

wurin yan wurinwan binga murra warra

to love, to support, to stand one's ground



A Resource Kit for Workers and Volunteers who support



SHINE for Kids

Aboriginal women with
family members in prison



Office for Women
NSW Premier's Department

Acknowledgements

There are many individuals and organisations that contributed to the development of this resource; many women who have family members in the criminal justice system and workers and volunteers who support these families in some way. I am grateful for their contributions, without which the real voice of the needy would not have been heard.

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These people provided independent guidance and feedback to the project all the way through.

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wurin yan, wurinwan binga, murra warra meaning 'to love, to support and to stand one's ground' are Wiradjuri phrases. Permission to use these phrases has been gratefully given by the Bathurst Lands Council.

wurin yan
to love
wurinwan binga
to support
murra warra
to stand one's ground

**A Resource Kit for Workers
and Volunteers who Support
Aboriginal women
with family members in prison**

The information comes out of stories and comments from Aboriginal Women in NSW who have been through this experience. They spoke about the places where they reached out to get a hand and offered words of advice to their sisters who are going through it now.

Shine for Kids are very grateful to all the women who volunteered their time and stories. **'Wurin yan, wurinwan binga and murra warra'** are Wiradjuri phrases from Western NSW.

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The drawing of mother and child was created for this project by Tambelin Howarth, a young Aboriginal woman in year 8 at Bathurst High school.

Introduction

This is a book for people who are able to support our Indigenous communities in some way. You may or may not be Indigenous; it doesn't matter really, what matters is the quality of your attention and care, your understanding of the real issues. The following appeal comes from the Aboriginal women surveyed for this resource.

What is most important to Indigenous people is that you meet face to face, as individuals; me to you, rather than seeing each client as another Koori with a bucket of problems. It can be easy to think all Aboriginal people have the same problems and issues and to deal with each person in the same way, but it doesn't work like that. Take the time to get to know your clients, take time out to share a cup of tea with them and let the trust slowly build.

It is vital to know about Indigenous issues such as the Stolen Generation and the effects of Colonisation, as it is important to know about the current social situation of many Aboriginal people; like inter-generational poverty and violence. This knowledge gives us a background understanding of why an Indigenous person may be in need of some support. But just knowing about these issues doesn't automatically qualify you for genuinely helping out Indigenous people, even if you are Indigenous yourself. Knowing about these issues helps only if you are also able to open your heart and mind and give individualised care and attention, no matter how small it may be. 10 minutes of real listening or one genuine simple gesture can go a long way.

It is also important to know some truths about families of prisoners. Most of us have strong opinions about people that have committed crimes and are doing time for it, but it is essential that we do not transfer those feelings and perceptions onto their families or let them inhibit your ability to provide assistance. Every child deserves a chance at the 'good life', how can you and your services support and empower Aboriginal women to better look after the children? Can you imagine yourself in her shoes? You never really know what a person has been through and what they are up against. These issues can be confronting and overwhelming, don't let them intimidate you though.

If you come across a woman that frustrates you because you can see she is stuck in a destructive cycle, repeatedly making the same mistakes, know that she probably does not wish to continue the cycle; she just may not know how to break it. How many of us know how hard it is to give up smoking even though we want to and know how bad it is for us...It can be a long stride between embedded trauma and positive self empowerment and there are no rules about how to assist someone in taking that step. What does help though is having a friendly ear from the people she meets.

What qualities are important when working with Aboriginal women?

- Genuine Empathy, not hand outs or feeling sorry for someone
- Listening, not all that talking and asking questions. Slow down, silence is ok
- Honesty, including being honest about what you don't know and about your mistakes
- Being down to earth, be yourself, be genuine, don't fake it or pretend, people know
- Integrity, never say you'll do something, and then don't do it
- Openness. Are you 'fair dinkum' about wanting to find a way to help this woman? Are you prepared to step outside your comfort zone, learn a different view?

It is the hope of many Aboriginal women with family members in prison and the staff and supporters of SHINE for Kids that this resource proves valuable and deeply relevant, for you and your service.

The following acronyms are used throughout the text and represent research documents; they can be further identified in the bibliography.

RCIADC	–	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991
FOP	–	Families of Prisoners, 2003
NSW DCS	–	Aboriginal Inmates Strategic Plan 2003-2005
WAACHS	–	Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005
CRC	–	Community Restorative Centre NSW
DOCS	–	NSW Department of Community Services
DCS	–	NSW Department of Corrective Services

Preface

The SHINE for Kids *Resource and Support Kits for Aboriginal women with family members in prison* project was funded by the Office for Women in the NSW Premiers Department to address the need for timely information and quality support for this group of women. The project was conducted throughout 2005.

With knowledge of the high imprisonment rates of Indigenous Australians and a deep understanding of the effects of imprisonment on the families involved, SHINE for Kids saw the need to develop resources that could both support and empower Aboriginal women to support their children and guide the workers and volunteers who address this group. Two resources were developed through this project, the one you now hold and one that is distributed to Aboriginal women themselves across NSW.

“Too many Aboriginal people are in custody too often”

1.3.3 RCIADC, Vol. I.

Despite the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, over-representation of Indigenous Australians in custody remains a problem that runs ripples through the community. The 2003 Families of Prisoners report (FOP 2003) reveals that whilst representing approximately 2% of our national population, over 20% of the overall prison population is Indigenous. The statistics are higher for women and young people. The steady rise of these rates does not indicate that it is improving any time soon. Indigenous communities have a strong sense of family values and kinship ties; the whole community provides for the children and is responsible for their development. There are as many children in these communities as there are adults, so with many adults caught up in the criminal justice system, these kids have less people caring and providing positive role models for them. The women are left to pick up the pieces of their broken families and communities and provide a secure economic and social background for countless kids. This resource explores how challenging this is to achieve.

Reports tell us the level of contact the Aboriginal community has with the criminal justice system has to do with ‘discrimination, poverty, dispossession, disadvantage and the vulnerability of Indigenous culture and family structures since European settlement.’ (FOP 2003, p. 40) It can be complicated to set apart the impact of imprisonment from the other pressures to which prisoners and their families are often subject to, pressures such as low income, poor health, domestic violence and substance abuse etc. The cycle of poverty and offending can be hard to break. By supporting families of prisoners and

strengthening family relationships, recidivism can be reduced and young people placed at less risk of offending. Supporting Aboriginal women and children with family in prison goes some of the way towards addressing the social factors which can contribute towards incarceration. It is important when working with Aboriginal women to view their situations in this greater context of inter-generational disadvantage, along with giving credence to the difficulties and isolation faced as a family member of an inmate. This resource aims to help put some of these perspectives into place.

The Resource kits were developed through thorough literature research and extensive consultations with Aboriginal women who have had or currently have a family member in prison. The issues were discussed in focus groups as well as in surveys distributed to the women through various helpful services. Aboriginal women in the waiting lines of prison visit centres and at the Winangaay centre in Bathurst were also surveyed. It was important to access the voice of Aboriginal women who had experienced having family members in prison. A lot of this feedback went directly towards creating the women’s kits, acting as the voice of an aunt or elder shining the light on a well-trodden yet darkened and difficult path. Extensive surveys and consultations were also held with many support services, Government and non-government, Indigenous and not, right across NSW. The consultations themselves highlighted how little the general community knows about the real challenges families of prisoners face.

Aboriginal Women with family members in prison and what it may be like for them

It can be hard to separate the impact of incarceration from the daily struggles some Aboriginal women are dealing with. This section looks at the whole picture for these women and breaks it down a bit, to be able to put her request for assistance into an appropriate context.

Aboriginal women can have greater support needs than non-Aboriginal women. Often they are confronted with countless difficult issues peripheral to the incarceration of the family member. These women are more likely to have experienced, with greater frequency and intensity, mistreatment that has been repeated over generations. Aboriginal women may experience hardship and oppression from many directions;

1. as an Aboriginal person,
2. as a woman,
3. as someone on the bottom of the socio-economic scale.
4. and in our case she is often received as a *broke black woman with a criminal family member looking for handouts.*

**“Aboriginal women often bear sole responsibility for holding together their families and local communities, under circumstances negatively impacted by past and present socio-economic and cultural dispossession”
Salomone (2002: 3 cited in Goulding 2004, p. 47)**

These experiences need to be considered when working with the women that access your services. What may influence her, socially and culturally as an Indigenous person, what she faces as a woman, what she may experience due to less access to resources and what affects her as a result of having a family member in prison. All this needs to be considered while recognising her *common humanity*, which she shares with each of us. Let's have a look at this picture in more detail.

