



# THE COMMUNITY SECTOR AND THE ACT PRISON

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FORUM HELD 16 MAY, 2006.



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## INTRODUCTION

In 1998 the ACT Liberal Government announced that Canberra would build a jail to house its prisoners, ending the transportation of its citizens across the border to New South Wales. The plan has caused controversy ever since, with many people loathe to spend money on prisoner services, preferring instead to compound prisoner's sentences with alienation and exile from family and friends.

Recognising that the community sector has a pivotal role in providing services to people caught up in the criminal justice system, ACTCOSS formed the Canberra Community Coalition on Corrections (the Corrections Coalition) in 2000. The Objectives of the Coalition were to "ensure broad based community involvement in the development and reform of the ACT corrective services system with particular reference to:

- The development of best practice restorative holistic models;
- Transparency of contractual arrangements involving public funds;
- Rigour and efficacy in the regulatory regime;
- Advocacy of the rights, needs and interests of prisoners and their significant others; and
- The development of new and emerging corrective services functions.

ACTCOSS has also become involved in other networks, such as the Beyond Bars group, which was established as an internet-based resource to fight against the "law and order" debate in the 2002 New South Wales state election. Membership of that group led to the development of a forum in 2004 – "Who gets to go to jail", that examined the way that people's level of disadvantage in the wider society puts them at risk of conflict with the law.

ACTCOSS also became aware, through the Beyond Bars network, of the work of the Kempsey interagency group, and its InsideOut forum in 2003. That conference spent two days examining the impact of the proposed new jail on the community services in Kempsey. Realising that the ACT community was facing similar challenges, ACTCOSS invited the coordinator of that conference, Jodie Sherrin, to come to the ACT and share that experience.

The May 16 Canberra forum on the community sector and the ACT prison came about because of good will. Good will from Jodie to take the time to share her experience and knowledge with this community. Good will from the Department of Justice and Community Services which agreed to fund the event. Good will from the speakers, from the head of Justice and Community Safety, Renee Leon to an ex-prisoner, who spoke to the community services that came along and to let them know what must be done and who needs to be involved. Good will and humour, too from the workshop presenters and the panel members, who helped provide parameters for this broad concept of a prison run on human rights principles.

Importantly, there was also good will from Ngunawal elder, Ruth Bell who not only welcomed participants, but shared part of her story and the needs of Aboriginal people who come into conflict with the white law.

The ACTCOSS forum on community services and the ACT Prison showed the community sector has dedication and commitment to the welfare of people caught up in the justice system, their families and wider support circles. The day provided an opening; the start of a conversation on how best to provide services to the inmates of the Alexander Machonochie Centre (AMC) and their families that connect them to their community in preparation for release. It is also apparent that the community sector is ready for a couple of other conversations, starting with how we keep as many people as possible OUT of prison, and how we keep the prison management accountable after the AMC has opened.

ACTCOSS is now developing a work plan for the Corrections Coalition to harness the increased interest in that group as a vehicle for community input and access to the development of AMC programs. We would like to thank everyone who was involved in the day for their enthusiasm, their ideas and the commitment.

## RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

### **RUTH BELL**

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#### **Ngunawal Elder**

Mrs Bell welcomed attendees on behalf of the traditional owners of the land on which Canberra is built. A member of the Stolen Generations, Ruth was born in Yass and is the mother of 7, grandmother of 25 and great grandmother of 6. She is a member of the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Advisory Council and works in her community for her community.

Mrs Bell provided a human insight into how families deal with having loved ones in prison. She shared her stories of assisting members of her community who found themselves in conflict with the law, and generously welcomed attendees to the forum as a traditional owner and elder of the Ngunawal people.

## **RENEE LEON**

### **Chief Executive, JACS**

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Renee Leon is the Chief Executive of the Department of Justice and Community Safety, which is responsible for policy on corrections, including the new ACT prison. Renee joined the ACT Public Service in early 2006, after a career in the Australian Public Service working on human rights, international law, and access to justice. Renee also has a background in the community sector in Canberra, having served on the Boards of the Welfare Rights and Legal Centre and the Women's Legal Centre.

### **ACTCOSS COMMUNITY FORUM – THE COMMUNITY SECTOR AND THE ACT PRISON**

Mrs Bell, Ms Creswell, Ms Child, Ms Sherrin, ... distinguished guests and agency representatives.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on, the Ngun(n)awal people. I respect their continuing culture and the unique contribution they make to the life of this area.

