

# **Ex-prisoners and accommodation: what bearing do different forms of housing have on social reintegration for ex-prisoners?**

authored by

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

CSHA	- Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement
DCS	- NSW Department of Corrective Services
DHS	- Victorian Department of Human Services
DoCS	- NSW Department of Community Services
FACS	- Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
LAP	- Life after Prison Ministry (Anglicare NSW)
NACRO	- National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (UK)
OOH	- Victorian Office of Housing
SWL	- Segmented waiting list
THM	- Transitional Housing Managers
VHS	- Victorian Homeless Strategy

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is largely a literature review in relation to a research project exploring the relationship between ex-prisoners' social reintegration and housing in New South Wales and Victoria.

## Policy Context

There were over 20,000 full-time prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) in Australia in 2000, approximately 7,400 in NSW and 3,200 in Victoria. There are no reliable data on numbers of prisoners being released into the community each year but estimates suggest over 30,000 in Australia. There has been a dramatic increase in numbers being imprisoned over the past decade

- Although Correctional Services are State responsibilities, matters pertaining to ex-prisoner re-entry to the community involve many government departments and programs, both State and Federal.
- In Victoria and NSW, Correctional Service departments fund or partly fund a very small amount of post-release support. Departments of Housing, Health and
- Community/Human Services and Centrelink are involved in providing services but none have had clearly defined policy aims and objectives or practices regarding housing for people being released from prison.
- A very small number of non-government agencies provide what little services there are, with the Supported Assistance Accommodation Program (SAAP) providing the bulk of assisted housing places designated for ex-prisoners.
- Governments have no reliable data on ex-prisoners' housing experiences nor the relationship between housing and recidivism.

## Literature

International and Australian literature in this field is characterised by:

- a paucity of studies in general;
- a lack of work on the particular housing issues faced by high needs groups;
- few empirical studies featuring samples of sufficient size to be representative of this group as a whole; and
- a lack of theoretically and statistically supported insight into the influence of factors such as housing on reoffending and social reintegration,

Earlier international studies and reviews:

- pointed consistently to the strong association between ex-prisoners and accommodation in terms of their social reintegration;
- argued that structural factors are fundamental to ex-prisoners being able to gain and maintain suitable housing.

Later studies agree on:

- the need for specialised housing and post-release bridging throughcare workers in all prisons;
- the need for housing issues to be dealt with as a priority at induction (reception into prison);
- changes in housing benefits to enable social housing to be retained by prisoners;
- allowing prisoners day release prior to release to enable housing search/inspection;
- the design of a flexible system of housing able to cater to varied need, but still based on a core of supported accommodation;
- less institutionalised ex-prisoner-only accommodation; and,
- programs for keeping homeless individuals out of prison in the first instance.

No large empirical study has been done in Australia regarding ex-prisoners and accommodation. Studies have been done involving women ex-prisoners in Victoria. Findings agreed with those of international studies.

What has emerged consistently across time and continents, is that:

- a large minority of people being released from prison does not have suitable accommodation to which to go;
- pre-release information and support in securing accommodation are grossly inadequate;
- ex-prisoners and recidivists who are re-incarcerated point to lack of suitable housing as a key factor in their unsuccessful transition to outside life;
- there is almost a total lack of coordination / integration amongst appropriate government and non-government agencies in this matter;
- there are particular subgroups amongst ex-prisoners, such as those with a mental illness; young unattached males serving short sentences, single women with children, who are more vulnerable and more likely to end up without adequate housing;
- social isolation is a core experience for many ex-prisoners who end up homeless or with unstable, unsuitable housing; and
- sending ex-prisoners to ex-prisoner hostels may be a continuation of the labelling practices of the prison and that, although 24 hour supported hostels are necessary for some ex-prisoners as a transition to the community, a greater variety of accommodation, especially self-contained units, with support being available in situ, be provided.

## **Literature on Related Issues**

Studies into the relationship between social issues and difficulties amongst prisoners, such as homelessness, mental illness/disturbance, intellectual disability and drug abuse, and post-release experience have indicated consistently a high level of difficulty in securing suitable accommodation upon release:

- There is a higher rate of incarceration of persons with such problems than in the general population.
- Similar problems exist for Indigenous Australian persons.
- Women, especially sole carers of children and those with a drug problem, have major difficulties in finding affordable suitable housing upon release.
- The current provisions for ex-prisoners with particular problems or in minority groups are reported to be grossly insufficient.

## **The Project Plan**

A year long study in which 200 prisoners in NSW and 150 in Victoria are interviewed using mainly closed, with some open-ended, questions, just prior to leaving prison, at 3 months and then 6 months post-release, is being carried out. This will be a consecutive sample.

Data gathered will include participants' social progress, especially their housing experiences, over the 6 months after their release.

Data will be analysed for significant relationships between factors and qualitative analysis will be carried out on the open-ended questions.

The research will:

- Provide an understanding of the housing needs and circumstances of persons being released from prisons in New South Wales and Victoria.
- Ascertain the importance of type of accommodation, in association with the other factors, which contributed to successful resettlement of ex-prisoners.