AS AN ABORIGINAL PERSON your client has probably had to deal with, either directly through personal experience or indirectly through her community, the devastating effects of colonisation, these include:

- The loss of heritage / culture / family / land and self - esteem since Colonisation
- Entrenched racism that still occurs on a government and community level
- The continued removal of her people to the criminal justice system
- Intergenerational poverty, violence, welfare reliance, drug and alcohol abuse and being less likely to have received any counselling to process these traumas

**“Indigenous communities experience more collective social and economic disadvantage than any other group”
(FOP 2003, p. 40)**

AS A WOMAN she is more likely than a non-Indigenous woman to:

- Have been the recipient of repeated sexual abuse and family violence
- Have had more children of her own and of others in her care
- Bear the brunt of 3 laws “whitefella law, traditional law and ‘bullshit law’” (A misappropriated mix of whitefella and blackfella laws. There is more on this in the Family Violence Chapter)
- Be blamed when a partner is taken into custody and become the victim of retaliation or payback. (FOP 2003)
- Have her traditional status as a woman undermined by contemporary policies

AS AN ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED PERSON she may have experienced

- Lower levels of education
- High levels of unemployment
- The daily struggle of not having enough money to cover costs, often resulting in unmanageable debt
- Less access to acceptable housing and possible overcrowding as a result
- Difficulties accessing appropriate legal representation

AS A FAMILY MEMBER OF A PRISONER she may be faced with

- Regularly having to travel long distances to visit the inmate
- The added expense of supporting the inmate financially
- The stigma attached to being closely related to an inmate, making it hard for her to access appropriate support
- The difficulties in coping with the family without the inmate around
- The behavioural problems children often present with someone close to them is incarcerated
- The lack of information available to her in regards to her situation
- Isolation, anxiety, grief, loss...

The woman sitting across from you may be faced with any combination of these, and probably more than you realise. A lot of Aboriginal women are carrying around not only their own traumatic memories but that of their community. Unresolved trauma, grief, loss and hardship have been identified as core issues that contribute to social difficulties. If she presents to your service as upset, angry or frustrated, consider the stress she may be under and try to understand her urgency, disappointment, frustration...

Indigenous communities need our respect, support and resources to be able to utilise current strengths and rebuild strong communities made up of strong individuals. What they don't need is to be patronised or dictated to about how to squeeze into a whitefella shaped box. It is fundamental to tailor your programs and your service delivery to the diversity of needs of these women, the women that actually access your service and not some generalised model of 'Aboriginal Woman'. Get the women involved in your planning; empower them to make decisions that have a positive impact on their lives.

**“Self-determination is at the heart of achieving justice for Aboriginal people and delivering affective services”
(NSW DCS, 2003)**

Protocol & Cultural Awareness – some guidelines to working with our Indigenous Communities

What is Indigenous?

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is:

- A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- A person who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and
- A person who is accepted by the Aboriginal community in which he or she lives.

There are over 600 language groups of Indigenous Australians, different groups with diverse customs and traditions. Traditional culture is not the same as it was before the introduction of western culture. Every Indigenous person has had varying levels of exposure to their traditional customs.

What is Protocol?

It is merely a matter of respecting the customs of the people you work with, nothing to be intimidated by. How can you do this? Ask the person in front of you what protocols to show respect to, ask the local community or local Indigenous services such as the Lands Council. Seek out information on protocol that is relevant to the women you are working with, and request permission where needed.

Cultural awareness; some relevant Indigenous issues to know about

- Stolen Generations
- The effects of colonisation
- Deaths in Custody
- Reconciliation
- Native Title
- 'koori time'
- Aboriginal English

Some protocols to be aware of

- Kinship & extended family; Indigenous people demonstrate a strong obligation to family. Family issues are given priority
- Preservation of culture
- Men's business / Women's business; who you can and cannot talk to regarding some issues
- Eye contact; some Indigenous groups see eye contact as rude
- Shame; Aboriginal people can be shamed by too many personal questions, by being singled out in a group or in sharing certain private details
- Death in a community, Sorry Business i.e. using photographs, names etc of dead people
- Expect communication with silences/pauses.

- Welcome to Country ceremony
- Generational social disadvantages; loss of culture and land, poverty, over-representation in criminal justice system, educational disadvantages, racism, addiction, abuse...

If you work with Aboriginal women with family members in prison and don't know about these issues, FIND OUT!
(See the following 'Who can help' section)

Working with Indigenous Communities – Suggestions for culturally appropriate service provision

If you are not an identified Indigenous service, you will probably need to make a great effort to access the community. It is important to establish trust on quite a personal level to be able to deliver your service effectively.

Relationships and people are important to Aboriginal women; they need to know that you can be trusted. The common view is that once a woman has identified herself to your service, she is then vulnerable to decisions being made about her and her family without her consent. This is especially true if you are a Government organisation, reflecting what has occurred in the past. Below is a list of ways to welcome the community to your service and build up trust. Working with Aboriginal women usually requires a blending of different approaches, tailored to suit each community you represent and each individual. Have patience, this will take time.

- Make your environment welcoming by displaying Indigenous posters, flags and colours, and having Indigenous newspapers in your waiting room, use Indigenous resources where available, or develop your own. If something displays at least the red, yellow and black colours, it will be more readily accepted.
- Get out from behind your desk, be prepared to try a different approach, challenge your own beliefs/perceptions; go outside the 9-5 boundaries, working on community time, not government time, be flexible.
- Know about local Indigenous culture and landmarks, whose 'country' you are in, ask your client about her culture.
- Go to the gaol and spend time at the visit centres, let the women and their families know you are available and what you can do.
- Employ Indigenous staff where possible and attend cultural awareness training.
- Go to Indigenous celebrations & events, or hold your own i.e. NAIDOC week celebration.

- Make sure your program is relevant to the community and arises out of a real need, ask the people what they want.
- Get to know the community and its Elders, an introduction from a trusted community member can help, form partnerships, network and build links in the community. This can take time to build and may require several meetings in different locations. The community will not instantly open to you.
- Be aware that there can be factionalism between different language groups, try not to get involved in this and include as much of the community as possible.
- Get to know your client, take the time for a cup of tea, try not to sit at the computer, sit with them face to face. If you are handing out information, read over it with them, be honest and down-to-earth and expect the same.
- Provide transport where possible.
- Find a way to do outreach; follow - ups, home visits.
- Accommodate culture i.e. respect the use of plain or Aboriginal English, family responsibilities etc.
- Use Indigenous based media where available.
- Identify as many Indigenous services as possible in your local area and state.
- Involve other members of your clients family and try not to single out people in a group situation.

“When my fella was first in the gaol, the best thing that happened was that someone from the local Indigenous support group came around to my place to visit me. They knew that he'd gone in and that I had a few little kids with me at the time. I had been so depressed and had hardly left home in weeks, I just didn't want to see anyone, I was sad and lonely and shamed. They came around and stayed a bit, we had a cup of tea and they brought me a food basket. They helped me feel a bit better again, just having someone to talk to about him being inside, and I felt safe in my own place, less shamed, they helped me get going again.”

- Listen & collaborate as opposed to knowing already and dealing out systematic solutions, find out what they want, rather than tell them what they need, seek permission to go ahead with processes.
- Use appropriate language i.e. Aboriginal or plain English, avoid using jargon or abbreviations, use open questions when possible.
- Hold meetings in comfortable settings, offer food at events/meetings i.e. make it a social occasion.
- Be aware that Indigenous people do not all have the same view.
- Be aware that not all women will have Medicare cards, birth certificates, proper identification etc.
- When visiting Indigenous communities seek information on appropriate protocols, such as taking photos, who you can and cannot speak to, ceremonies you can and cannot attend.
- Go over your community education processes, does the community know what you are doing and how they can be included?
- Be aware that when both parties resort to stereotype prejudices, there can be little trust on either side.
- Know your community and what services might serve Aboriginal women.

