



VICTORIAN
ASSOCIATION
FOR THE CARE &
RESETTLEMENT
OF OFFENDERS
LIFE CHANGING

Centre for Research Excellence into Injecting Drug Use

Colloquium 2015

Using Positive Strategies as a pathway out of the Criminal Justice System

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VACRO**



VACRO'S Mission

VACRO works across the Criminal Justice system to create a safe and fair environment, to respect and support individual and family dignity, and to make a positive contribution to reducing the harm done by crime.

We achieve this as leaders and in partnership, through the development and delivery of programs that empower people impacted by the criminal justice system, supported by research, education and advocacy.

Our Values

We show ***integrity*** in our relationship with each other, our clients and the broader community.

We display ***respect*** by supporting our clients to achieve positive outcomes and lead meaningful lives.

We work towards ***inclusion*** for all stakeholders in the development of our programs.

We are ***adaptable*** to the conditions and opportunities that arise in our daily work.



VACRO Background

- Commenced in 1872 as the Prisoners' Aid Society
- 143 years of working with offenders and their families
- First Victorian organization to recognize and include offenders' families as part of its primary mission
- Currently provides a suite of programs targeting prisoners, offenders, their families and their communities
- Programs include:
 - *Pre and Post Release programs*
 - *Family and Community based programs*
 - *Research and Development*

Presentation Focus

- Examine the past and what led to the current Reintegration Pathway
 - Justice Callinan's report and recommendations
 - The Pathway
- Where are we now?
 - What we are doing to improve transition
- Where to from here?
 - Considerations for Government, Corrections Victoria, services providers and the broader community



Back in 2003

- Evaluation of **Bridging the Gap, 2003** noted: *“This continual cycling from prison to the community and back to prison is a complex problem with multiple causes. Drug and alcohol dependence, mental disorder, aggression, greed, poverty, and sexual deviance are all contributing factors to the offending that leads to imprisonment. However, it is also clear that being imprisoned is itself a factor that leads to imprisonment, in large part because of the problems that released prisoners face in re-establishing themselves in the community when they are released. These problems include unstable and inappropriate accommodation, lack of vocational skills leading to high levels of unemployment and the absence of legitimate forms of income, rejection by their family and friends, and lack of access to mainstream health and social services. The ultimate consequences of failing to make the transition back into the mainstream community include injury, or death, mainly from drugs, re-offending and further imprisonment”* (Dr Stuart Ross, Melbourne University)

And Ten Years On?

Ten years on Justice Callinan noted:

“Misunderstanding often lies in a failure to appreciate that many of the causes of crime are social and that if potential criminals can be diverted into leading different lives, society and its economy will greatly benefit. Many offenders suffer mental disabilities, not always self inflicted. There were sad stories of children affected in the womb by the alcoholism or drug addiction of their mothers. They included children from both dysfunctional and drug or alcohol affected households. Violence occurs routinely in some households. Parents and step parents randomly move in and out of some families. Prison itself can be, for some, a school of crime.”



Recommendations by Justice Callinan that directly impact prisoners

Justice Callinan made 23 specific recommendations following his investigation of the Victorian Parole system, including:

- Measure 2 – the prisoner should be required to make application for Parole
- Measure 3 – On cancellation of Parole and re-imprisonment, an offender should not have Parole granted until half the unexpired time remaining has been served
- Measure 5 – All offenders should be categorised on conviction and sentencing for a non Parole term of imprisonment according to the nature and severity of the offence
- Measure 8 - The Board should remain exempt from the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities indefinitely

Recommendations cont'd

- Measure 13 – No person, whether a SVOSO should be granted Parole who has not undertaken programs which either the Court, or Corrective Services has ordered or directed or believes should be taken even if the prisoner has to await their availability
- Similarly, no person, whether a PDP (potentially dangerous person) or not, should be granted Parole who has not behaved satisfactorily at least the second half of that person's time in prison.
- Measure 14 – A test or tests different to the VISAT should be employed
- Measure 17 – Only very experienced forensic psychiatrists or psychologists should be engaged to prepare assessment reports, especially in cases in which detention might be sought
- The Parole Board should treat the date of the expiration of a non-Parole period as a target date only for the release of an offender on Parole