Thank you Ara, for inviting me here today. The Minister regrets that he was unable to attend personally due to his attendance at an interstate meeting. I will take this opportunity to pass on the Government's appreciation for the important work performed by ACTCOSS and the many community based agencies represented here today at the 'Community Sector and the ACT Prison Forum'. It is appropriate that we should come together as a community to explore the implications of the commissioning of the Alexander Maconochie Centre in late 2007. I say that because the community has been actively engaged in this project over many years and has overwhelmingly given its support to the idea that, regardless of what we might think of those who break our laws, it is not right that we should transport these people interstate to serve their sentences, out of sight and away from their families. The ACT Government has supported this view, which has been reinforced by its conviction that the remand facilities at Belconnen and Symonston are totally inadequate and shame us as a community. Dostoevsky, Churchill, Nelson Mandela and more recently Justice Michael Kirby have all passed comment on the extent to which a society can be measured by the state of its prisons and how it treats its prisoners. The Government determined that we will not be found wanting in this area of social policy. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners state:

61. The treatment of prisoners should emphasize not their exclusion from the community, but their continuing part in it. Community agencies should, therefore, be enlisted wherever possible to assist the staff of the institution in the task of social rehabilitation of the prisoners...

Some commentators choose to ignore this guidance. They find it uncomfortable to acknowledge the fact that, as a community, we have a responsibility to our prisoners, as well as to their families, to provide opportunities for persons sentenced to imprisonment to turn their lives around.

Justice Stephen Tumim, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisoners for England and Wales 1978-1995, noted that criminal behaviour emerges as a result of failure of both the individual and the community of which he or she is a part. The community has a consequent responsibility for prisoner rehabilitation. For those who find this notion of shared responsibility disturbing, there is the simple reality that prisoners will, again, be someone's neighbour, some day. What sort of neighbour is very much in our hands.

Our prison, as you will be aware, will be known as the Alexander Maconochie Centre or, true to Canberra's tradition of acronyms, the AMC. Captain Alexander Maconochie was a 19th Century prison reformer who had personal experience of imprisonment, having spent a period of time as a captive of the French. He was Superintendent of the Norfolk Island penal colony from 1840 to 1844 where he did away with harsh punishments and introduced education and religious services, not previously available to prisoners.

Alexander Maconochie is most well known for the introduction of his reward system, whereby prisoners would earn marks or credits for good behaviour and hard work. They could then use the marks to purchase privileges and ultimately their freedom.

The only punishment Maconochie advocated was the loss of marks. No-one in Britain or the colonies had tried such therapies with convicts before and prison as a reforming institution did not find wider acceptance until well into the twentieth century.

In this country at the moment the overwhelming approach to corrections is retribution and punishment and to prisoners, their demonisation. Given the extent of the power of the State over prisoners this is the easy approach – it is also morally bankrupt. We seek another approach, as did Alexander Maconochie.

The Operating Philosophy of the AMC reflects the spirit and intent of the ACT Human Rights Act 2004 and the Healthy Prison concept. A Healthy Prison is one in which:

- Everyone is and feels safe.
- Everyone is treated with respect as a fellow human being.
- Everyone is encouraged to improve him or herself and is given the opportunity to do so through the provision of purposeful activity, and
- Everyone is enabled to maintain contact with their families and is prepared for release.

The design of the AMC responds to these ideas. As you may have seen on the model displayed by the Project Team, the AMC will be an open campus-style facility with the majority of both sentenced and remand prisoners accommodated in self-catering, five bedroom cottages where they will be able to learn and practice living skills in preparation for their transition back to our community. A sixty-bed Transitional Release Centre will be located outside the secure perimeter of the Alexander Maconochie Centre to house low risk prisoners who are in the final stages of their preparation for release.

The Transitional Release prisoners will be able to leave the Centre during the day to access education, programs, employment, community support services or other pro-social activities in the community.

The design of the AMC breaks new ground in a range of areas, for example:

- The absence of excessive internal fencing and razor wire; the usual overt symbols of incarceration are absent
- Cells (include single, double and "buddy" arrangements) with high levels of space, natural light and ventilation and which provide a high degree of privacy
- A discrete area for women to ensure their access to services and their personal security and safety
- Provision for a mother to have her infant with her
- No cells for women
- Cell block design which maximises light and natural ventilation
- The consideration given to the needs of the hearing, physically and intellectually disabled
- Cottage accommodation for people on remand
- The needs of Indigenous people – in this regard the AMC project team has been assisted by the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre at Queensland University and other Indigenous people who have contributed to, and guided the project
- The extent to which the AMC conforms to the Government's environmental policies with the achievement of the Green Business Council's 4 Star rating.