Barriers to seeking Support

The women may have:

- Very limited access to cars, phones, public transport
- General mistrust of Government and 'whitefella' services, due to previous misuse of trust
- Been referred on too many times to too many services
- Cultural differences to you, Aboriginal people can be too shy to ask questions or shamed by too many personal questions
- Perceived lack of empathy or respect from services in response to her situation
- Difficulties in committing to ongoing 'case-management'
- Language/jargon barriers, she may not understand the criminal justice system or procedures
- Fear of separation from family/children
- Numeracy/literacy difficulties
- Been at the wrong end of too many funding cuts to programs
- Heard it all before.

Services may have shown Aboriginal women:

- A lack of coordinated service provision i.e. not keeping each other informed
- A general ignorance of Indigenous culture
- Inconsistent service delivery through too many short term projects achieving too little
- No time for rapport/relationship to be developed due to the all too frequent tight schedules (budgets, staffing etc) of services
- A lack of a holistic approach or inability to work outside of a familiar mould.

Who can Help?

ABC online Indigenous News	www.abc.net.au/news/indigenous
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commission – Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission	02 9284 9600 www.hreoc.gov.au
Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation	02 9555 6138 www.antar.org.au
Department of Aboriginal Affairs	02 9210 0700 www.daa.nsw.gov.au
Message Stick – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander online information	www.abc.net.au/message
NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG Inc.)	02 9550 5666
NSW Aboriginal Land Council	02 9689 4444
Reconciliation Australia	02 6273 9200 www.reconciliation.org.au
Koori Mail, National Indigenous Times Newspaper, Library, Indigenous Liaison Officer at Council...	

Prison Systems and Terminology

This section gives you an overview of the prison system and identifies some common terminology used. One of the greatest struggles for women with family members in prison is not knowing what is going on or how things work. It can be hard for them if their support workers don't have this information either. If you have had no contact with Corrective Services in any way, either personally or through your work, it can be quite an intimidating force to come up against. Knowing some of the terminology and processes can help.

The NSW Department of Corrective Services oversees:

- 30 correctional centres - maximum, medium and minimum security facilities
- 10 periodic detention centres
- 2 transitional centres for female inmates
- 69 probation and parole offices
- The management of approximately 9,100 inmates in full time custody, including approximately 600 women
- The management of approximately 900 inmates, both men and women, in periodic detention centres in weekend and mid-week programs
- The supervision of approximately 18,000 inmates in the community on parole, probation, home detention or serving community service orders

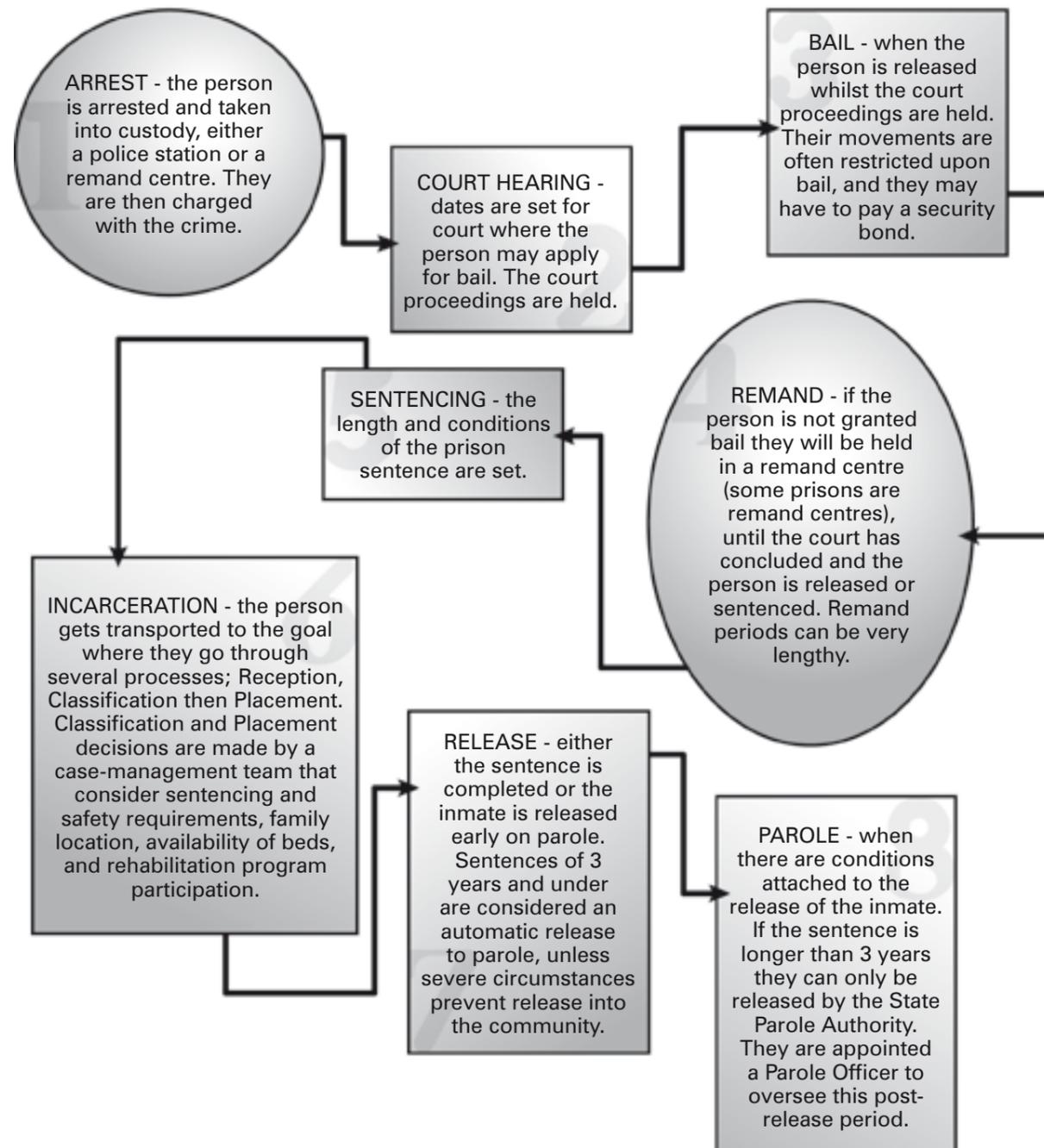
This information is from the NSW Department of Corrective Services website www.dcs.nsw.gov.au

Australian Bureau of Statistics –
Indigenous incarceration in NSW as of June 2005

- There were 1,739 Indigenous people in gaol, a 9% increase on the year before (this represents approximately 20% of the total prison population)
- The proportion of Indigenous prisoners with prior imprisonment was 77%
- The strongest reason for incarceration was 'intended acts to cause injury'
- The median aggregate sentence length for Indigenous prisoners was 24 months

This information is from the Australian Bureau of Statistics website www.abs.gov.au

The Process of Incarceration



Terminology/Gaol Lingo

AOD - alcohol and other drugs

BUY-UPS - inmate supermarket system

Classo - classification rating. A case-management team made up of custodial and non-custodial staff and the inmate make a recommendation of classification to the General Manager of the gaol; a case-management committee gives final approval for classification

- Male classifications: A1, A2 – Maximum, B – Medium, C1, C2, C3 – Minimum, E1, E2 – escapees
- Female classifications: Category 4, 3, 2, 1 & E1, E2 where 4 is maximum security

GENERAL MANAGER - (previously known as the Governor) oversees the management of the entire gaol complex. The General Manager sometimes looks after several gaols. They have assistants known as Security Managers (previously known as Deputy Governor)

LOCK DOWN - when all inmates get locked in their cells. This occurs at random intervals in the prison. It may be done for security reasons and there is no warning for it. Visitors may arrive to find out that the gaol is in lock-down and they will not be able to visit. A lock-down is also performed each afternoon when most gaol staff goes home. The inmates are locked into their secure areas with the evening officers, until the next day.

MAIL - can be sent to and received from the inmate, it is always screened. Before posting other items to the inmate, check with the gaol to see if the item is allowed.

MIN - master index number, the inmates ID number that will stay with them throughout their sentence. It is very useful for family members to know and memorise the MIN to make communications with gaol easier.

Money - family members can put money into the inmates account either through the post or when visiting (a maximum of \$100 per week.) If the accounts department is not open on the visiting days, a money order should be sent to the gaol (via Inmate accounts dept) with a letter containing the inmates name, MIN or date of birth. The family members' VIN number (see below), name and address must be included or the money will be returned or held until release. It is strongly suggested the family asks for a receipt to be posted to them.

PAROLE - when an inmate is released from gaol with certain conditions attached. They will have to attend regular meetings with their Parole Officer. If the sentence is longer than 3 years they can only be released on parole.