- Evaluate and compare the different housing forms experienced by ex-prisoners in relation to a variety of social support programmes.
- Analyse to what extent there is programme integration and how effectively it supports sustainable accommodation / tenancies for ex-prisoners.
- Compare accommodation types and social outcomes of the marginal and "at risk" sub groups within the ex-prisoner sample (eg psychiatric, intellectual disability, women sole parents, women experiencing domestic or other violence, family breakdowns) and also Indigenous peoples.
- Provide data for use in comparative studies between this at risk group and other at risk groups.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In a very perverse way, prison is a form of secure, affordable housing for many prisoners who have had insecure, unsuitable or unaffordable housing prior to their incarceration. If prison provides this, what of the housing needs and experiences of such prisoners upon release? In Australia, as in many countries of the world, most prisoners are housed one day and released the next. They have to try to find accommodation, employment and rebuild a social life. For some, family, friends, the parole service, or other agencies may have already helped organise this transition. But the experience of prison (an institutionalising one) and earlier life experiences, often of poverty and disadvantage, drug or alcohol abuse, physical or sexual abuse and social alienation do not prepare many ex-prisoners to negotiate these social necessities successfully. Particular sub-groups of ex-prisoners, such as those with an intellectual disability, with a mental disturbance, single mothers, Indigenous Australians, young single males without social ties, may find it especially difficult.

When you're released to face your old problems, you have even fewer resources than before in terms of housing, friends, or sense of self, with the added stigma of being an ex-prisoner to complete your sense of isolation. (Hampton 1993:159-160)

Homelessness, unstable and unsuitable housing and being accommodated temporarily with family or friends seem to be common experiences for many ex-prisoners but to what extent? What is known about how ex-prisoners leaving prison in Australia fare with finding accommodation? What post-release policies are there and what services are available to facilitate these? And why be concerned about this group and how important is housing for ex-prisoners anyway? This paper will address these questions by summarising relevant demographic information, reviewing relevant literature and identifying directions for research. Post-release experience and study lie at the intersection of a number of theories and disciplines represented by criminology, human behaviour, social welfare, the built environment and political economy. There has been little specific application of any of these perspectives to an understanding of the nature of ex-prisoners' post-release experience of housing and reintegration but the little there is, is referred to briefly in this paper.

This paper is largely a literature review in relation to a research project exploring the relationship between ex-prisoners' social reintegration and housing in New South Wales and Victoria, hence the focus, where information is available, on those states.



## **Terminology Relevant to Ex-Prisoners and Housing**

**Aftercare:** Long-term community-based treatment/support following a period of institutionalisation/imprisonment.

**Crimogenic:** conditions, attitudes or forces which are deemed to contribute to criminal behaviour.

**Mental Disturbance:** A short period of mental illness like experience and behaviour, sometimes caused by trauma or drug or alcohol abuse.

**Mental Illness:** A chronic or sustained psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia, depression, bi-polar disorder

**Offender:** person who has committed an offence and has been found guilty in a court of law.

**Parole:** A period determined by the courts in which an offender is released from prison in to the community but is still under sentence. The parolee must meet certain parole conditions set by the courts, such as having stable, suitable accommodation and reporting regularly to the parole office.

**Penal Welfareism:** An approach to dealing with prisoners', ex-prisoners' and their families' needs via the provision of support, counselling and other human services.

**Post-release:** An arbitrary period of up to about six - eight months after release from prison.

**Prisoner:** person who has been incarcerated. This is a more inclusive term than offender as 'prisoners' comprise not only incarcerated offenders (those tried and found guilty) but also those being held in remand and those individuals that may have been falsely imprisoned.

**Recidivism:** Repeat offending and imprisonment.

**Remand:** Period during which an individual who has been charged with an offence but who has not yet been tried and found guilty and not been granted bail or cannot meet bail requirements, is imprisoned awaiting trial.

**Social Reintegration:** The introduction/return of the ex-prisoner to functional, personally fulfilling and responsible participation in wider society. It comprises factors such as secure housing, adequate income, supportive interpersonal relationships.

**Situationalist:** Within the discipline of criminology--one who believes that the social, economic and interpersonal environment, as opposed the intrinsic psychological properties of individuals, constitute the primary determinants of offending.

**Throughcare:** Programs which aim to provide continuity of treatment/support and education for prisoners throughout their period of incarceration and into their post-release environment.