The CV Reintegration Pathway

- Provides an integrated approach to transitional planning and support that directly targets seven critical intervention domains – Housing, Employment, Education and Training, Independent Living skills, Mental Health, Alcohol and other Drugs, Family/Community Connectedness
- There are four key stages – Entry, Sentence, Pre Release and Post Release
- VACRO was appointed by Corrections Victoria to provide the Relink program across 11 prisons in Victoria over three years. MAP, JLTC and MRC were not included in the contract
- Four regional providers provide post release support – VACRO, Jesuit Social Services, ACSO and VALS. Case Managers take responsibility for encouraging clients to engage with community based services and activities



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Reintegration Priority Areas



Reception – Triage

- **Triage upon entry into the system –**
- Housing support - Referral to Housing Worker
- Debt Reduction – Referral to Financial Advisor
- Remand transitional support – Referral to Remand Release Assistance Program
- Child Support Payments – Referral to Child Support Agency

Regroup program

- **Domains covered in this CV program –**
- Leaving prison information session
- Parole information session
- Education and Training portfolio building
- Finalise Identification and Day of Release travel
- Health and Mental Health information session
- Legal Aid information session
- Disability Referral and assistance
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Housing Referral
- Community engagement Referrals
- Transition Program Referrals
- Centrelink Referral



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Relink Program (VACRO)

Two Levels of support –

- Level I, 8 hours group work and
- Level II, 4 hours individual support

Corrections Victoria prioritized four domains for Relink –

- Returning to families/community
- Money Management
- Life Management
- Succeeding on Parole

Reconnect Program

- **Objectives:**

- Provide individualised transition planning for exiting prisoners to address key needs to reduce re-offending and maximise opportunities for reintegration into the community

- **Timing:**

- Support commences up to six weeks prior to release with two program streams – Targeted (up to four weeks) and Extended (up to 12 months)

- **Eligibility:**

- Parolees, SVOSO's (straight release and Parole), ASTI and female prisoners



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Barriers to a Successful Transition and Solutions



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Family Violence

- Trauma is not gender specific, however the facts are on the table:
- Out of 6200 prisoners currently in prison, over 5000 LEAP and CV records were successfully matched in July
- 45.6% of men in prison came into contact with Vic Pol (LEAP) in the previous ten years for FV matters, prior to incarceration (M: 30-44 yr). 35% had Assault charges
- 51% of females in the prison system are victims of abuse
- **Community Corrections:**
- 93% were matched to LEAP. 45% had been a FV offender. (Half were male; 35-39 years)
- 83% FV offenders had Assault as their offence. 63% had stalking/threatening behaviour charge

(Crime Statistics Agency, Victoria 2015, Corrections Victoria)

Action on Family Violence

- Corrections Victoria has a Violence Steering Committee. The Corrections Commissioner, Jan Shuard chairs the Committee.
- Five programs have been run in the community over past four years and two in prison
- Community based providers won't work with offenders unless they admit their behaviour and many of the participants won't do this, which becomes problematic.
- Community Corrections has local arrangements in place to run programs. Vic Pol is involved in the programs and provides information on IVO's
- A common assessment framework is used. This was established by DHHS and is to be rolled out in prisons.
- Prisoners and offenders are encouraged to participate in treatment programs. VACRO is considering our role in pre and post release work with program participants

Alcohol and Other Drugs Impact on Prison Population

- **Burnet Institute:**
- New study funded by National Health and Medical Research Council (\$1m)
- Conducting a large scale, four year study of 600 prisoners in Victoria with a history of injecting drug use.
- The study follows on from a study conducted during 2008-2010 called *Hit and Miss: A study of post release support*, which explored the post-release trajectories of 141 ex-prisoners with a history of injecting drug use in Victoria.
- The study follows prisoners with a history of injecting drug use in the four weeks prior to their release.
- Follow up of these study participants will then occur three, 12 and 24 months post-release. At each point, participants will undertake in-depth interviews and provide blood samples to examine outcomes related to blood borne virus transmission.
- This study will provide unprecedented detail regarding the experiences of this vulnerable population after release from prison.