PHONE - the inmate can make phone calls if they have the money. The calls are usually limited to 6 minutes and may be listened to. Family members cannot phone the inmate directly but may leave a message with the OSandP unit (see below).

PROGRAMS - there are work, education and therapeutic programs your family member can do in the gaol. Different gaols have different programs and they are not all available to every inmate. It depends on availability and the case management plan for your family member. If an inmate participates in programs it can contribute towards parole review or lowering of classification.

PROTECTION - Protection - also known as SMAP (special management and protection) - When the inmate is separated from the general community of inmates because they are in need of protection. The inmate will probably be moved to another prison. An inmate is placed on protection for a number of reasons, it could be by request or it could be by court ruling or solicitor recommendation. Sometimes the inmate has no choice about being on protection. It can be hard to get off protection as there is often a stigma attached to it with the other inmates. Segro or Segregation is another form of protection, where the inmate is at risk or poses a risk to others. Limited and non-association is protection where the inmate is limited to who they can make contact with and where. Call the OSandP (Offender Services and Programs) Welfare Officer or General Manager for more information or concerns regarding protection.

PRISON CHAPLAIN - available to support for families; they don't push religion, but listen and support. Naturally, they can provide spiritual support if required.

RECEPTION - any new person coming into prison goes through reception. They are searched, interviewed by court staff, Corrections health staff, custodial and non-uniform staff and sometimes long-term inmates. Personal belongings are registered and sealed; inmates are given their MIN and their kit containing uniform, toothbrush, sheets etc. Immediate risks and health concerns are assessed during this process.

SCREW - gaol officer

SENTENCE - length of time spent in gaol

- **ON THE TOP** - represents the total length of sentence
- **ON THE BOTTOM** - represents part of sentence where inmate can be up for parole.

* Eg inmate may be sentenced to 4 years on the top with 2 on the bottom, meaning they are up for review of parole after serving 2 years and may not have to serve the full 4 year sentence

SORC - Serious Offenders Review Committee

TRANSFER - the inmate can be moved to another gaol without notice. This can be for many reasons; the inmate has requested it to be closer to family or access certain programs, or they may be moved due to availability of beds or medical reasons.

VIN - visitor identification number, family members and anyone over 18 visiting an inmate will get one of these numbers that stays with you for the length of the inmate's sentence. It is needed for processing visits, for putting money in the inmates account and other interactions with the inmate. 3 forms of identification are required to obtain a VIN.

VISIT - every inmate is entitled to visits from family and friends. The conditions of these visits may be restricted and each gaol is different. The sentence and classification of the inmate and the behaviour of both the inmate and the visitor will determine the conditions of visiting. There are contact and non-contact visits. Non-contact visits are when the inmate is behind a screen. If there are AVO restrictions applied to either inmate or visitor, visits may be disallowed. Each visitor is processed in an office before every visit to the gaol. This means showing ID, filling in forms, going through security checks and storing belongings in lockers.

WELFARE OFFICER - Every gaol has a Welfare Officer that is available to help the inmate with their needs; legal, support, Centrelink, contacting family etc. They are also available to families of the inmate, and can be contacted through the gaol at any time during working hours. There is an Aboriginal Welfare Officer in most prisons. They are sometimes limited as to what they can tell the family about the inmate and their activities, though they try to be as supportive as possible. The Welfare Officer is in the Offender Services and Programs department (OSandP) and is now known as the SAPO (Services and Programs Officer) in some prisons.

Gaol Phone Numbers

BATHURST	02 6338 3282
BERRIMA	02 4860 2555
BREWARRINA (YETTA)	02 6874 4717
BROKEN HILL	08 8087 3025
CESSNOCK	02 4993 2333
COOMA	02 6455 0333
DILLWYNIA	02 4582 2222
EMU PLAINS	02 4735 0200
GLEN INNES	02 6733 5766
GOULBURN	02 4827 2222
GRAFTON	02 6642 0300
IVANHOE WARAKIRRI	02 6995 1403
JOHN MORONY	02 4582 2222
JUNEE	02 6924 3222
KEMPSEY	02 6560 2700
KIRKCONNELL	02 6337 5219
LITHGOW	02 6350 2222
LONG BAY	02 8304 2000
MANNUS	02 6941 0333
METROPOLITAN REMAND AND RECEPTION CENTRE MRRC	02 9289 5600
MULAWA	02 9289 5334
OBERON	02 6335 5248
PARKLEA	02 9678 4888
PARRAMATTA	02 9683 0300
SILVERWATER	02 9289 5100
ST HELIERS	02 6543 1166
TAMWORTH	02 6766 4977
WELLINGTON	02 6845 3730

Transitional Centres

BOLWARA HOUSE	02 4735 7098
PARRAMATTA	02 9890 1327

Visiting the Inmate

Travel and Accommodation

Visiting the family member in prison is a significant part of this experience for Aboriginal women. A lot of time, energy, money and stress are put into prioritising visits, often at the expense of other important matters. Whilst visits offer a wonderful opportunity for families and friends to be close, it can bring about more trauma and stress. Below are some factors Women should consider when planning for visits.

To begin with the prison environment is intimidating and daunting. With its large barred doors and gates, high walls and security fences, sniffer dogs and armed guards it is no wonder a lot of women and children report not enjoying the visits, despite seeing their family member. The waiting lines are usually long and women speak of being treated like an inmate, with suspicion and mistrust. Aboriginal women have spoken about feeling as though they are treated differently by the gaol due to their cultural heritage and their association with 'crims'. There is very little privacy in a visit, making conversation and intimacy with the family member near impossible. There is not a lot of time to talk and underlying tensions can get in the way of a positive experience. It is hard to maintain or develop strong families in this environment.

A common obstacle that women talk about is getting to the gaol and discovering that their family member has been transferred, or that they were unaware of visiting conditions or that visiting conditions had changed. For this reason we strongly encourage all visitors to ring the gaol before EVERY visit:

They need to call Sentence Administration with the MIN or full name & date of birth of the inmate to find out which gaol they are in and to call the gaol directly before each visit to check:

02 8346 1310

- If the inmate is still there?
- What the visiting times are; is booking required?
- What can be taken in to visits? (in most cases, nothing can be taken in, no food, nappies, medicines, toys etc)
- Whether or not the toilets can be used by adults and children (they usually cannot unless you have a medical certificate or are accompanying a child).
- If there is food available, vending machines? How many coins can be taken in?
- How many people can visit in one day?

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CHECK EACH TIME AS THIS CAN ALL CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

Visiting with kids

Visiting can be particularly stressful for kids. It requires a lot of love and patience from families to make the visit with their family member as enjoyable as possible. Visit centres are not the most child-friendly environments. Often there is not much to play with and it can be especially traumatic if the child has restricted or no contact with the inmate. It is a long day for kids, made worse by sometimes not being allowed to use the toilet and only having junk food available for them from the vending machines. It is difficult for some kids to see their family member in their gaol uniforms and to cope with security measures undertaken in a gaol. Women need to be encouraged to prepare the kids as best they can, by being honest and describing possible situations to them. Most visit centres will have SHINE for Kids 'Children's Activity Packs' to ease the children through the experience, or you could contact SHINE for Kids and ask for one to be sent to the family along with information on what to tell the kids. CRC can also assist with this.

Despite these difficulties, studies have shown that it is important for children to maintain contact with the person in gaol (FOP, 2003 Sec4.5). Visits are often seen as a privilege for the inmate, but they should be a right for the child (unless there are exceptional and damaging circumstances). Meaningful contact between parent and child during the incarceration period can help the child adjust to the loss of losing a significant adult from their life and help them stay on track as well as make the transition during the release period more manageable.

Transport

Transport and accommodation are some of the biggest issues for Aboriginal women with family members in prison. Most women rely on public transport as cars are few and far between in many Aboriginal communities. It is tiresome and expensive to visit family in gaol as often the women are travelling vast distances to get there. A lot of gaols are in hard to reach places and require several public transport connections, expensive taxis or lengthy walks from bus stops to the gaol. Imagine travelling on public transport for hours on end, waiting for buses with a handful of hungry and tired kids!

Many stories have been told of women travelling for days, only to have a short and often intense visit, to turn around and spend several days getting home again. A lot of women are found hitching rides, either with strangers or pitching in resources and travelling with friends. The return journey is not always catered for; often women have to hang around until next pay day until they can travel home.