## **CHAPTER 2 AUSTRALIAN, NSW AND VICTORIAN POLICY CONTEXTS RELEVANT TO EX-PRISONERS AND HOUSING**

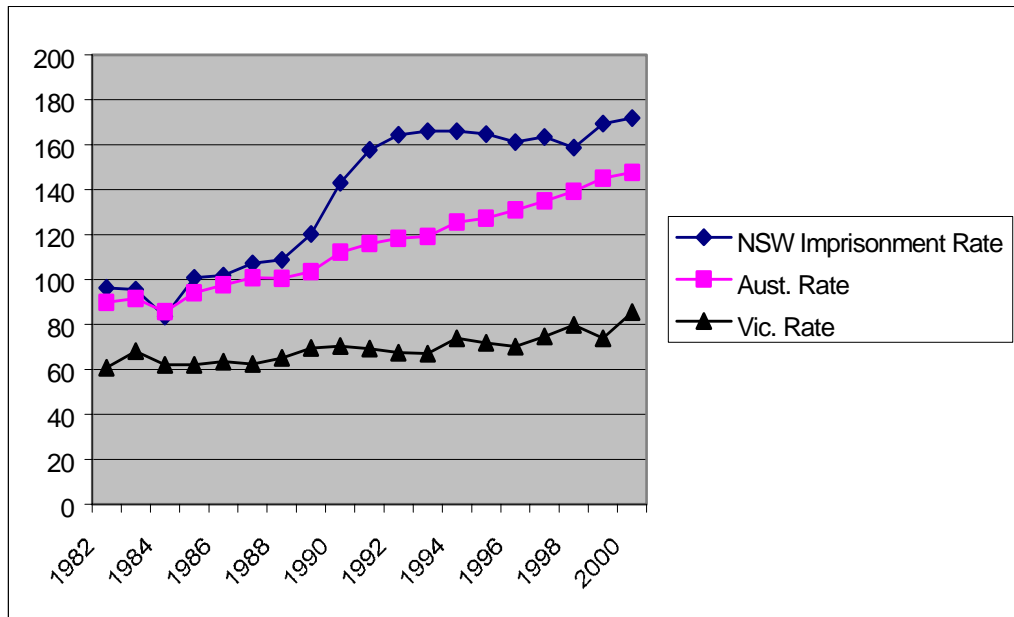
### **Prisoners and ex-prisoners Australia**

This study will concentrate on full-time prisoners as opposed to those serving periodic and community based sentences because it is assumed that those serving sentences outside prisons are more likely to maintain their housing, and possibly to have had reasonable housing in the first place<sup>1</sup>. There were 20,483 full-time prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) in Australia on June 30, 2000 (ABS 2001). This represents an increase during the previous decade of over 50% (ABS 2001). More than half (56%) of those prisoners had been incarcerated under sentence before, with 76% of Indigenous Australian prisoners having been imprisoned previously. There is no national datum on prisoners released each year, but, as the majority of prisoners serve shorter than one-year sentences, the number is likely to be at least the number who went in! So it is safe to say that over 21,000 persons were released from prisons around Australia in 2000. The number is likely to be well over 30,000. Eventually, almost all prisoners are released and expected to live successfully in the community again. The importance of this information for our present study is that, the greater the number of persons imprisoned, the greater the number of persons released each year and the more potential socially dislocated persons in the community. The level of recidivism indicates, at least, that a majority of prisoners have not reintegrated into society in a way that has enabled them to avoid re-incarceration.

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<sup>1</sup> This may be an inaccurate assumption, but no information is available on this matter.

Chart 1 Australian Imprisonment rates (per 100,000 adults) 1982 - 2000



Derived from ABS 2001 *2000 Prisoners in Australia* ABS, Canberra

Post-release figures regarding housing and ex-prisoners are hard to find. The National Supported Assisted Accommodation Program (SAAP) has yearly data on accommodation of clients immediately prior to entering SAAP accommodation (SAAP 2000). But, as many persons leaving prisons will try other accommodation first (such as with a family member or friend or a non-SAAP shelter, or the streets) and as many ex-prisoners do not identify themselves as such, this data is acknowledged as not indicating the number of ex-prisoners using SAAP services. This perfectly understandable non-disclosure of a period in detention or the fact that a partner is in prison, and the fact that there are no figures on those not using SAAP services either, makes deriving a clear picture very difficult.

### New South Wales

There were approximately 7,700 full-time prisoners in NSW in August 2001 (NSW Department of Corrective Services August 2001a). According to the 2000 Prisoner Census (Corben 2001) (the most recent comprehensive publication on inmates in NSW) 6.2% of inmates were women and of them 25.8% were on remand (unsentenced) and 21.6% were Aboriginal women. Of the male prisoners, 19% were on remand and 15.5% were Aboriginal men. These figures represent a massive over-representation of Aboriginal persons in prison as Aboriginal persons make up only 2% of the general NSW population. Two thirds of full-time inmates in the census had served prior prison sentences (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2001b). According to official Departmental figures, in the 1999-2000 census year, 7,506 full-time prisoners were released (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2000). This figure excludes unsentenced prisoners released and is therefore very conservative.

Retrospective data about the status of accommodation prior to imprisonment in NSW drawn from a prisoner health survey (Butler 1997:20) indicated that only 7-8% of male and 11% of female prisoners at that time were homeless or in highly insecure accommodation. On the other hand, 54% of male and 62% of female prisoners listed 'renting' as their living situation. This may well mask intermittent homelessness or highly unstable housing, but the data is not graded finely enough to know whether this is the case. Anecdotal information from Parole officers supports this assumption. Regarding post-release figures, a recent NSW SAAP phone survey of five services yielded much higher figures of ex-prisoner homelessness, with up to 50% of their clients being ex-prisoners in need of and using those services (SAAP 2000), than would have been expected from the health survey.