Alcohol and Other Drugs

St Vinny's Hep C treatment:

- Treatment has improved over past five years, allowing for an easier pathway to successful eradication of Hep C, which is prevalent within the prison population. New treatment is being trialled in Victorian prison system

Use in prison:

- Whilst there are no official stats available on drug use in prison, anecdotally we are aware that drugs are readily available. This leads to debt, stand over tactics, violence, addiction, anxiety and depression
- Substitution programs are available –methadone and Bup, Nicotine replacement
- There is no likelihood of NSP being introduced to Victorian prisons

Preparing to transition:

- Education on harm minimisation is provided pre and post release through the Reintegration pathway

Bikie engagement:

- An ongoing problem for young offenders who are being lured into a particular lifestyle

Mental Health

MAP:

- Reception prison has high care unit, that is generally full. Supported by Forensicare

MRC:

- Remand prison. Recent riots have interrupted prison life and impacted on service provision across other prisons

Treatment across the system:

- High population of prisoners are co-morbid and require specific treatment programs (Caraniche behavioural change programs and modified TC, Marngoneet Prison)
- Mental health of prisoners in management units is problematic
- Ravenhall Prison has been designed to assist prisoners with specific needs, including mental health issues. Step down process and transitional support built into model

Lack of appropriate Housing

- Safe, appropriate housing remains a major factor that precludes successful Parole applications
- Offenders transition out of prison – often into homelessness, maintaining recidivist cycle. Prison offers a bed, three meals a day, your mates, a job.....
- Prisoners are being released on their EDD (final release date, rather than earliest release date). Straight release brings a new set of transitional problems, particularly for long termers or co-morbid prisoners
- Upon release, without basic living skills, maintaining a 'home' can be a daunting and impossible task
- Transitional housing is for a 3-12 month period generally. What happens when the client is not able to secure a Seg 1 property, or private accommodation, that is sustainably affordable?

Education and Employment

General Population:

- Prisoners are encouraged to work, as they progress through the system. Billet positions are popular.
- Can also undertake volunteer positions offering Peer support, (mentoring – Penhyn Unit PPP), community based projects prior to release (on permits)

TAFE:

- Prison based training is offered to all prisoners and Certificates issued, to assist with post release employment

Marngoneet:

- A new literacy (pre employment) unit was established to assist prisoners to become job ready. High percentage of prisoners are illiterate and cannot complete forms

Degree courses:

- Prisoners are also able to undertake higher education whilst in prison.

JLTC:

- All prisoners transitioning through JLTC are encouraged to work or study as part of their transition plan

Lack of Connectedness

Unmet relational needs can have significant impacts on a ex offenders ability to transition into society. Offenders face social isolation, a lack of motivation and support which can lead to:

- Increasing a sense of isolation from family
- No empathy or support from community (NIMBY)
- Anti-social behaviour
- Loneliness
- Shame
- Heightened anxiety and depression
- Damage to an individual's health and wellbeing, and
- At worst, re-offending

If not addressed, this can lead to negative impacts on:

- Individual
- Family
- Broader community

A lack of connectedness severely damages overall wellbeing





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The Children of Prisoners



- For many of the young people who had younger siblings, or a parent with a mental health or alcohol or other drug issue, the incarceration of a parent meant that they assumed a level of caring responsibility significantly more than they had been used to. Whilst no child or young person identified themselves as a 'carer' it was apparent for some that their caring responsibilities prevented them from engaging fully in education, social activities with peers and work or employment opportunities. Young people were also more likely to take on financial responsibilities and the management of the home. Young people expressed a need to receive extra financial and practical support for themselves and their families, so as to not be disadvantaged. It is critical that the insights gained from parents, children and young people in this study are carefully considered in order to understand how the relevant systems and service responses can better encompass and address the issues experienced by children and young people who have a parent in prison. This is fundamental to ensure that these children are better supported and not inadvertently more disadvantaged than they perhaps already are.