What assistance is available?

- Women with a pension or unemployment card can receive various travel discounts from State Rail and Country Link services by presenting their card. Up to 50% can be saved by booking travel 3 weeks ahead.
- Some people are eligible for Travel and Accommodation assistance through the Department of Corrective Services. They need to be
 - Travelling long distances
 - Visiting an inmate with at least a 6 month sentence
 - Be on a Centrelink benefit
 - A resident of NSW.

They can get money for fares, petrol and accommodation. It must be applied for at least 3 weeks before travel, and if approved, receipts need to be supplied after travel to be reimbursed. The Welfare or OS&P Officer at the gaol has application forms. This can be done only once every three months.

CRC provides a low-cost bus service between Sydney and these country gaols: Oberon, Lithgow, Kirkconnel, Bathurst, Berrima, Goulbourn, Cessnock, Junee (overnight trip), Musswelbrook	(02) 9288 8700
CityRail	131 500
CountryLink trains and buses	132 232
Private Rural Buses	131 499

Accommodation - Short Term

Accommodation is another obstacle for women when travelling long distances to visit

family in gaol. Cheap hotel rooms for a family are quite costly, especially when you take into account the frequency of visits and the added costs a lot of women bear when they have family in prison. Budget hostels do not often accept children and emergency accommodation does not include Aboriginal women who have no where else to stay. The beds are kept free for domestic violence and other similarly threatening situations. Some women's refuges will not take young boys over a certain age.

There is little to no planning for these long haul visits, with many Aboriginal

There is an overwhelming need for supported accommodation for these women and their children.

women getting themselves and their kids into crisis situations with nowhere to stay at the end of the day, and no money to pay for somewhere. Planning for these visits is difficult when there is so much going on and the focus is largely on the inmate. If they are lucky, the women have family or friends in the vicinity, or may meet someone in the waiting line at the gaol and be invited to stay with them. Otherwise, a lot of women end up on the streets, sleeping in cars or train stations or wandering around looking for emergency accommodation. Not only is this incredibly distressing, but it places the whole family at great risk. The women who do this also put themselves at risk of being reported to DOCS – Department of Community Services for neglect of their children..... and then the problems compound. Women need to be supported in trying to find a balanced approach to visiting and be made aware of the reality of the situation.

What can you do?

- Encourage the women to visit only once a month and be able to afford it, than to visit weekly and be at risk.
- The women could plan to come on a pay week, and make sure they have enough money to cover accommodation, food and return transport. You could assist your client in identifying some of these costs and their options.
- Obtain a compiled list of affordable accommodation often available from the local Neighbourhood or Information centres. If they don't have one, make your own list to distribute. There are hotels, motels, caravan parks, hostels and emergency accommodation options.
- Promote and use the Department of Corrective Services Travel and Accommodation assistance program, available through the gaol. (see Transport section)

Accommodation - Long Term

Relocation is a choice many families of prisoners make, choosing to move closer to the gaol where the family member is serving their sentence. It is wonderful for families to be close together, but it is recognised that relocation presents a range of problems for families. Some of these are identified as:

TRANSFERS - It is regularly the case that a family relocates to the town where their family member is in gaol, and before long the inmate is transferred to another gaol in a different region.

SUPPORTED HOUSING - Waiting lists can be very long (up to 2 years) and can be delayed by previous unpaid amounts or a bad record. Women are encouraged to get their name on the list of all housing providers as soon as

possible. Even if their current housing is ok, things can change fast. Housing providers need to be updated with current contact details, as an unsuccessful attempt at contact is considered as declining an offer. An effort needs to be made to pay off any debts, even if it is only \$5 a week.

KIDS - The kids will have to adjust to a new school and make new friends; this can be very challenging, especially if there are other stressful things in their life, like mum or dad in gaol.

LOSS OF SUPPORT NETWORK - It can be isolating to move to a new town and not know anyone. If there are no family or friends around and there are already high levels of stress it can be hard for women to get out and develop new support networks, formal and in-formal.

What can you do?

- Assist your client in identifying ways to meet people and get support. Are there any culturally appropriate support groups in your area? Talk to any local Indigenous workers and find out what is available to her. You may need to make a consistent effort to get her involved; pick her up in the work car and take her with you to community events.
- Talk to your client about the kids. Can you get the Indigenous Education Officer involved and keep the school informed of what the kids are going through?
- Keep other services informed, collaborate together. Build a team of support around the women and their kids. Keep her involved.

Who can help?

Aboriginal Corporation for Homeless and Rehabilitation Community Services – Jack Walkers' Place and Ngura Hostels	02 9799 8446
Aboriginal Housing Enquiry Line	1800 355 740
Aboriginal Prisoners and Family Support Services	02 9318 2122
The Homeless Persons Information Service can tell you where there are hostels/refuges available close by. It is not to be assumed that refuges are a viable resource, find out about the criteria for a bed.	1800 234 566
Aboriginal Tenancy Information NSW Department Fair Trading: advice, information, referral	1800 500 330

Possible Emotional Responses

“Your whole world changes the moment they are taken away”

There are varying emotional responses women may experience as a response to having a family member incarcerated. Different stages of the process of incarceration stir up different responses in varying degrees of power. This section identifies some of the turmoil that can be experienced.

SHOCK is a standard experience for family members of prisoners, especially if the person is taken away suddenly or if the woman was unaware of the family members' criminal activities.

“I just kept saying I can't believe it, over and over to myself”

GRIEF and loss are common emotions women deal with as a family member is incarcerated and it can be particularly strong in the early stages of sentencing. Studies show that these families experience grief much the same as the death of a loved one. (Howard, S, 2000) This is important to acknowledge, as grief is barely recognised under these circumstances due to the nature of the event and as a result can often go unshared. It is also difficult to share grief with an inmate when someone else in the family dies, especially for Indigenous people who share grief in a community process. If the family do not have ready access to the inmate when someone dies, it can intensify everybody's trauma.

ANGER at the overall situation, anger at the family member for their behaviour, anger at the system which seems impenetrable, anger at how difficult it is to find out information and to get to the gaol.

FEAR of not being able to cope, of being overwhelmed, of what might happen to them and the kids, fear of what might happen to the family member, fear of being judged by the family members' actions.

LONELINESS and isolation may arise for women who feel like no one really understands what they're going through, coping with all the changes on their own or simply missing the company of the family member. Aboriginal women could feel isolated due to feelings of shame or through being ostracised by family and community. Merely living a long distance from the family member in gaol can make women feel lonely.

SHAME is a cultural notion for Indigenous people, which equates to a loss of personal dignity. What creates a sense of shame for an Indigenous person might not be the same for a non-Indigenous person. Being singled out for either praise or criticism, having to share personal details or being associated with an inmate can incur a sense of shame. This often creates a barrier for Aboriginal women when seeking support, as culturally, it is considered shameful to talk about your personal feelings with strangers, add to this the sense of shame of having a family member in prison and accessing support can seem impossible. Even sharing some minor details at reception can be too shameful.

GUILT and A SENSE OF FAILURE are feelings parents of prisoners often experience, feeling as though they have failed their child. Women with family members in prison may feel responsible for the actions of the family member and feel guilty about this, with thoughts like "I should've done more" and "if only I had..." Guilt can be used by an inmate as a tool of emotional manipulation to try to persuade their family members to do special favours for them; with pleas like "I can't cope when you don't visit every week; it's ok for you, you still have your freedom..."

STIGMA by association can be debilitating for families of prisoners. Family, friends and the wider community can express a negative opinion about people in custody which can carry over to the families of inmates. Even if a woman does not experience this directly she can fear it and it can be a barrier to seeking support. Try telling people "my partner's in gaol" and you will feel some of the strong feelings there even if they are un-spoken.

POWERLESSNESS and FRUSTRATION arises out of feeling like nothing can be done to change the situation or help the family member in prison. It is often felt that imprisonment is not going to help the family member, that incarceration is counterproductive to rehabilitation. Not being able to contact the family member directly, easily obtain information or have any say in their programs can make Aboriginal women feel disempowered and extremely frustrated.

WORRY about everything; money, visiting, getting there, the kids, how the extended family will cope, losing the house, being on your own, worry about the dangers in prison and concern for the long term effects of imprisonment. There is worry for inmates with mental health concerns, for those who self-harm and knowing the sad history of Indigenous people in prison, there is increased worry about Deaths in Custody. This can result in *not eating or sleeping well*. Poor health can contribute to not coping well and is a contributing factor to the development of depression.