## *Victoria*

According to the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner (2001) between 30 June 1995 and 30 June 2000 the Victorian prison population increased significantly from 2,467 to 3,153 prisoners, an increase of 27.8%. Over the same period the female prisoner population increased significantly from 116 to 183 prisoners, an increase of 57.8%, which was more than twice the rate of increase of the male prisoner population in the same period (26.3%). The remand population in 2000 was 17.4%. The number of full-time prisoners discharged in the census year 1999-2000 was 4,729 (4,207 male, 522 female). In stark contrast to NSW, Indigenous prisoners represented 4.3% of the total prison population. As Aboriginal persons represent 0.5% of the general Victorian population this is an over-representation but not as high as the NSW over-representation. 60% of all prisoners had served a prison sentence before. There are no figures available regarding accommodation prior to incarceration.

Both NSW and Victorian prisoners exhibit similarly low levels of education (more than 80% have not completed high school), only one third are married and most were not in full-time employment when arrested. A large majority rents or lives with others; very few own their own homes.

### **Policy and practice relevant to prisoners being released**

Prisons are the domains of State Governments in Australia, as is most criminal law. The Federal Government does not build or maintain prisons, other than detention centres for potentially illegal immigrants. Rates of incarceration vary considerably across states due to variations in policy, legislation and practice. For example Victoria has half New South Wales' rate of incarceration whilst being similar demographically. Lengths of typical sentences for typical offences also vary greatly from state to state. On the whole though, policy and practice shaping ex-prisoners' experiences upon release are sadly similar for a majority of prisoners across Australia. Upon release ex-prisoners are expected to become self-sufficient, organised and socially adept and productive citizens. Almost nothing is known about what happens to men and women after they leave prison, other than that the recidivism rate is something between 55 and 66%.

The Federal Government's participation in post-release policy and practice is marginal. It is a partner in both the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth/State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) IV Bilateral Agreement. The States though implement these Agreements according to their own contextual requirements. The CSHA outlines broad policy and outcomes for public and social housing. The SAAP IV Bilateral Agreement sets the policies and strategies for responding to homelessness in Australia. Thus it will be necessary to examine State Housing and SAAP policies and practices. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) has recently taken a policy turn towards recognising the particular and cumulative disadvantages of many families of prisoners and prisoners upon release. (Vanstone and Abbott 2001 *Australians Working Together - helping people to move forward*)

### **Relevant Policies and Practices in NSW**

#### *NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS)/Supported Assisted Accommodation Program (SAAP)*

SAAP is a combined State/Commonwealth government initiative providing support for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, as well as crisis responses for survivors of domestic violence. The program is cost shared between the State and Commonwealth Governments, administered on a day-to-day basis by State and Territory governments, with most services on the ground provided by NGOs. SAAP has operated since 1985 through a series of five-year agreements between the Commonwealth and the States. The current SAAP IV Agreement is in effect to 2005.

NSW SAAP has no specific programs for ex-prisoners nor is this group targeted, although ex-prisoners fall into many of SAAP's officially targeted at-risk categories (mental illness, intellectual disability, family breakdown, financial difficulty, domestic violence survivors, Indigenous persons). SAAP takes a multidimensional approach to homelessness recognising that it is not just a housing issue. Moreover a recent draft of the NSW SAAP Service

Framework notes that “frequent encounters with Police and the criminal justice system” and “repeated admissions to correctional facilities” constitute significant aspects of definitions of clients with high or complex need (NSW Department of Community Services 2001: 10)

Though ex-prisoners are not a data collection group for SAAP national data collection, there is a widespread concern that some SAAP generalist services are becoming de facto ex-prisoner accommodation. Initial inquiries into SAAP services dealing with large numbers of ex-prisoners show that Foster House, an inner-city homeless refuge has established a detailed referral protocol with the Department of Corrective Services as a direct response to high levels of ex-prisoner demand. Bathurst Emergency Accommodation, a rural SAAP agency, reports ex-prisoners (especially Indigenous males between the ages of 20-24) to be its largest client group by a huge margin<sup>2</sup>.

### *NSW Department of Corrective Services (NSW DCS)*

DCS currently funds or partially funds (SAAP/DoCS, NSW Health and Housing all contribute varying amounts) four post-release accommodation services representing about forty places for ex-prisoners under its Community Grants Program. The program provides \$1.5mil but this is spread across chaplains, general support services and some accommodation. Reports prepared by the Public Practice and the Standing Committee on Law and Justice both identify the resultant public benefits of increasing transitional services and commensurate funding.

They state that funding of transitional services for offenders will provide positive cost benefits to the community by reducing the chances of them returning to custody. The cost of programs to successfully return a person to the community is a much more productive use of public funds than incurring the costs of their return to custody (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2001b: 7).