Undoubtedly there will be critics of this approach, but it is simply a matter of creating a climate conducive to the humane management of prisoners and to foster their rehabilitation.

The very broad representation of agencies present here today is indicative of the complex group that prisoners represent and the complex needs they present. Poor health, substance abuse, failure in education and employment, mental illness, unstable accommodation, chaotic and abusive personal circumstances, financial problems and exclusion from the pro-social aspects of community life that many of us take for granted are characteristics of prison populations. The over-representation of Indigenous people in prisons is of grave concern, as is the growing number of women prisoners. The manifold adverse life experiences of these two groups present a particular challenge for all of us as we grapple with their rehabilitation.

We as a community cannot expect, that, despite the best of intentions, the staff of ACT Corrective Services, both within the AMC and in Community Corrections, will be able to address these problems by themselves.

In this context, today's forum is a timely opportunity to demonstrate our commitment, as a community, to this endeavour.

Support services are presently obliged to react to the needs of ex-prisoners, after they are released and return to Canberra, when they are most unstable and at greatest risk of repeating past mistakes. The task before us, through the establishment of the AMC and repatriation of our prisoners, is to maintain contact

with this group, throughout their imprisonment to allow for the provision of proactive, rather than reactive, care and treatment – essentially to properly prepare them to take a productive place in our community.

To this end, Corrective Services will introduce a Throughcare model of Case Management in which Probation and Parole Officers will maintain Case Management responsibilities for prisoners from their first contact with the correctional system, usually prior to sentencing, through the period of any sentence whether in custody or in the community and until their separation from correctional supervision, either post release or on completion of a Parole or other order.

Many agencies here today already have well established working relationships with Corrective Services and in particular Community Corrections. If we, as a community, are to achieve rehabilitative objectives with our prisoners we will need to strengthen and build on these existing relationships. We will also need to develop and maintain new relationships in order to work together in a co-ordinated and holistic response to those issues that contribute to criminality. Most of our current prisoners were previously clients of one or more community agencies in the ACT, and will return to Canberra to become clients again. The opportunity available to us, following the opening of the AMC in 2007, is to build on successful interventions with prisoners while they are incarcerated and to plan carefully with them, for their successful re-integration into the Canberra community.

In providing our prisoners with the best possible opportunities to change we need to provide holistic approaches to the many and complex needs our prisoners present. To do this well, each agency should recognise the expertise and resources available through other services in the ACT.

Having repatriated our people from NSW, we must not permit the Alexander Maconochie Centre to become isolated from the wider community. We cannot allow the staff of the AMC and of Community Corrections, by themselves, to shoulder a burden for which the community has a degree of responsibility. Rather, with your goodwill and support, together with the efforts of ACT Corrective Services, we will ensure that the AMC is well integrated into the larger ACT community as a valued component of our social infrastructure.

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## **JODIE SHERRIN**

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### **Coordinator, Insideout conference, Kempsey 2003.**

Jodie Sherrin holds a Bachelor of Social work (University of NSW 1988) and a Masters of Social work (University of Sydney 1992). Jodie wrote her masters thesis on 'Alternatives to women's Imprisonment'.

She has worked in a variety of community based services around Sydney's inner west and western suburbs before working for three years (1991-1993) in a post-release support service for women being released from Mulawa women's prison. This service was based at Sydney skillshare (Chippendale) and auspiced by CRC Justice Support. During this time Jodie was a member of the Prison's Coalition and was official visitor to Mulawa detention centre.

Jodie completed a Graduate Diploma in Adult education and training, and is currently employed as a teacher of community service work at Kempsey TAFE. She is also the Chair of Kempsey Community Services Interagency, the committee who organised Kempsey's "Insideout" conference.

The following are Jodie's speech notes from the forum.

**REPORT FROM "INSIDE-OUT" : PRISON POST RELEASE ISSUES CONFERENCE HELD 4/5<sup>TH</sup>  
SEPTEMBER 2003, KEMPSEY.**

**MID –NORTH COAST NSW AND WHERE WE ARE TODAY?: POINTS OF INTEREST FOR ACT  
COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR**

I would like to thank you for asking me to speak here today and I acknowledge Ngunnawal elders past, present and future and thank them for allowing me to travel and visit this country.