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR THE INMATE is often an overwhelming task for Aboriginal women and their families. The nature of incarceration can mean

that the inmate becomes overly focused on themselves and may become demanding about the support their family members provide. Women often experience having to provide tremendous emotional and financial support to the inmate and go to remarkable lengths to meet these needs. If the women are too focused on the needs of the inmate, they can neglect care of themselves and those in their immediate care. *A balance needs to be attained in caring for everyone's needs.*

RELIEF is experienced for some Aboriginal women and children when the family member goes to prison. This is often the response if there has been any sort of family violence, where the incarceration is viewed as a period of rest from these traumatic experiences. Some women have viewed the incarceration period as a time to get strong and make some positive changes in their lives, away from the destructive behaviours of the family member now in prison.

DEPRESSION can be hard to avoid if all these strong feelings are not dealt with and the women do not receive support. It is an all too common experience for Aboriginal women, there is too much to cope with without depression making it even harder.

Other words used to describe some of the emotional stress experienced: Disorientation, feeling overwhelmed, vulnerable, anxious, confused, sad, withdrawn, rejected, abandoned, betrayed...

What can you do?

- Listen, be non-judgemental, and let them talk; allow the women to express their feelings, especially the negative or uncomfortable ones.
- Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation and validate the women's feelings as normal reactions
- Help them identify a friend, family member or elder to talk to that may have had a family member in gaol. This shared understanding of a similar experience can be valuable. CRC and SHINE for Kids can also talk to women about what it may be like for them, and assist them in finding appropriate support.
- Assist in identifying informal social networks that may be beneficial. i.e. Support groups, playgroups and help lines. Encourage regular exercise and developing activities of interest.
- Make yourself visible & available to the women in visiting times and at the visit centre.

- Help them find more substantial counselling if the stress and trauma makes coping difficult. It is important for the counsellor to have some understanding of the prison system and the effects of incarceration on families.
- Be careful not to 'shame' the woman by being too vocal or explicit about her situation, especially at reception, offer her the discretion you would your mother.

“More than 63% of Aboriginal People presenting to Aboriginal medical services have a significant level of distress, principally depression...Aboriginal people most frequently suffer from grief trauma and loss – these are risk factors for depression. Trauma and loss are embedded in the history of invasion, the ongoing impact of colonisation, loss of land and culture, high rates of premature mortality, high levels of incarceration, high levels of family separation, particularly those involving forced separation of children from parents, and deaths in custody. Other factors include domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse and a whole range of other traumas...”
Sansbury 1999, p. 3

Who can help?

24hr Mental Health Helpline for Prisoners and Families	1800 222 472 or 02 9311 3927
Aboriginal Prisoners and Family Support Services	02 9318 2122
CRC Support for Prisoners and Families	02 9288 8700
Domestic Violence 24hr helpline Women's Advocacy Service and Court Assistance Scheme	1800 656 463 or 02 9637 3741 in SYDNEY 02 8745 6999 or 1800 810 784 (rural)
Lifeline	131 114
Link Up linking separated Indigenous Families	02 4759 1911 or 1800 624 332
Mental Health Information Service	1800 674 200
Mission Australia Helpline	02 9219 2000
Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Women's Crisis Centre Family Support	02 9319 2613
Rape Crisis Centre	1800 424 017
Relationships Australia	1300 364 277 or 02 9418 8800
Restorative Justice Unit	02 9289 3921
Salvo Careline 24hr	1300 363 622 or 02 9331 2000 in SYDNEY
Shine for Kids – Children of Prisoners Support Group	SYDNEY 02 9714 3000 BATHURST 02 6332 5957 WINDSOR 02 4582 2141
Victims of Crime 24hr Info & Support line	1800 633 063
Women's Information and Referral Service	Aboriginal Info Officer 1800 817 227

Thanks to the Invisible Sentences and Families of Prisoners for most of this information.

Family Violence

The term *Family Violence* is preferred in Indigenous communities over *Domestic Violence* as it encompasses not only the physical and psychological abuse that goes on behind closed doors, but also the violence that continually arises in the community out of the devastating effects of colonisation and welfare policy. It is more culturally specific. Family violence is used to describe assault, homicide, sexual assault, child abuse, suicide, self-harm, one-on-one fighting between adults of the same sex, inter-group violence, psychological violence, substance abuse and dysfunctional community syndrome.

It is important to know that Aboriginal women bear the brunt of this violence. They are 12 times more likely to be victims of assault than non-Aboriginal women, and at least 50% more likely to know the perpetrator of the crime.

“Blackfella love; that’s a tragedy but we laugh and joke about it. ‘You ain’t been loved until you’ve been knocked out by your man’.”
Moore 2002, sec. 4.2

Aboriginal women in rural and isolated communities are up to 45 times more likely to be victims of repeated acts of family violence. (Keel 2004). These statistics are staggering and have reached epidemic proportions. Even

more staggering though is the rate at which it is happening to Indigenous children.

Unfortunately, Family Violence has become normalised within the community, to the point that it is often referred to as blackfella love. There is also a modern myth in some communities that describes acts of Family Violence as a demonstration of cultural tradition, where Aboriginal women talk of being subjected to 3 types of laws; “the white man’s law, Traditional Law and Bullshit Law,” (Payne, p. 72) where bullshit law is the distortion of traditional laws being used to justify family violence as an expression of cultural identity. It is important to understand that **Family Violence is not and never has been an acceptable part of traditional culture.** Traditionally, Aboriginal women enjoyed a status and a role comparable to the men’s.

Family Violence is understood by examining the effects of colonisation and entrenched welfare reliance on Indigenous communities, where traditional roles for Aboriginal men have been made largely redundant. This created a vacuum where loss of meaning in one’s life and dis-empowerment is compensated for by an aggressive assertion of male power over women and children. The helplessness and powerlessness felt only intensifies when being raised in traumatic environments; by substance abuse, racism, a lack of positive role models and low self-esteem. This display of misappropriated

power is clearly the experience for some Aboriginal women with male family members in prison, where family violence “by remote control” is played out. Her movements, friendships and finances are dictated by emotional blackmail, by threats to her or to harm himself and through manipulation and persuasion. (FOP 2003, p. 28) When working with Aboriginal women it is important to understand why some women stay involved with their perpetrators or choose to do nothing about it. Studies show that women stay in abusive situations for a variety of reasons; she

- May have little self-confidence or believe it is her own fault
- May be unsure how to manage on her own
- May feel as though she can't cope financially, or scared to leave her home for fear of not getting another, she may also appear to have nowhere to go
- May want to stay together for the kids or for love
- Believes or wants it to get better

“Even if he gets drunk and violent sometimes he still helps me with the kids, I just want him to stop the drinkin’”

Aboriginal women may not be disclosing information or seeking help regarding incidences of Family Violence for more culturally specific reasons; fear of reprisal or ‘payback’ coming from the community, feelings of shame and fear of being blamed, feeling as though the perpetrator needs to be protected from the police and consequent incarceration, fear of having her children taken away and not knowing what community resources are actually available to assist her. Some women may have experienced disclosing information only to have had nothing done about it; the lack of response may be due to not having the knowledge, confidence, resources, empathy or capacity to respond meaningfully to traumatic situations. Aboriginal women may find it hard to trust government (and other support) workers because of the role they are seen to have played in the destruction and oppression of their people, in terms of the removal of children and alienation from their homelands. Trust in these services has often resulted in betrayal, and this trust needs to be built again, from the ground up.

It is also significant that a lot of Aboriginal women don't want to abandon their family members or see them punished or incarcerated, preferring for them to get help to be able to change their behaviours. Indigenous people tend to want the emphasis to be more on healing the individual, rather than punishing the perpetrator, which would go towards keeping families strong and addressing the needs of the whole community. The request is often for culturally appropriate means to be discovered for addressing the problem of

Family Violence within the community.

What can you do?