The Department's 2001-2004 Corporate Plan makes repeated references to the proven necessity of throughcare and of the need for strategic relations between government and NGO providers so that prisoners can access necessary services. Improving the availability/accessibility of ex-prisoner supports through an ongoing case management model is stated as a priority in order to “achieve community reintegration essential to reducing reoffending” (NSW Dept of Corrective Services 2001b: 6). This policy and associated strategies are still being formulated but the aftercare component of throughcare is to be implemented partly through the Community Funding Programs. There are to be three main strands: Inmate Support; Transitional Support; Children and Family Support. The one of relevance to ex-prisoner accommodation is Transitional Support and the measures to be introduced are:

- Intensive supported accommodation (2 male and 2 female Drug and Alcohol houses; 1 male house for Intellectual Disability; 1 aboriginal male rural; 1 aboriginal female rural)
- Transitional Supported Accommodation grants (for a network of houses across the state)
- Transition case workers (attached to houses above)
- Funding for prisoners to visit trained counsellors
- Research into employment services

These programs and projects have not received funding as yet. (NSW Department of Corrective Services 2001c)

### *NSW Department of Housing*

The Department of Housing has a number of forms of housing relevant to ex-prisoners' accommodation needs (NSW Department of Housing 2000).

Public Housing has no special provision for ex-prisoners but many ex-prisoners meet all the criteria. Priority Housing does not recognise ex-prisoner status as a criterion of priority. However many ex-prisoners fall into “at risk” categories such as unstable housing, medical

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<sup>2</sup> SAAP NSW informal phone survey unpublished results made available to the authors.

conditions and having a disability. Rentstart Service pays at risk/low income persons 75% of their bond, 2 weeks' rent, removal costs and gas/electric connection. As part of the Rentstart program the Department offers Temporary Accommodation, which provides short-term accommodation in a hotel or motel to people who are homeless or in housing crisis who have not other resources. During the Olympics, when statistics were collected on reasons for needing assistance, 9% of those receiving Temporary Accommodation had been recently released from a correctional centre. Crisis Accommodation funds 950 refuges/hostels state-wide and 14 of them are ex-prisoner specific. Unfortunately there was no further information on these 14 places.

Public Housing policy of particular relevance to prisoners includes:

- the provisions for tenants to be absent for 3 months;
- the provision for a tenancy to be transferred to other household members if eligible ;
- the relinquishment of tenancy (see below).
- Public Housing policy specific to prisoners includes:
  - the provision for reapplication for housing while in prison (but there is no datum on this)
  - the provision for consideration for priority housing if public housing was relinquished while in prison.

Client Service Teams visiting NSW prisons; maintaining contact with prison welfare; and assisting with prisoners' applications while inside and also upon release (although there is no indication how often this occurs).

There is a separate Aboriginal Housing Office that provides the same products and services as above for Indigenous clients.

### *FaCS/Centrelink*

On release prisoners (aged 21 to pension age) may apply for Newstart allowance and may receive one week's benefit in advance and also may apply for a one-week crisis payment. However the following fortnightly payment is reduced by the amount of any advance (NSW Legislative Council 2000:151). Effectively this means that, at best, ex-prisoners will receive three weeks' benefit to cover their first month post release.

### *Other services*

There are at least two post-release services run by community organisations that receive little or no government funding. For example Life After Prison (LAP) is run by Anglicare and Breakout Housing is run by a committee of ex-prisoners. Both these services provide accommodation but LAP also provides full social support.

## **Relevant Policies and Practices in Victoria**

As in NSW, there is little in the way of post-release services. Generic housing and accommodation services are mainly funded through SAAP. Again, as in NSW, generic services may well provide housing for ex-prisoners, but how extensively is unknown (Victorian Office of Housing 2001).

### *Office of Correctional Services Commissioner*

Ward (2001) prepared a paper on transition from prison to the community for the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner. Her analysis revealed that most prisoners exit the system from rural/regional locations, spend less than six months in custody and are released unconditionally, without parole supervision (p.1). The current transitional support service framework is extremely underdeveloped. There is no recognition in legislation or policy documents that provision of transitional support is a core function of correctional services; there is no statement of the purpose, objectives or desired outcomes of current activity; service standards are minimal and where they do exist, compliance is not routinely monitored. Exit planning and pre-release preparation activities are highly variable across the

system and community based agencies have not been funded to provide meaningful levels of transitional support (p.1). Nevertheless, as in NSW, there is a Correctional Grants Program that provides approximately \$ 0.4 million annually to a range of NGO post-release services. Most are targeted at discrete prisoner sub-groups (pp. 29-30). A pilot program, Bridging the Gap, announced in late 2000 provides an intensive support program and drug treatment service for ex-prisoners. It has non-recurrent funding of \$3.5 million for five services (p.31), These do not provide accommodation although workers often try to help clients find housing.

Recent moves to deal with these problems have taken a number of forms, one being Transitional Housing Management (THM), a Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative, that is a joint pilot of the Office of Housing and the Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner. It aims to pilot in three prisons the ongoing provision of appropriate housing services to sentenced prisoners who on release from prison would be at high risk of homelessness. This will occur through assistance from a Housing Placement Worker who will conduct a specialist housing assessment, develop individual housing case plans, and match client needs with immediate and longer term accommodation and support options. (Department of Justice 2001). The 2000/01 State Budget contained funding for three post-release transitional units (yet to be established) accommodating up to 60 ex-prisoners at any one time.