*Report - Children of Prisoners: Exploring the needs of children and young people who have a parent incarcerated in the Australian Capital Territory
Vicky Saunders, Prof Morag McArthur 2013*

Support for Children

- SKY Program supports carers and children up to 18 years to maintain contact with incarcerated parent. Funded through philanthropy
- Builds resilience using a trauma based approach through specialist worker
- Video Visits allow long distance contact
- Resources available for families – Transition Toolkit and booklets



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VACRO's Role in Transition process

VACRO's Approach to transition

- Client centred
- Strengths Based
- Tony Wards 'Good Lives Model' of Support
- Focus on the whole person:
 - Enhancing well-being
 - Building skills
 - Building social connections
 - Supporting achievement of personal goals

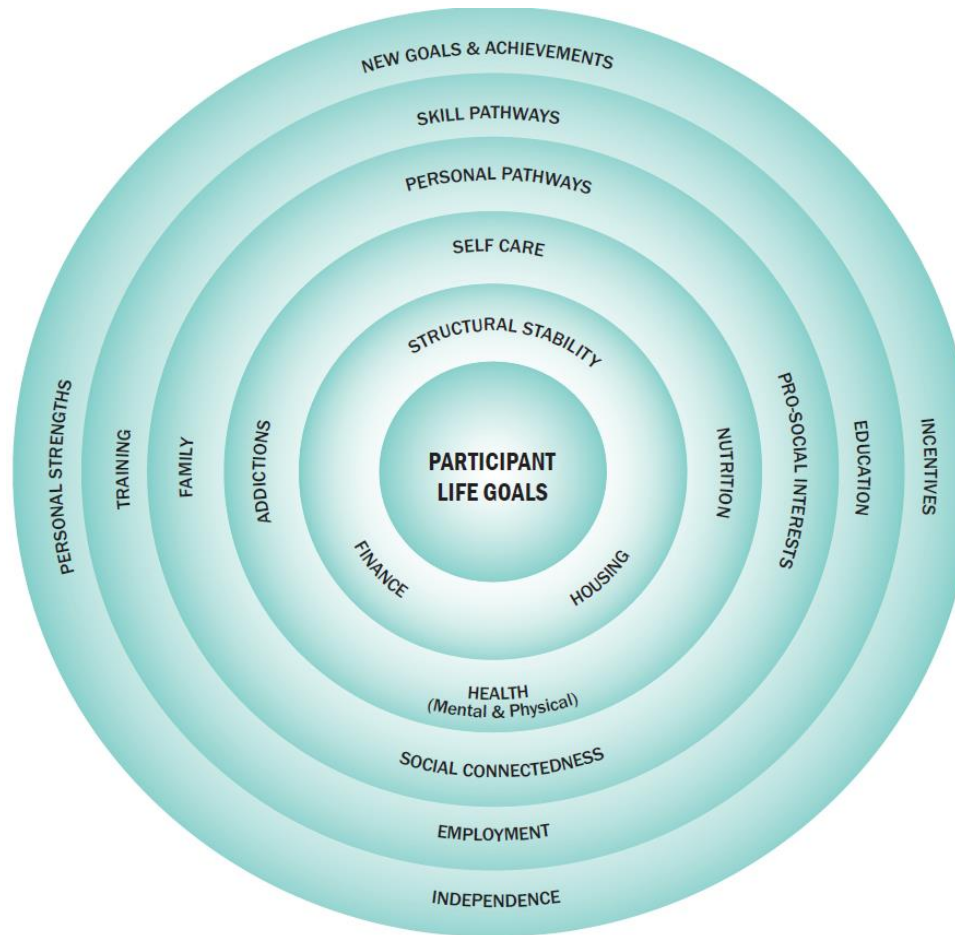
VACRO developed a service model : Life Goals Hierarchy





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Life Goals Hierarchy





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Mentoring

Mentoring

There is worldwide evidence that mentoring works. Programs supporting men and women in the Adult Criminal Justice System exist in United Kingdom, Scotland, USA and Australia

Breaches of non-custodial orders account for approximately one tenth of all women received into prison custody annually in Victoria

In 2005 – *Better Pathways* was launched – a strategy that articulated Corrections commitment to address women's offending

VACRO Women's Mentoring Program has been active for 15 years. Highly successful one-to-one 12 month support program for women in the community. Evaluated and proven to improve the life of women exiting prison and on Orders

Mentoring

A number of men's programs have been run in Victoria. VACRO has commenced a pilot model in partnership with PPP. We need mentors from the community!