I've come to share some of the insights we have learned in Kempsey about what happens when a prison come to town. It's a bit like when the circus comes it brings whistles , bells and razzamatazz as the spruiker promises all kinds of excitement and events but more like the "sideshow" in that it holds a lot of broken promise and a general feeling of being tricked.

I had worked as a post- release support workers for women inmates in a programme funded by Department of industrial relations called "Women at work". Who serviced the women at Mulawa detention centre form 1991-93. So I did have some insights into how a NSW department of corrective Services operates and the complex needs of inmates on release. I had stayed in denial about its coming ,until I took my young daughter to the Kempsey show and saw a banner on the grandstand proclaiming that the firework's were " proudly sponsored by the Department of Corrective Services" and realised I had better get myself and my sector 'wised up' to what was coming because the public-relations show that had been rolling had worked wonders – they had the general community eating out of their hand and even the community service workers were hypnotised by the spangles and sequins.

The "Inside-Out" conference held in Kempsey on NSW's mid-north coast attracted 250 delegate's over two days. The conference was initiated by the

Kempsey Community Services Interagency. The Interagency is a network of community service providers who were concerned about the lack of discussion and resources being allocated to support service provision to ex-inmates and their families on release. We considered it contradictory for 54million to be spent on building a prison to house people from mid-north coast, when it was well documented that this region was poor in terms of socio-demographics and its social capital. The conference was funded by the North Coast Institute of TAFE

The NSW Department of Corrective services had set up camp in the town some two years before the prison was opened. Basically we had two years of public relations work from them. The Governor and staff attended all of our interagency's meetings and community events, playing an active role and speaking about the needs for cooperation between the community services sector and the prison in terms of "through care". They said it was an important principle of operation that inmates were to receive pre-release planning and post-release referral to community services to ensure support in the transition back to community.

At the time we were impressed with their level of commitment and even I started to believe that there was such a thing as a "new model" prison (after all I'd always loved the circus). We were keen to play a part in this process; however we had a number of concerns:

- Our community service sectors ability to service clients with such high needs at funding levels that had contained no growth monies for many years.
- Our worker's skill levels in dealing with high needs clients such as those with alcohol and other drug issues and mental health issues.
- The logistics and values differences in forming service partnerships between the prison and community services sector.

The conference was seen as an opportunity raise awareness amongst community service workers who had had little or no contact with prison issues .We covered areas such as: who we lock up?; how they come to be locked up and some thing on the experience of imprisonment and the effect that has on inmates and families and what their needs are on release. We showcased some examples of programmes that were being run around the state to support post release transition.

It was important also in that it allowed a space for some opposing voices to the consensual view that a prison was coming and it was a good thing because it would bring economic growth and employment to a regional area with little industry. It provided the community services sector with a platform from which to raise issues and concerns for the post release support needs of inmates and their families and to allow us to organise , lobby and advocate for increased resources to do this .

We contacted community workers on councils for Cessnock and Junee and both workers confirmed our concerns – that a prison coming to a country town brought with it specific service needs:

- Family support

- Emergency relief funds
- Accommodation for inmates - post release
- Development of cooperative case planning between corrections and community based services in the provision of post release support

#### PROFILE OF THE NSW PRISON POPULATION

The majority of people we lock up in prison are the "poor " and generally suffer a range so social disadvantage:

- Indigenous: 1828 per 100,000 compared to 121 per 100,000 for non indigenous (ABS 2001)
- The Unemployed: 65% of inmates were unemployed prior to imprisonment (Baldry 2002)
- Those who have problems with alcohol and other drugs: 70-90% of inmates (Department of Corrective Services Research Unit)
- Those who have been imprisoned before: 66% of inmates ( Baldry et al 2003)
- The mentally ill – 10 times more likely to be imprisoned (Fazel and Danash 2002 cited Baldry and Maplestone 2002)
- There is an over-representation of people with an intellectual disability in prison. (Hayes 1991; Lyall 1995; Simpson 2001 cited Baldry and Maplestone 2002)
- The homeless: 85% males and 11% females had stable housing prior to imprisonment (Baldry et al 2003)
- Two-thirds of prisoners did not finish high school ( Lynch & Sabol 2001 cited Baldry and Maplestone 2002)

And on top of these shameful trends, the numbers of people of cumulative disadvantage we continue to lock up continues to grow - there was a 45 % increase in the prison population between 1992-2002 (ABS 2003).