### *Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS)*

Current arrangements to address homelessness predominantly focus upon providing support and accommodation for people who are already in crisis and have become homeless (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001a). A 'key client group' identified in community consultation as requiring particular attention, was people leaving prison (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001b, 2001c, 2001d). Recent consultations for this strategy identified that neither the prison system nor the homeless service system was effective in addressing the specific needs of people exiting prison. The discussion paper noted that prisoners are not able to apply for public housing through any of the priority Segmented Waiting List (SWL) (*currently under review*) categories because they are not deemed to be 'homeless' in prison. This is despite possibly having been homeless, or in severe housing crisis, immediately prior to incarceration. Prisoners who may have been on a waiting list for public housing are unable to retain that place even if they have been waiting for several years. It also pointed out that some Transitional Housing Managers (THM) are seen to be more accessible than others, and THM staff members do not receive any specific training on the needs or circumstances of ex-prisoners. As ex-prisoners are unlikely to have pre-arranged support services on release they are also unlikely to receive immediate access to transitional accommodation. As noted above, initiatives are being taken to try to address some of these criticisms.

The paper addressed problems for women leaving prison, stating that they need access to a range of other critical support services, and generally for extended periods of time. It was felt that current limits on support periods negate their effectiveness and force women to cycle in and out of crisis and/or further incarceration. Whilst the Office of Housing (OOH) does provide for a reduced rent during short-term sentences (\$15 per week), many prisoners are not made aware of this provision and many would not be able to meet the \$15 per week payment whilst in prison (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001d). This also relies on early notification of their incarceration, and assistance to fill out necessary forms and/or negotiate the term of the reduced rent. Examples were given of evictions being issued whilst tenants were in prison, with no linkages or communication between the OOH and the prisoner due to the change of address.

The Victorian Homeless Strategy (VHS) Outcomes Paper on Representatives of Prison Providers and Sentence Management (Victorian Department of Human Services 2001e) noted that there was no system for the vast majority of prisoners who are released to freedom (i.e., non-parole). Whereas Community Correctional Officers in the prisons will telephone housing agencies on behalf of parolees, those not on parole fall through the gaps with no one in the correctional system responsible for assisting them with their housing needs.

The most pointed analysis of current Victorian policies and practices is made in the VHS Ministerial Advisory Committee *Working Report: Building Solutions for Individuals and Families who Experience Homelessness*, (Victorian Department of Human Services April, 2001). The Report highlights that too often people become homeless as an unintended

consequence of poor planning and processes in institutional settings such as prisons. Current barriers to housing options for people leaving prison prevent them from organising accommodation before they are released, and in many ways they are 'set up to fail' (p. 72).

The Working Report highlights critical problems:

- Many prisoners without family or community support leave prison without any post-release support, including housing assistance, material aid and other services.
- No datum is currently collected from people in the prison system regarding their housing status or risk of homelessness on release.
- Case management services within prisons do not currently include comprehensive assessment and exit planning around housing issues.
- SAAP funds a small number of post-release support services, but the SAAP Act precludes expansion of this role.
- Current prison environments and regulations inhibit communication and information dissemination, often delaying potential housing actions/outcomes.
- The homeless service system is often structured to respond once a person is homeless, and is not geared to effect the transition from prison to housing seamlessly (p72)

## **Summary**

These critical problems noted for Victoria sum up well the situation in both states. What policy and programs there are depend upon the poorly funded and very small NGOs in the field. Governments' policies and programs relevant to ex-prisoner re-integration (such as Human Services and SAAP) barely mention or have provision for ex-prisoners. Although there are moves to increase the pitifully small policy and budget attention given to ex-prisoner housing and other social needs, there is little in the way of stated policy or integrated/coordinated policy or programs and no data on which to base policy and programs.



## CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE AND STUDIES REVIEW ON EX-PRISONERS AND HOUSING

This field is under-researched worldwide as Paylor points out.

It is widely assumed that the prisoner...faces a number of problems in re-establishing him/herself in the community upon release. The research so far (albeit limited and of some antiquity) has purported to show that prisoners have both practical and social resettlement needs. However the statistical base for such beliefs is very limited nor are the processes clearly understood (1995: 2).

The English language literature in this field is dominated by UK work. In the past decade there have been only two works of substance investigating housing needs and experiences of ex-prisoners. The deficits we later identify in these works and in other past studies and writings in the field, namely

- the lamentable paucity of studies in general;
- the lack of work on the particular housing issues faced by women ex-prisoners and those in other high needs groups;
- the few empirical studies featuring samples of sufficient size to be representative of this group as a whole; and
- the lack of theoretically and statistically supported insight into the influence of factors such as housing on reoffending and social reintegration, are yet to be remedied. In the domestic Australian context such gaps in knowledge could be more correctly described as chasms. There is virtually no direct empirical research on ex-prisoners and housing bar service or location-specific case studies and evaluations.