Mentoring provides ongoing, practical support (non therapeutic) for transitioning participants.

Aimed at:

- modelling pro-social behaviour in order to address issues of community safety and anti-social behaviour

Responds to:

- risks posed by the lack of social supports available in transitional services

Leads to:

- positive impacts on individual wellbeing and thus community safety

Encourages:

- positive engagement with the community

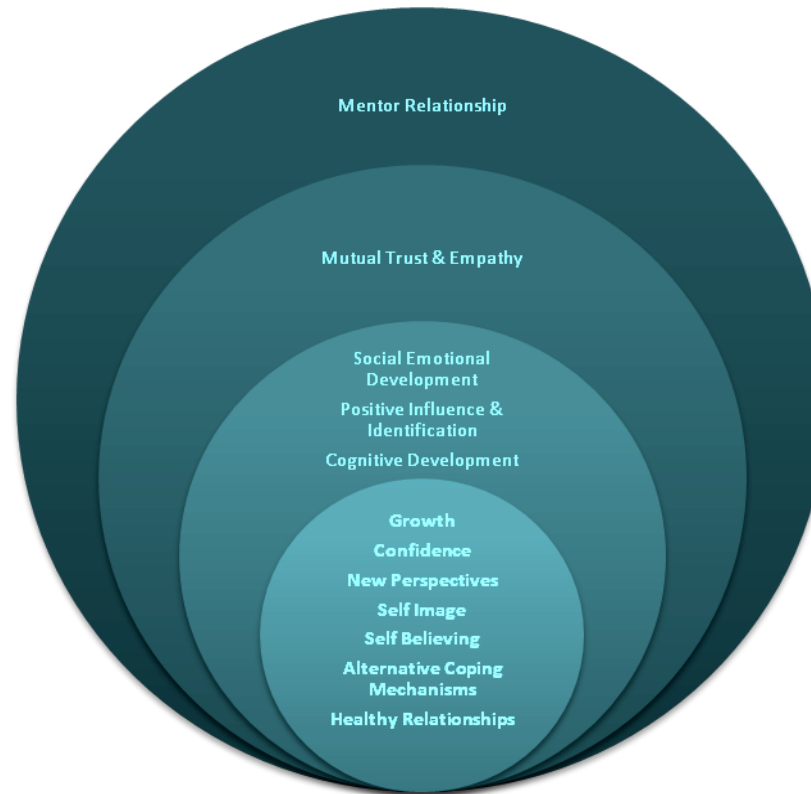
Human capital + Social capital = Desistance from crime

Sampson and Laub Desistance from crime



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Life Goals Model for Mentoring



Flexible, positive influences leading to growth. VACRO suggests that their Life Goals Model:

- Complements Correctional supervision
- Builds opportunities to achieve goals
- Clients achieve satisfaction through pro-social engagement and community connection

Ultimate aim:

- Independent living in the community
- Connection to family and loved ones
- Increased participation in education, training and employment



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Outcomes of Mentoring and Processes of Desistance

Mentoring Activities

- Consistently spending time reflecting on imprisonment, future plans, goals
- Positive reinforcement of non-offending routines and thoughts
- Challenging anti-social thoughts & patterns
- Assistance with justice system eg. court support

- Non-judgemental, trustworthy consistent, authentic friendship and support
- Encouraging links with resources such as family and services
- Assisting with links to work/study/volunteering