Another important trend, especially relevant to us on the mid north coast was that prisoners are drawn from highly socially disadvantaged areas and return to areas where services are scarce, under resourced or non existent (Vinson 1999). Releasees return to neighbourhoods where there are few job opportunities, little suitable housing, high crime and high levels of police surveillance . The prospects for social success are low ( Baldry & Maplestone 2002)

82% of inmates are imprisoned for 12months or less (Baldry et al 2004). These short stints upset housing, employment and family life. And despite Corrective services rhetoric of "through care" 73% of inmates reported that they received no information regarding accommodation nor support in planning for release (Baldry 2003)

This sort of profile leaves many community workers with limited resources , with grave concerns as to how to meet such client and community needs with no promise of future funding increases on the horizon and no political will with concern for those most disadvantaged.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE KEMPSEY CONFERENCE

The conference and the post –conference lobbying made us aware that there was general lack of interest and ownership of prison post release issues. Ex-prisoners are generally not recognised as a social category with specific needs and are not falling under the jurisdiction of any one government department.

The underlying recommendation from the conference was identification of the need for inter- departmental cooperation in developing a comprehensive framework of post release support services. We identified the need for a lead agency in this process requiring strategically targeted programmes supported by a range of human services departments. We felt that the non-government, community based sector could best deliver such programmes.

During the second day of the conference we broke off into workshops and identified needs and strategies. Some of the recommendations made were as follows:

### BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS THAT CROSSED ALL WORKSHOPS

- From every workshop the recommendation was put forward to establish transitional support workers for white men and women and for aboriginal men and women.
- Support services are best delivered from community based services as experience suggests that ex-inmates feel more comfortable in accessing services in a community setting. Transitional worker positions would be able to assist short sentence inmates who rarely receive probation and parole orders and are at the highest risk of offending. General responsibilities for such positions include: pre-release contact, assessment; developing and coordinating case plans; referrals; counselling and advocacy.
- The need for ongoing networking and lobbying to source funds to implement recommendations and to build relations with offender programmes officers inside prison to enable transitional support pre and post release.

### POST-RELEASE HOUSING ISSUES WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

On the mid north coast we have a shortage of cheap rental accommodation and 4 year waiting list for public housing.

- The major recommendation was to see increases to public housing stock.
- Establishment of a housing brokerage worker in the community to assist inmates to secure accommodation and to have access to funds to cover establishment costs.
- The need for an accommodation hostel for visiting families was also identified. Currently some families are sleeping on the Anglican Church's verandah.
- Research into appropriate models for transitional housing services

We established through the operation of Kempsey Neighbourhood centre a housing worker/brokerage services (via funds from Department of housing). However funds are limited as is cheap rental accommodation. A Housing forum has been established and they have designed a short two day course for people on rights and responsibilities of renting and how to access and keep rental accommodation. Attendance at this course enables participants to achieve points with real estate agents in the competitive rental market. This has proved helpful to ex-inmates who generally have no prior renting references.

#### INDIGENOUS ISSUES WORKSHOPS

“There need to be indigenous voices heard at all levels of planning and implementation of post release support services. We have our own answers. Own programme ideas. Own solutions. We need to be involved in all decisions made about post release issues “

(Indigenous issues workshop, “Inside-out Conference”)

- Generally the Aboriginal conference participants called for the need for indigenous voices to be heard at all levels of post release planning for services.
- The group recommended the appointment of indigenous workers to carry out post release support.
- The group identified the need for financial support for families in travelling to regional prisons to visit inmates and support for families who would be housing extra visitors in their homes.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ISSUES (AOD) WORKSHOP

- Identified the need for transitional support workers: Visiting inmates prior to release and assisting people to plan for their life after prison e.g. methadone, housing, ID, socials security issues, possible employment training options.
- Identified lack of service provision in AOD treatment area on the mid north coast. Rehabilitation and AOD counselling service models—long waiting lists and lack culturally inappropriate treatment models.
- Increased training needs for frontline workers in dealing with AOD affected clients in a holistic and appropriate manner. Developing a directory for frontline workers of AOD services in the state.
- Establishing service partnerships between Corrections and community based services to ensure seamless service delivery inside to out.
- Establish post release support directory identifying community based and government services that are “ex-inmates friendly” and tuned into their needs and who are also willing to visit inmates prior to release.