- Listen without judgement.
- Acknowledge the difficulty and take the abuse seriously.
- Let her know that it is not ok, help women to ‘bury the shame’ and to acknowledge that it doesn't have to be this way.
- Ask if she needs assistance to find out what services and options are available to her. Let her know there are options and people that can assist her. Ask her what her plan is for next time it happens, talk about safety and some strategies to keep herself and the kids safe.
- Speak to domestic violence and sexual assault workers about how to respond.
- Consider the recommendations made in the *Culturally appropriate service delivery* section. Educate yourself on her culture and appropriate ways of helping her, your regular methods may not be the most appropriate ones.
- Read “*Our silence is abusing our kids*” an inspiring booklet available through the Women’s Legal Service NSW that contains stories and information about Aboriginal women working innovatively to stop child sexual assault.

Who can help?

Domestic Violence Advocacy Service which includes the Women Domestic Violence Court Assistance Program	1800 810 784 02 8745 6999
Domestic Violence Hotline	1800 656 463
Domestic Violence Liaison Officer at your local Police Station	
Rape Crisis Centre	1800 424 017
Victims of Crime 24hr info & support line	1800 633 063
Women’s Information and Referral Service	1800 817 227
Women’s Legal Resource Centre	1800 639 784

“In order to keep our people out of prison, we need to go back to the beginning, start with the kids, in primary school, build their self-esteem, make them proud of who they are, where they come from, proud of their culture. Support their families!

**Educate the community!”
(Morseu-Diop 2001, p. 6)**

Children of Prisoners

Children of prisoners are the hidden victims of criminal justice; they suffer greatly when a parent or significant person is removed from their life and taken to prison. In 2001, NSW Corrections Health Service conducted a cross-sectional survey of prison inmates (Quilty, S. 2004) and identified that 20.1% of Indigenous children in NSW had experienced parental incarceration. Reflecting on the information already covered in this resource for Aboriginal women, it is easy to conclude that their children are doing it tough. The effects of imprisonment on a child are profound enough without taking into consideration the stress they are normally under. Often, Aboriginal children are raised in an environment laden in trauma, abuse, confusion, poverty and anger.

A 2005 report on Aboriginal Child Health presents some staggering facts about the predicament of Indigenous children, finding that “over two-thirds (70%) of Aboriginal children were living in families which had experienced 3 or more life stress events.... 22% had experienced seven or more of these serious events in the past 12 months” (WAACHS summary 2005, p. 11). Arrest and imprisonment are listed as stressful life events, along with death in the family, serious illness, family breakdown and financial problems. It is widely known that chronic and traumatic stress exposures when young, affect the development of the child’s nervous, endocrine and immune systems and can compromise their health throughout life; it also leaves the child more vulnerable to experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties. “Children of prisoners are at high risk of negative health outcomes and are themselves at an increased risk of offending later in life.” (Quilty, S. 2004)

What will happen to me?

They all care about their kids; it’s just that so much can get in the way

Change

The stress begins for children the very moment the relative is taken away, particularly if they are present during arrest. It is sudden and shocking and very

confusing for children. They can be left without appropriate care and no one to explain to them what is going on or what will happen next. The changes and dislocation in the child’s life continue on from here, often aggravating existing pressures such as poverty and learning challenges. Imprisonment can mean new carers for the child; either with extended or foster families which may also mean a new community, new school and new friends to adapt to. Children may experience stigma in their school, family or community life, which may cause them to blame themselves for what has happened, or feel deeply shamed. The child can experience any combination of the emotional stresses already highlighted in this resource, yet if the parent/ carer is preoccupied with their own trauma and difficulties, the child’s emotional distress often remains unchecked.

Behavioural Problems and Support

The loss of a significant relative in a child’s life can cause much grief and it can also be hard for a child to articulate this loss. As a result, children may withdraw into themselves or act out in other ways. SHINE for Kids and the 2003 Families of Prisoners report identifies some of these behavioural problems as self-harm, dysfunctional eating, disruptiveness at school, attention seeking, learning problems, delinquency, crime, drug & alcohol use, aggression & violence. Some kids may experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, ADD or Attachment Disorder as a direct result of the imprisonment.

Parents and carers often feel unequipped in confronting the behavioural problems of their kids and may be unaware of any help that is available to them. Aboriginal women may not seek help from child support services as there is often a (substantial) fear that the child will be removed from their care. Due to limited resources, both child welfare and criminal justice workers may not be inclined towards collaborating together. Decisions are not always made then, that suit both the child’s vital needs and the inmates rehabilitation needs.

I didn’t know there was any support for my kids

Parent/Carer Issues

Either as a parent or carer of children of prisoners there are tremendous difficulties to overcome;

- Financial hardship
- Tiredness
- Loss of independence
- Respite needs
- Coping with behavioural challenges of children
- Isolation
- Strains on relationships
- Overcrowding (Considering Aboriginal women tend to have more children and relatives in their care)
- Anxiety about coping
- Lack of information and support
- Legal and bureaucratic difficulties
- Disruption to their lives

The financial burden alone of having a family member in prison is hard and research shows that most families of prisoners are of a lower socio-economic background. If the prisoner previously contributed to the household income then there is a substantial financial burden for the women to carry to meet the costs of living and any debts they may have. Child payments from prisoners stop once they are sentenced and there are additional costs in visiting and supporting the inmate.

Prisoners as Parents

Having a parent in prison provides a role model for young people that is hard to avoid. Unfortunately for Indigenous kids, the imprisonment of their family members has become a normal occurrence and now carries with it some 'status' in

the eyes of young people, almost as an initiation into adulthood. Aboriginal juveniles are grossly over-represented in the criminal justice system, according to HREOC - Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission; they are 20 times more likely to offend than non-Aboriginal juveniles. This mythologised view of incarceration is supported by the barriers present in parenting from prison. Besides the common problem of vast distances between the home and the prison, the loss of daily or regular contact can create a distance between child and parent that is hard to bridge. Inmates lose their authority and guidance over a child and children may grow resentful, angry and distrustful of the parent. Each birthday, holiday and significant achievement missed by the incarcerated adult make it harder for the child to cope. The prison environment itself is not conducive of familial warmth and effective communication, and is often not a favourite place for kids to go to.

In some instances, an inmate may decide after several years of non-contact to reach out to their estranged kids. This may be the positive outcome of Corrective Services Programs, but it can be hard for the kids to understand and needs to be closely managed and supported by both Corrective Services and Child Welfare. There are also instances when a woman gets reported for child neglect to DOCS – the Department of Community Services by her partner when he gets incarcerated, this is often played out as retribution if he blames her for the incarceration.

Children and Family Violence

For some children, the incarceration of a significant family member may be a relief from violence and constant tensions at home, spelling a time of calm.

“It is not uncommon for generations of families to have experienced arrest, sentencing and incarceration and for parents and children to be incarcerated at the same time”...this results in “the continued breakdown of family structures”
FOP p6,p40

Even if they are not the direct recipient of acts of violence, children are deeply affected by witnessing family violence. They grow up believing that anger and violence are normal solutions to resolving problems. Aboriginal women fear what their children are growing up to be, yet are mostly powerless to prevent the cycle of violence, abuse and incarceration continuing. These women and children need your care and support and their men need help to heal.

School

School is one place where a child can have real difficulties and also receive quality support. If a child begins to show disruptive behaviour or suddenly stops attending school for extended periods (i.e. when travelling distances to visit the prisoner), knowing what is going on helps the school put in place some support. Many schools and all regions have an Indigenous Education Officer that can give personalised care to the child with a support program; this may include tutoring, counselling, mentoring and peer support. Children have reported feeling like they had someone on their side in the Indigenous Education Officer.

What can you do?

- Talk to the children about their experiences or find someone in the community who can; a trusted family member, an elder or a relevant counsellor. Make it clear to them that they are not to blame, kids often feel as though it is their fault that the adult has gone to gaol.
- Be honest with the kids; tell them what is going on. If they are very young it only needs to be simple, but they benefit from knowing even basic details.
- Encourage the kids to write and speak to the family member in prison as much as possible.
- Know that Indigenous children have close bonds to extended family members, what westerners may know as 'distant relatives', so they can be deeply affected say, when an uncle or second cousin is incarcerated.
- Where possible, make contact with the Corrective Services Welfare Officer and work together with them; keeping each other informed supports the development of strong, healthy families.
- Inform the school and the Indigenous Education Officer what is going on in the child's life; they can help you put together a support strategy. Ask the school or call the Aboriginal Education and Training Office to find out who your local officer is.
- Talk to SHINE for Kids to see how they can support the child. If visiting is difficult for the child or hard for the carer to arrange, then they can organise a video link-up for the inmate and child to talk or even do

homework together. Brighter Futures is another program that provides tremendous support for children of prisoners.

