Dillwynia 2 years

Once sentenced Cheryl was relieved to be able to have visits with her children under the supervision of FACS, and she feels a little safer with other Mob from her community. But she is agitated as she is withdrawing from her alcohol and at being separated from her children. She has no money and is reliant on the prison for all her sanitary products, and she is cold and just wants to buy a hoodie for winter.

Bolwarra Transitional centre:

After 2 years Cheryl is more comfortable now that she had been moved to the Bolwarra transitional centre. She has more freedom and is able to leave on day release to work in a small plastics factory close to the prison. However she is worried about her release date as without 'suitable accommodation' they won't release her. And she doesn't know how where she is going to find housing given her bad history with community housing. Even if she could get housing support she could never fill in the forms, because she can't read and write.

The parole board was also concerned about Cheryl's chances of successfully meeting her parole requirements, her family history of alcohol abuse and her intellectual disability means that she could be easily led and end up back in prison. She could go back to her community but that will mean she receives nothing for her disability or from the trauma she has suffered from her past violent relationships. Cheryl doesn't care though, she just wants to get out and be with her kids

Workshop Activity: Vanessa Smith – Pathways and experiences of the correctional system



MIN:
250 433

DOB:
20 / 12 / 1989

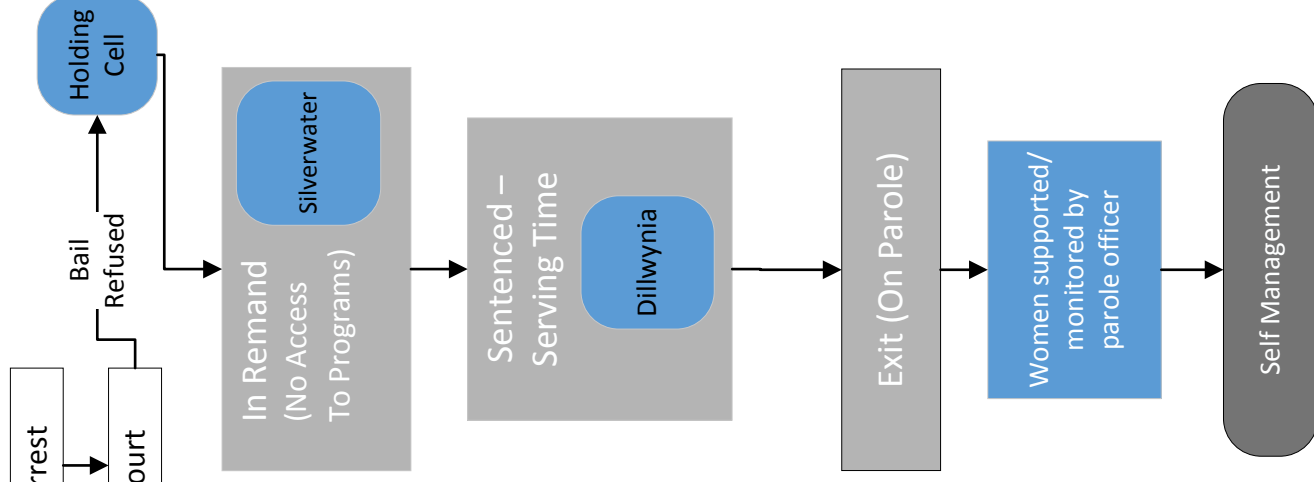
Vanessa is 27 years old. Vanessa comes from Gingie Mission Walgett. Vanessa's Tribe is kamilaroi. Vanessa has 2 children currently under care of FaCS NSW.

Vanessa was removed from her mum when she was a baby, brought up by her grandparents. She turned to marijuana and amphetamines when she was 14 years old.

Most recent conviction- Armed robbery, 2 accounts of aggravated break and enter, to pay for her drugs.

Vanessa has been sentenced to 5 years.
Vanessa has completed 4 years imprisonment.

Vanessa's parole date is being determined now. She will go back home to Walgett.



Arrest

Vanessa is agitated and feeling victimised and desperate. She has been homeless for months now living day to day with no forward planning, just maintaining her ice habit anyway she can. She doesn't trust the police or the courts and doesn't care about the consequences of her actions.

Remand Silverwater

She is feeling apprehensive about going into prison and is worried about what will happen to her children because she doesn't trust DOCs. This feels like just another encounter with the white fella system which means bad news.

Sentenced Dillwynia

Vanessa finally feels somewhat relieved as she has connected with her mob in Dillwynia, it's a small comfort in a pretty miserable situation but at least her mob understands.

Vanessa has just started an AOD treatment program at the prison. But again she is confronted by the black and white divide even in prison. She can see she has less support than the white prisoners from family/friends on the outside. Her mob just can't afford to send her money let alone the cost of traveling to Dillwynia.

When she is not with her mob Vanessa keeps to herself no point asking for help from a system that has done nothing to help her since she was a kid. Vanessa is bored and using drugs again, but at least she knows where she is going to sleep and where her next meals are coming from.