We have seen the establishment of a pilot ‘Correctional Centre Release Treatment Scheme’ by Justice Health. This service provides support to inmates pre and post release. The scheme targets those on methadone. It has one full-time worker and one part-time aboriginal worker. There are no female workers.

We still face gaping gaps in service provision –both counselling services and rehabilitation centres have long waiting lists. Rehabilitation centres are generally unwilling to take people direct from gaol.

We have managed to source funds from Drug summit money and Dept of Health to run training workshops for frontline workers in working more effectively with AOD affected clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FAMILY SUPPORT WORKSHOP

- Bolster funding to already existing Family support services already to fund positions prison family workers. To provide counselling and support to family.
- Ensure prison visits are as child friendly as possible-toys, food etc. At the Kempsey facility, mothers are unable to bring food/bottles in for children. Only food accessible is "junk" food machine which creates its own stress and tensions between parents and kids.
- Bolster funds to charities to provide emergency relief to travelling and visiting families.
- Ensure adequate transport to the gaol.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WOMEN'S WORKSHOPS

- Forge partnerships between women's services and corrections to ensure services offered inside and out. Services need to work as advocates for women inside and out. Especially when women inmates are imprisoned within a men's prison and will have "shared" facilities, which generally sees them missing out on services. This has validated by our current experience at Kempsey. Women's education choices are limited to 'jewellery making', Hairdressing and deportment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHOP

- Concerns were raised at the increasing numbers of people inside with mental health and intellectual disabilities. Felt this to be a result of lack of comprehensive support and treatment services in the community. Recommendation was made to ensure corrective services implemented improved screening and assessment at prison reception and ensuring quality services inside prison and adequate referrals post release.

**PROGRESS TO DATE**

From the workshop a delegation took the recommendations to the 'Human Services group' of the 'Regional Coordination Management Group', coordinated by the NSW Premiers Department. We were met with a mixed response. Some managers felt that they were already doing what they could and for others it was a issue for further consideration.

We have seen the funding of the 'Correctional Centre Release Treatment Scheme' by Justice health and managed to access funds via Department of Housing for a Housing Brokerage service. We have established a 'Prison subcommittee' as part of our interagency work and this group has written submissions for funding of "transitional support Workers" but no progress to date. The subcommittee monitors issues in regards to the prison and has written a number of letters to the Governor and to the press.

## ONGOING ISSUES AND DIFFICULTIES

Services organised 'Info/expo' for inmates. The Governor and senior offender programmes had agreed that this would be a beneficial move. Yet despite all the paperwork being in to ensure access and briefing of services in regards to security issues, on the day many service representatives were left outside or experienced long delays. There were also problems with accessing the inmates. Services spent a lot of time on their own – talking amongst themselves.

We no longer see any representatives from the prison or Probation and Parole at interagency meetings. They seem to have become insular and isolated ("institutionalized") from the community sector. This has left any post release referrals and transitional cooperation in the doldrums.

The "Through care" idea has simply become rhetoric. There are few referrals and few probation and parole workers visiting prior to release. The "New model" could have, "through care" and cooperation between 'inside and out,' increased transitional support. But in reality the "New model" simply sees security as paramount, this then becomes a barrier to community service worker entry.

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ACT COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR:

- Community development -Organise strong networks for the long haul – monitoring issues and development of service delivery.
- Attempt to build relations with Corrections health/welfare staff and the Governor to assist transitional support models.
- Ensure appropriate staff training and support in working with clients with complex needs
- Research and develop appropriate service models for post release support

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## ACTCOSS PRISON FORUM WORKSHOPS

### SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

#### HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

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Presenters: Jessie Mitchell – ACT Shelter  
Jason Morrissey – Samaritan House  
Notetaker: Fiona Styles.

#### Key issues raised:

- Not enough exit strategies and support services.
- Pre-release consultation and work – resolve housing problems before exit.
- No exit housing support for men: ACT prisoners in NSW jails currently can't register for ACT Housing accommodation until post-release.
- Mental Health clients needs not addressed/catered for.
- Need to improve networking between services.
- ACT Housing policies around tenants who are incarcerated needs developing: debt, loss of housing while in custody: loss of community and family links, mental health pressures.
- SAAP, Housing and Prisons run by 3 separate departments/ 3 separate Ministers.
- Need to un-block SAAP accommodation and create affordable housing options.