Who can help?

After Care Helpline	1800 656 884 or 02 9890 3899
Childcare Access Hotline	1800 670 305
Child and parent support services 'CAPS' child abuse prevention service have information and referrals for working with children from abusive situations.	1800 688 009
DOCS Disaster Recovery Service	1800 018 444 or 02 8855 5111
DOCS Helpline	132 111
Kids Helpline	1800 551 800
Your local Family Support Service can help identify appropriate support for the kids.	Call 02 9692 9999 to find out where your closest service is.
NSW Aboriginal children's services	02 9698 2222
NSW Family Services	02 8512 9850
SHINE for Kids are available specifically for children and families of Prisoners	02 9714 3000 www.shineforkids.org.au
www.fcnetwork.org is a great resource for information on children of prisoners	
Wirringa Baiya - Family Care Support Solicitors can help with DOCS and child welfare issues	02 9569 3847

Release and Parole

The release of an inmate can create a mixture of feelings for Aboriginal women ranging between excitement, fear and anxiety. The length of the sentence served, the type of offence committed and the amount of times the family member has offended can determine how hard the homecoming will be. A lot of Aboriginal women talk about the fear of their family member coming home 'institutionalised', meaning they have become used to ways of coping in the criminal justice system that may not be appropriate once released. The women are afraid their relatives have learnt to be manipulative, distrustful and aggressive; they are afraid their family member may have contracted sexually transmitted diseases or that they have been using drugs as a means of coping. Most women anticipate that one way or another the time spent in prison has been detrimental to their family member and fear bearing the consequences of this. None-the-less, it is another period of great change to adjust to, for both family and releasees, a change as great as the early stages of incarceration. Do not underestimate the amount of support Aboriginal families need in this post-release period.

There is often a 'honeymoon' period directly after the release of the inmate followed by periods of great stress, where the reality of the daily grind sets in. If the offender has trouble adjusting to life on the outside with factors like noisy kids, job searching, family dynamics and renewed responsibilities, they may become withdrawn and moody and have angry outbursts. It can be too easy for them to fall back into the destructive behaviours that led them to the incarceration in the first place; turning to drugs, drinking, violence and crime as a means of coping. This is such a challenging time that does not get enough attention and support, a time when an Aboriginal person is vulnerable to re-offending and their families are under tremendous stress.

Getting Parole will depend on many things; how well the inmate has used their time in gaol and how ready they are to be released. They will do better if they have legal representation, like someone from Legal Aid to support them. There will be conditions attached to their parole that need to be kept, such as

- Regular contact with a Parole Officer
- Counselling, behaviour-management programs, job seeking etc
- Urinalysis
- Home visits
- Not leaving a certain area and letting Parole know if they are moving around

An Aboriginal Client Services Officer will be assigned to most Aboriginal people

released from gaol. This person would be well known to, and trusted by the inmate as they will have assisted them throughout their sentence. Families are encouraged to contact them to talk about the release and how their family member is adjusting to their new life outside.

What can you do?

- Talk to the women about their fears and concerns and help them find ways to be prepared. Help them to know they are not on their own during this difficult period of adjustment.
- The **Indigenous Health Worker** can talk to both the women and the parolee about sexually transmitted diseases and guide them through a safe testing period. The Health Worker can also assist the parolee to maintain any health programs that commenced in the gaol i.e. Hep C treatments and diabetes management.
- Encourage women who are afraid of repeated acts of Family Violence to have a plan if it does arise. Who can they call? How are they going to manage it? Can the parolee be encouraged into some family conferencing and counselling?
- Make contact with the **Aboriginal Client Services Officer 02 9289 2676** and keep each other informed. **ACSO's** can be located at Probation and Parole District Offices in:

- Bathurst (63) 32 2737
- Blacktown (02) 9671 4266
- Bourke (68) 72 2455
- Broken Hill (08) 8087 9155
- Casino (66) 62 4311
- Coonamble (68) 22 1988
- Dubbo (68) 82 9744
- Forbes (68) 52 2699
- Grafton (66) 43 2585
- Kempsey (65) 62 7403
- Lake Macquarie (49) 56 5533
- Lismore (66) 22 1277
- Narrabri (67) 92 4457
- Mount Druitt (02) 9625 7777
- Newtown (02) 9550 4056
- Nowra (44) 22 1599
- Wagga Wagga (69) 21 2950

Creating your own LOCAL RESOURCES

The following is a guide to assist you in developing your own local resources. This can be your most valuable work: giving the women practical information on the spot, rather than referring them on. Adapt it to suit your service and clients.

INFORMATION TO SEEK	WHERE TO LOOK	NAME, ADDRESS, CONTACT PERSON...
What affordable accommodation is available in your area?	Hotels, hostels, caravan parks etc. often the local Neighborhood & Information centres have compiled a list	
What emergency accommodation is available? What are the criteria for getting a bed?	Refuges, Hostels	
What Indigenous Services and Indigenous identified positions are available in your area?	Lands Council, Centrelink, Health Worker, Aboriginal Medical Service, Council Liaison Officer, AECG etc	
What is your local Family support service?		
What supported housing services are available?	Department of Housing, Women's Housing, Aboriginal Housing worker etc...	
What counseling services and support groups are available in your area?	Community and Health centres	
What Domestic Violence services are available?	Community and Health centres	

How would you respond to information shared regarding Domestic Violence/ substance abuse/child neglect etc...	Ask DOCS, Community Health Centre, Counseling Services... Ask your managers what mandatory reporting requirements you may have...	
Where is the closest Legal Aid office and Aboriginal Legal Service?		
What Mental health services are available?	Community Health Centre, Counseling Services	
What Nation/s of Indigenous people belongs to the land where you live and work?	Land Council, Council Liaison Officer, ask your clients	
What local Indigenous landmarks are there?		
What Indigenous festivals/ events are held in your area?	Any local or State Indigenous agency will be able to tell you, ask your clients	
What is your closest prison? What is the mainline phone number?	find out about visiting requirements	
What transport options are there for getting to the prison?	Bus, train, how much is a taxi?...	
Where is your nearest soup kitchen or community meal available?	Local church groups may provide this	



SHINE for Kids

SHINE for Kids is a community based organisation that supports children whose parent(s) are imprisoned. There are a wide range of services provided to meet the needs of children of prisoners. These services include:

- Individual children and family support
- Supported children's transport services
- Children and young persons' activity and drop-in centres
- Children's and young peoples' groups
- Preparation for visiting a correctional centre
- Assistance with school work
- Video Conferencing with inmates and children
- Pen pal programs
- Brighter Futures project (financial and education assistance)
- Mentoring program
- Daytrips
- Pre-release preparation and Post-release support
- Child and parent activity days within correctional centres
- Inmates play groups
- Community education and advocacy
- Volunteers program

Our offices in Sydney, Windsor and Bathurst cover most of the NSW area, call one of our offices to get more information and speak to one of our workers.



Support Hope Inspire Nurture Empower

Sydney 02 9714 3000 Windsor 02 4582 2141 Bathurst 02 6332 5957

www.shineforkids.org.au

Other relevant services that can help

Health

Alcoholics Anonymous	02 9799 1199
Alcohol and Drug Information Service	1800 422 599 (rural) or 02 9361 8000
Family Drug Support	1300 368 186 or 02 9798 0001
Hep C helpline for prisoners and families	1800 803 990 or 02 9332 1599
Narcotics Anonymous	02 9519 6200

Government Agencies

Aboriginal Complaints Officer – Ombudsman’s Office	1800 451 524 (rural) or 02 9286 1000
Anti-discrimination Board	02 9268 5544
Department for Aboriginal Affairs	02 9219 0700
Welfare Rights Centre	1800 226 028 (rural)

Legal

Aboriginal Legal Services	02 9318 2122
Community Legal Centres	02 9318 2355
Aboriginal Women’s Program and helpline	1800 639 784
Law Access NSW	1300 888 529
Restorative Justice Unit	02 8346 1054
Violence against Women Specialist Unit	02 9716 2061
Wirringa Baiya Aboriginal Women’s Legal Centre	02 9569 3847
Women’s Legal Service	1800 801 501 (rural) or 02 9749 5533

Prisoner Post-Release Services

Life after Prison	02 9683 4311 or 0414 768 160
Yulawirri Nurai Aboriginal Women’s Post Release Family Support Workers	02 4973 5560

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Notes...