### International Literature

#### *UK studies and reviews*

Both Paylor (1995) and Carlisle (1996) suggested that the accommodation situation for prison releasees in the 1990s in the UK was worse than indicated in earlier studies. Thus we will review those early studies despite the fact that some are a quarter of a century old now.

#### *Earlier studies*

Banks and Fairhead (1976), in a study of petty short term prisoners found that 66% of homeless ex-prisoners were likely to reoffend within one year of release as opposed to 26% of those who had found accommodation of some kind. An even higher rate of reoffending (76%) was found with those prisoners who had no fixed abode immediately upon release. Also a high level of drug and alcohol problems and mental disorders was observed among this cohort. Two years later Corden, Kuipers and Wilson (1978) followed the pre and post release housing resources of 97 male prisoners who were eligible for voluntary aftercare. Of this cohort 26.1% had been homeless on entry to prison, many more had been lodged in unstable or impermanent accommodation. At release, 49.5% of the men were uncertain of their destination one week prior to release, and 31.7% were homeless on release. Highly significant relations were found between the standard of post-release accommodation and overall social isolation, and also between deterioration in quality of accommodation post release and levels of reoffending. Corden et al avoided the inference that these relationships might be mono-directional or causal. Overall 25 prisoners saw a decline in their previous standard of accommodation, 25 fared worse (including ten men who were forced to sleep rough for the first time) and 12 saw an improvement. This "improvement" though was disputed subjectively by 40% of the ex-prisoners, as the researcher's judgement of accommodation quality was based on an objective housing scale.

A UK Home Office survey of the south-east's prison population which gathered data on prisoners' levels of homelessness and their relation to social integration and reoffending (Banks 1978) found that 33% of all prisoners and 42% of petty offenders had been homeless on arrest. These homeless offenders comprised 6% of all first offenders and a huge 77% of offenders with 21 convictions or more. In other words the higher the number of stints in prison

the more likely the prisoner was to have been homeless on arrest. Offending more generally was related strongly to the relative social isolation of subjects' living arrangements prior to arrest. Finally the survey illustrated that the reconviction rate for homeless ex-prisoners (69% were back inside within 2 years) was very much higher than for the ex-prisoner population as a whole (only 30% in the two-year time frame). When 200 short term (under three month sentence) young prisoners were asked about their offending a huge majority said that housing problems were *the* major factor (Stanton 1982). When asked about post release expectations they stated that they would need accommodation assistance and that getting together rental bond was the greatest single barrier to obtaining suitable accommodation.

Corden and Clifton in a 1983 study focused on socially isolated prisoners comprising almost exclusively homeless (95% no fixed address at release), unemployed, highly alienated, significantly mentally disordered, and physically unhealthy men. Finding suitable housing for participants was an onerous, almost Kafkaesque endeavour. They concluded that housing problems of such ex-prisoners were overwhelmingly the result of structural causes such as supply and discrimination rather than inadequacy on the part of ex-prisoners. Participants said they benefited from the intangible, interpersonal things, such as a supportive, warm relationship with the social worker, rather than any specific material forms of assistance. Indeed participants were critical of the hostels and boarding house style of accommodation found for them.

### Reviews

Ramsay (1986) compiled the first comprehensive review of literature on housing for the ex-offender noting that, time and again housing emerged as *a* (if not *the*) major hurdle faced by ex-prisoners in achieving social reintegration. The links though between quality of housing achieved and reincarceration were more often presented via anecdote than through empirical evidence. Despite this lack of proof he argued, housing presents as one area of service provision for ex-prisoners in which distinct, concrete advances can be made relatively easily. Ramsay further pointed out that imprisonment is constituted by *symbolic* as well as by temporal and physical sanctions, and that, in the light of this, the *symbolic aspects of aftercare* should be given their due as well. As the participants in Corden and Clifton's research (1983) tacitly demonstrated, social reintegration is as much a self esteem and interpersonal relationship-building achievement as an economic/material one.

Walton (1987), in a wide ranging review of the psychosocial needs of ex-offenders supported the need for studies to focus on structural influences on the reintegration process rather than explanations focussing on individual pathologies. Walton urged researchers to go beyond a simple and ahistorical understanding of the influence of structure to one incorporating a sophisticated understanding of contemporaneous social forces on subjects' lives. (p.131).

Haines' (1990) review of UK after-care services, reiterated complaints about the quality and quantity of research, adding that research into the fate of minority ex-prisoners was another area of neglect. As well as noting again that housing continually emerged as one of the primary resettlement needs of ex-prisoners, he highlighted two significant problems with a number of prior studies. First the tendency to make use of researcher-defined objective housing scales as measures of housing quality failed to capture many of the nuances of prisoners' subjective experiences. For instance, one researcher might scale living with one's family higher than living alone in a bedsit. Yet this makes no allowance for the wide variations in family relations experienced by ex-prisoners. In fact more recently Hagell et al (1995: 14) noted that "in most cases returning to the family [post release] was proving unsatisfactory and unsustainable". Second Haines pointed out the dangers inherent in taking raw levels of recidivism as a measure of "success" in social reintegration.