#### Key action items:

- Need to document activities and collect statistics (ed. note – de-identified).
- Target funding from Corrective Services to support exit/transitions programs, pre- and post release programs.
- ACTCOSS Corrections Coalition needs to be restimulated – include housing issues.
- DHCS to be approached for their input/response to housing issues for released prisoners for policy and funding.

#### DUAL DIAGNOSIS

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Presenter: Lyn Magor-Blatch, ADFACT  
Notetaker: Bridie Doyle

#### Key action items:

- That the community sector explores the idea of a parallel through-care model with every case manager selected by the person with money for these positions.
- That the drug & alcohol and mental health workers employed in the AMC NOT be Corrections employees: i.e. outside agencies and contractors.
- Recommend that there be residential blocks designated as drug free.

- We recognise that drug use is a continuing problem inside the prison and recommend there be a range of strategies in place to keep people safe. For example, a needle and syringe program and/or drug free cottages.
- Recommend that inmates with mental health problems are not segregated off together.
- Recommend that the provision of all health related services in AMC be the responsibility of the Department of Health, not the Department of Corrections.
- Recommend that there be a recognition that corrections officer's jobs include dealing sensitively with mental health and dual diagnosis and this should be reflected in their training.
- Recommend the implementation of peer educators program like Lifeline's existing South Australian program.

### **PRISONER'S AID**

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Presenter: Hugh Smith, Prisoner's Aid

Note taker: Aristides Gonzalez

#### Key issues raised:

- Information for families regarding available community support, case management of the prisoner, visits, etc.
- Visits and contact, including telephone contact and other non-visit options. 'Maximum contact with minimum fuss' needs to be the hallmark.
- Family support – using existing community organisations.
- Post release services: employment, accommodation, continuity of programs begun in prison.

#### Key action items:

- Cooperation between agencies for support and funding of prisoner and family support programs – a wide range of areas requires funding.
- Training of volunteers is important – for example, volunteer visitors, community organisations that may not deal with prisoners until the AMC opens.
- Education of community – most importantly, employers, government agencies, community agencies and politicians on the subject of who gets to go to jail, the reality of imprisonment and the needs of released prisoners.

### **ACTCOSS PRISONER HEALTH POLICY STATEMENT**

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Presenter: Karen Nicholson

#### Key issues raised:

- Need to define health in positive terms – WHO definition.
- Clearer exposition of sexual health and sexual orientation section needed.
- Covert practices are risky practices – for example, piercing, sexual practise and drug taking.
- Private family visits important.
- Interface between counselling and health service delivery needs to respect privacy and provide continuity.

#### Key action items:

- Need a "bucket of money" to resource services that want to develop programs (Gov. action).

- Measures of success of the health services within AMC to be developed (ACTCOSS).
- Need to get boards and committees talking about their ability and capacity to participate in programs supporting the AMC (individual organisations).

## QUESTIONS COMMUNITY SECTOR BOARDS MIGHT CONSIDER ON THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE AMC

ACTCOSS has been working towards a human rights-based, rehabilitation-focussed prison that uses the skills and knowledge of the community sector to promote better outcomes for people sentenced to imprisonment. We do this through the Canberra Community Coalition on Corrections, which is a forum for policy development and discussion on law and order issues.

With the opening of the Alexander Maconochie Centre, community groups will have an opportunity to have a role in the support provided to inmates. Here are a few issues your organisation may wish to consider in response to this opportunity.

- Do any of our consumers come into contact with the ACT Corrections system? The following are just some of the groups who need support or who are overrepresented in the prison system:
  - Consumers with partners/parents/siblings/significant others in prison
  - People who have drug and alcohol problems
  - People who are homeless
  - Indigenous consumers
  - People with an intellectual disability, including ADHD
  - People experiencing mental health problems
  - People experiencing poverty
- Do we currently provide services for people who might end up in the remand or prison systems, or who are exiting these institutions?
- Does our mission statement and objectives in our constitution give us any guidance on whether the prison should be a focus for our services?
- What will be the financial cost of providing existing services once the prison opens? (Some useful information may be found on the Alexander Maconochie website – [www.amd.act.gov.au](http://www.amd.act.gov.au) )
- What are the costs/benefits in our organisation tendering to provide services within the AMC?
- What are the costs/benefits of offering to provide support to prisoners and remandees, if there is no specific funding for these services? (Consider whether continuity of care through a prison term is something that improves your organisational outcomes)
- Do you feel you have enough information about the AMC to make these decisions?

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