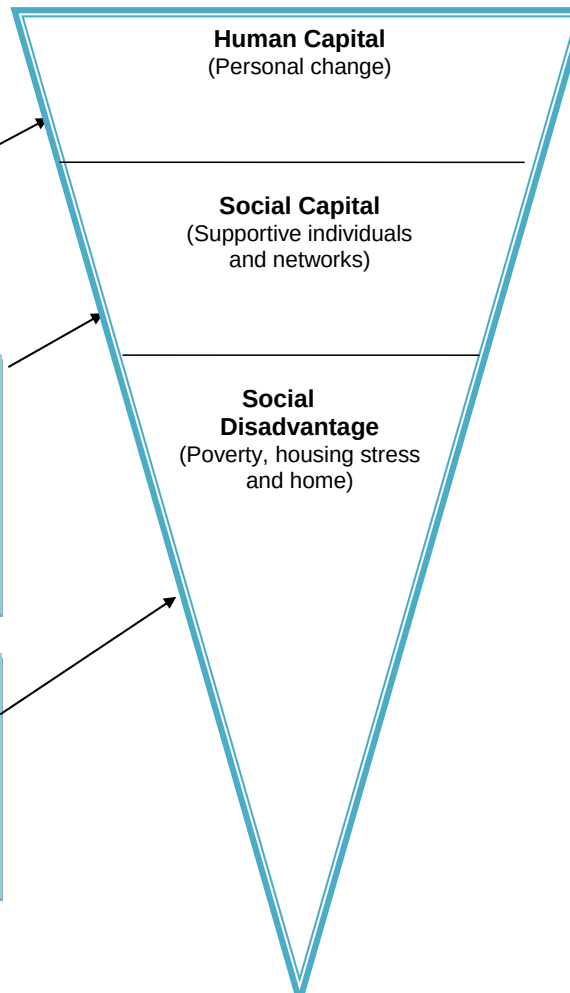
- Advocacy with Centrelink
- Identification of housing crises & referral to VACRO or other service
- Housing reference
- Employment reference

Outcomes of Mentoring

- Ability to evaluate offending & prison
- Interest in non-offending lifestyle & commitment to putting routines and behaviours in place for support
- Improved self esteem and self worth

- Capacity for better relationships with support services, families and other networks
- Sense of support & connection, reduced isolation
- Increased opportunities for work/study/volunteering
- Sense of community 'safety'

- Stronger capacity to advocate with services
- Increased likelihood of issues being identified & addressed by services
- Increased resources to access employment/study



Desistance



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Relink Program – a new beginning

Positive is Best

Positive Psychology activities

- Reducing focus on the past and concentrating on the future – making plans and how to get there ('personal' case planning)
- Gratitude exercises such as Seligman's 3 blessings
- Learned optimism exercises such as 3 anticipations
- Acts of generosity to develop empathy
- Signature strength exercises
- Tools for success – understanding how the brain works (neuroplasticity)
- Mindfulness activities, including meditation (excluding meditation for prisoners who are extremely mentally unwell)
- Forming collaborative work groups to work together to create an ideal future (group work in Relink, family therapy, post release community based programs for family violence, AA/NA)
- Mentoring

Two Mind States – The Red and Blue Zone



When the 'childhood' mind (reptilian) persists into adulthood we call it the **Red zone**, and contrast it to the 'adult' mind state or **Blue zone** (creative/neo cortex)

Red Zone triggers

Physical threat
Fear/Anxiety/Guilt
Rejection/Exclusion
Ambiguity & lack of clarity
Perceived **unfairness**
Not being listened to
Sarcasm
Being told how to think
Being judged

- Our current education system creates adults with two mind states – “**Red zone**” and “**Blue zone**”.
- In the **Blue zone** we are at our best: confident, collaborative and creative.
- In the **Red zone** we have limited choices and do not have access to creativity, nor collaboration and tend to be pessimistic.
- Leadership is increasingly based on leaders modelling the **Blue zone** to others so that they can operate at their best.

Blue Zone triggers

Safety
Unconditional respect or love
Being listened to
Clarity
Permission
Authentic attention
Acknowledgement
Trust
Inclusion
Generosity
Vulnerability

About Relink

- We are working with participants who have a long history of trauma. This journey generally occurs in youth, where there has been abuse and a lack of role modelling and proper care; causing poor mental health, homelessness, drug and alcohol dependency and more recently, we have seen a significant rise in the reporting of domestic violence and the devastating effect it has on individuals and families
- The Relink program is based on **positive psychology**, using neuroplasticity to create new neural pathways for change (new habits of behavior and thinking). Relink was consciously developed to enhance each participants ability to understand the impact of their emotions and actions; and manage this, as part of a successful transition from prison into the community
- To do this, we use tools that are easy to understand and allow the participants to identify their own personal strengths and the challenges they will face, so that they can successfully create their own case plan and self manage their transition