Due for release on parole:

Vanessa is looking forward to getting out and seeing her kids. Its been 4 years though and she is uncertain how they will respond to her when she sees them. But she is happy at the prospect of being released and returning to family in Walgett, its just a question of when her parole date will be set for.

On Release:

Vanessa is heading back to country, there are no services in Walgett but she doesn't care she is just happy to be out and to be returning home. But in the back of her mind she wonders if she will fall back into taking drugs and end up back in prison.

Appendix 7: Workshop Records - Group reflections about the 'case management response' activity used in Session 4

1. The impact of a new system on our processes/approach

- It was identified that the broader criminal justice system will enable/disable our process of working with clients e.g. identification, address, meeting with FACS (while in prison) etc.
- How a clients criminal record will impact how we can work with/support these clients.

2. Supporting clients with multiple complex and often competing needs

- How do we prioritise 'needs', how do they fit together, what is the sequence of this work. Particularly when the needs are multiple, and addressing them may require concurrent processes/approaches. This may require a far longer process to address the complexity of needs
- It will be important for us to identify what tools already exist to help us prioritise this work. Women in Prison Advocacy Network (WIPAN) and Marrin Weejali (MW) use tools that have been developed specifically for them, and there is an opportunity to get their input into helping/enabling us to develop our own). WIPAN and MW identified the need for tools to be purpose built.
- There will need to be points in time when we need 'reality checking' for us and for clients
- How can we develop processes that support quality approaches to case managing complex clients?
 - MW, have daily 'case checking' sessions that provide a space/opportunity for staff to workshop/discuss clients and the best approach to support them
 - MW and WIPAN encouraged ROAR to touch base and informally case check with them.

3. Who and How Many Clients

- We need to be clear on **whom we can and who we can't work with**. So that we can make informed decisions that meet our duty of care and that don't negatively impact the client.
- We need to be clear on how many clients we can work with.

Appendix 8: Workshop Records - Group discussion about 'where to next'

Where to next – workshop session

Based on the project learnings prior to the workshop and the emerging elements through the workshop activities and reflection session the Sightlines team proposed key approaches to focus on moving ahead. Participants were asked to explore, challenge, confirm and add to these approaches to reach a clear path.

1. Early contact
2. Be Response ready
3. Co-Case Management
4. Consistency, trust and credibility

Notes from the facilitated discussion are outlined below.

Early contact:

It was agreed that this was critical, with a suggested time frame of 3 months being given as the ideal amount of time to engage with the clients prior to their release.

Purpose:

- Participants identified the purpose of this early contact as being: to build give time for planning pre-release in an environment where there are fewer variables, (less drug use, accommodation, food etc. is stable) that enable time for understanding the client's needs ensuring support is appropriate on release. The issue of securing housing on release was identified as a critical need that would be a big focus of pre-release support.
- Participants identified that the following needed to take place in order to enable this to happen:
 - We need to be clear on who we need to be building relationships within the correctives services to realise this early contact. (Mapping of who and where they are in the criminal justice system)
 - We need to be clear on which clients we are seeking to work with, and which we are not.
 - We need to be clear on what the priorities are for this phase of work.



Be 'Response Ready':

Participants agreed with this principal and identified the following specific things that needed to take place to achieve this.

- We need to actively build our knowledge of the criminal justice system how it functions and the stakeholders engaged. (Maps, Org charts of correctives, who are SAPO's, justice health etc.)
 - Our staff/organisation need to know what questions we need to be asking, and when to ask this. This will be an
 - We need to know where we source information from.
- Built our understanding of the experience through the system, and how this shapes our work with clients.
- We need to have service directories ready, up-to-date and at hand so that we can respond effectively to these clients
 - But more importantly these directories need to be grounded in connections and relationships across the correctional services that enable referrals and collaboration.

Clear Case Management:

Co-case management was discussed as not the correct term. It was agreed that working effectively with other organisation/institutions was critical to this work. However, participants felt that 'co-case management' as a term did not represent the collaboration that needed to take place. The concept of 'case-management' implied a specific approach or relationship with the client that was not appropriate for all stakeholder services (e.g. WIPAN mentors are not case-managers).

It was also identified that the concept of 'management' was often not a good starting point for a collaborative relationship. It was suggested that collaboration or sharing may be a better way to articulate the working relationship. In order to do this participant's identified that we needed a system/model that:

- Gave a processes/guidance that helped us have a conversation with collaborators – but was not prescriptive
- Enabled these collaborations to be effective
- Resulted in clarity around who was responsible for what.
- Was client centred



Consistency, trust and credibility:

Participants identified that we need to operate in a manner that builds trust within our clients and credibility within the prison population. Consistency was identified as being one of the critical elements to build our trust and credibility. However it was identified that there are certain organisational limitations that can make consistency difficult. WIPAN and Marrin Weejali emphasised that although having the same face meeting the client was ideal, it was also critical not to make promises or to set expectations that couldn't be kept (this is worse as women in prison, have such low levels of trust in relationships at all levels – personal, prison and the systemic).

- Don't make promises you can't keep
- Acknowledging its importance and its challenges



Acknowledgement and Appreciation

This collaborative project has benefited from the insights and input of the following organisations:

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