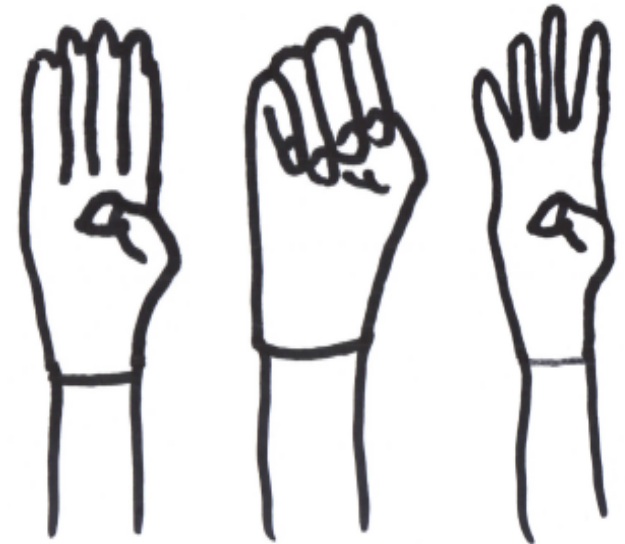
The Relink Program cont'd

- We encourage all participants to identify and change behaviors, through simple skill building exercises that promote mindfulness and a creative approach to learning new skills, thus reducing the stress and anxiety of exiting prison
- As a first step participants learn about brain function. They learn about the reptilian brain (red zone) and its negative, but protective impact on behaviors and thoughts. They also learn about the neo frontal cortex (blue zone), where they will create positive thinking about making changes in their lives. It takes five times more energy to be in the blue zone, than the red zone
- Throughout the eight hour sessions, the impact of 'flight or fight' is also discussed. This information assists in developing insight into the participants own, and others behavior. When the 'flight or fight' response is constantly activated, the immune system is suppressed and participants are constantly 'on alert'
- New language being used in the Relink sessions: **blue/red zone** describes the various zones of the brain where thinking/actions occur, **'flipping the lid'** refers to the immediate, negative response that someone may have when under stress, and **'the tree'** which describes the Transition Plan that clients will be asked to design to support their own journey out of the prison system and into the community



Flipping the Lid

- Participants learn that a good way to remember the zones of the brain is to use the hand. The wrist is the brain stem, with the hand representing the brain. Participants are taught to lift up their fingers and place the thumb into the palm to see the approximate location of the Limbic system (flight/fight).
- When participants curl the fingers back over the top, the Blue zone (creative/rational) is active.
- When we “Flip our Lid” raw emotion is visible and in control (Red zone)





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Reconnect Post Release Program

Reconnect – Post Release support

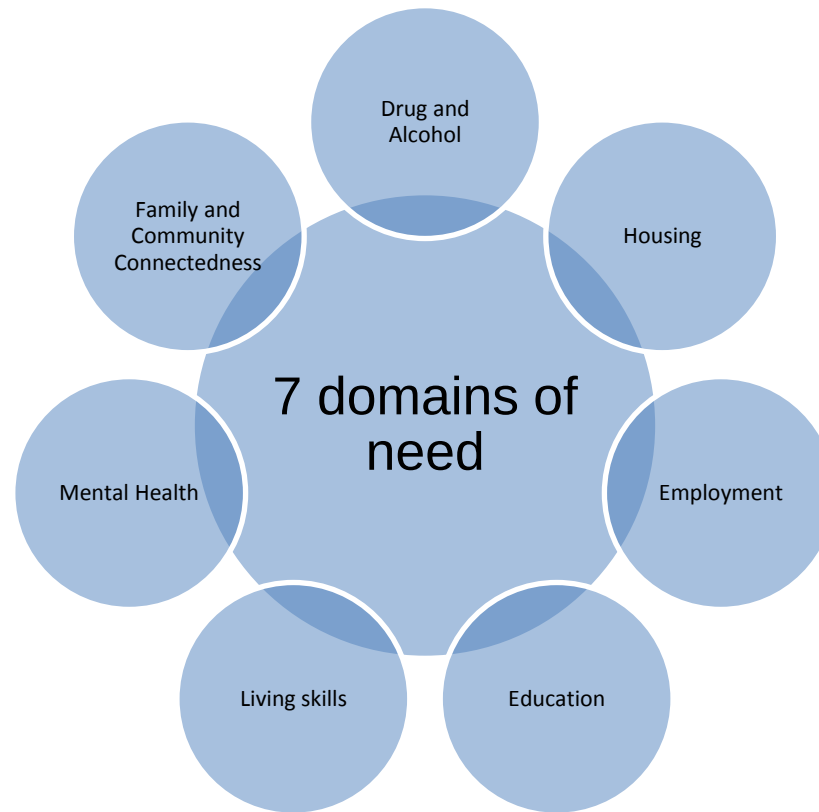
All service providers have developed their own model for Reconnect. The VACRO Reconnect model provides a level of support that responds to the individualised Transition Plans developed through Relink, in three stages:

- The first week, known as the Intensive Support stage, is a critical time during re-entry to the community. The program provides practical support, such as transport, purchase of necessary personal items, assistance to attend appointments (CCS induction, housing provider, temporary accommodation, bank, Centrelink)
- Assertive Outreach support is provided in the early stages and will be responsive to the needs of the participant
- Final stage support at the end of the program focuses on practical transition strategies and stabilisation, for effective independent living within the community



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Relational Needs of Transition: A Positive Cycle of Support





Service Providers for Reconnect

- There are four providers of the Reconnect program:
- Where a client has no identified address/region:
 - VACRO –Barwon, Marngoneet, Hopkins, Langi Kal Kal
 - ACSO –Dhurringile, Beechworth, Fulham, Tarrengower
 - Jesuit Social Services - PPP, DPFC, MAP, MRC
 - VALS – Statewide service for all ATSI clients
- Where clients are returning home to an identified address or region, the service provider in that region delivers the service:
 - VACRO - Barwon and Grampians Region
 - ACSO - Regional areas/Southern and Eastern Metro
 - Jesuit Social Services – Inner North West Metro
 - VALS – Statewide service for all ATSI clients



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Challenges for consideration.....

- Managing drug and alcohol use within the community, including the increase of damage caused to individuals and the community through increased of Crystal Meth use (as part of poly drug use) in the offending population. Youth, ATSI, 18-35yrs particularly affected
- 60% of women being discharged at Court from Remand, going back to the same circumstances – co-morbidity, disconnection from family, poverty homelessness, family violence, street work
- Need for suitable and sustainable housing for offenders and their families
- Gender appropriate Family Violence service provision must be continued in women's prisons. A high priority is the Corrections Victoria Women's Policy. A Family Support Program Pilot will be introduced in 2016. Appropriate programs need to be integrated into the men's prisons, long after the media hype of 2015 has disappeared
- Reduction in offending, through diversion and residential programs
- Juvenile Justice Order – mandatory treatment for young people under discussion
- Reduction in substance misuse (and associated behaviours) in prisons
- Increased participation in appropriate education training and employment, leading to real world outcomes
- Community Involvement: breaking down barriers to inclusion and acceptance

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VACRO SERVICES



VACRO works to create a safe and fair community and make a positive contribution to reducing the harm done by crime. Our contribution focuses on achieving justice for individuals, families and communities. We are family focused, providing thorough support and referral for all

DONATE NOW FUNDRAISING



VACRO's Children's Foundation has been established to help the lives of children and families affected by the Justice System. Help us build a stronger community

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TRAINING



An exciting new development in the SKY program is the opportunity for your organisation to attend tailored training sessions about a specialised area of work, children, families and the criminal justice system. Training can be specially designed for the needs of school staff, Child FIRST agencies or others in the field who believe it may enhance their

WELCOME TO THE NEW VACRO WEBSITE

When someone is charged with an offence and remanded into custody, they come *from the community*, and the majority of prisoners ultimately return to *the community* on release.

► [More about VACRO](#)