Like Ramsay (1986) Haines (1990) pointed to the import of the interpersonal/relational preconditions of social integration:

'Going straight' is not the mechanical adherence to a non-delinquent way of life that the term suggests to the public. It has meaning only in its emotional setting. It is the consequence of attachment to people. The condition of social isolation that characterises homeless recidivists makes nonsense of acceptable living because there is none to notice and approve of it (p.17).

Support for this thesis came from Massachusetts where prisoners, who were allowed to maintain higher levels of community ties through a furlough program (the provision of special leaves from prison, like weekend home leave), displayed reoffending rates 1/2 to 2/3 less than other prisoners within the same jurisdiction (1990: 27).

### *Summary*

Earlier studies and reviews pointed consistently to the strong association between ex-prisoners and accommodation in terms of their social reintegration. Most writers argued that structural factors (for example poverty, social class, lack of attainable suitable accommodation, lack of service integration) are fundamental to ex-prisoners being able to gain and maintain suitable housing. Interpersonal/relational aspects and the material/social goods aspects of aftercare may be understood as separate, necessary, if insufficient, preconditions for social integration and social forces should be included in assessments of social reintegration. Writers point to the significant lack of knowledge in this field. The research currently being undertaken (that will be described in detail at the end of this paper) takes up the points made in this earlier research by investigating ex-prisoners' financial and social circumstances in relation to their accommodation and their social integration.

### *Recent studies*

Two investigations into the reintegration needs of prisoners by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO 1992 and 1993a), in the UK found:

- the lack of service integration among the different state and non-government provisions for ex-prisoners to be a primary problem and
- that 83% of ex-prisoners approaching the organisation requested housing assistance with 18% of this group having been homeless prior to arrest, and 64% of no fixed abode upon release.

Cross-portfolio cooperation and coordination was seen to be a rare commodity, a situation where the combined effect of different agencies' "benign intentions" often resulted in less than optimal provision ("malign outcomes") to ex-offenders caught in the interstices (NACRO 1992: 4). A majority of ex-prisoners surveyed received no resettlement information or assistance prior to release. The reports noted that, because ex-prisoners are excluded from most social policy planning, often the actions of one arm of government perturb those of another "with prisoners caught between two incompatible sets of procedures" (NACRO 1993a: 14). A model of floating care, that is one where the individual remains in the one property while services are delivered *in situ*, on a needs basis, was proposed.

*Housing Needs of Ex-offenders* (Paylor 1995) and *Housing Needs of Ex-Prisoners* (Carlisle 1996) constitute the next and most recent advances in this domain.

Paylor's empirical study in which he interviewed 82 prisoners who had served less than an 18 month sentence found that prisoners, post-release, experienced a deterioration in their housing standards compared to pre-incarceration and that housing standards for ex-prisoners in the 1990's were far worse than those reported by Corden et al in 1978. He theorised that social reintegration is the product of a complex process comprised of not one but rather a number of causal factors. Social reintegration is by no means reducible to the availability level of material provisions such as housing; it is as much about constructing new ways of living and reconnecting to a society in which one was and, most pointedly, still *is* marginal. Despite this, Paylor maintained that it was still not clear *how* social integration prevents reoffending, merely stating *that* it does (1995: 199). He also proposed that, not only do ex-prisoners *not* constitute a special needs group but that it makes little sense to treat them as such, whatever the empirical reality. The problems faced by ex-prisoners stepping up to the challenge of reintegration are common to many oppressed and marginalised groups. Assistance should be provided on the basis of social justice and need rather than less noble concerns for reductions in levels of reincarceration. Furthermore, he argued, the processes of stigmatisation and marginalisation of prisoners that results from their being labelled as deviants are more good reasons to abandon the tradition of specialist housing facilities for ex-prisoners and to abandon the classification of ex-offenders as a special needs group (1995: 184-185). Paylor agreed with others that accommodation problems suffered by ex-prisoners

were explicable as *primarily* the result of poor or non-existent coordination between prison and housing systems rather than the product of any individual pathology on the part of ex-offenders. Thus any cure should take a similarly systemic focus, that is, aiming to build functional links between prison and housing systems (1995: 47).

Carlisle's (1996) study followed the post-release housing experience of 61 UK prisoners hailing from 6 male and 2 women's prisons. Imprisonment saw 38/61 participants lose housing held previously (8/19 women; 10/15 from ethnic minorities). Almost all would have preferred to retain their former housing. Social support was a demonstrated crucial factor in retaining past housing. Hostels were the housing option most commonly proffered to homeless ex-prisoners: most either refused or were highly reluctant to take up this option citing safety, privacy, hygiene and interpersonal concerns as reasons. Women, persons from ethnic minorities, persons with learning disabilities, persons with drug and alcohol issues and those ex-prisoners returning to families requiring support were cited as groups with particular re-housing difficulties. Carlisle added to the calls for mixed, non-institutional and self-contained housing featuring needs-based floating support for ex-prisoners.

The Rough Sleepers Unit of the UK Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions report titled *Blocking the Fast Track from Prison to Rough Sleeping* (2001), was based on in-depth qualitative interviews with male ex-prisoners (N=71) and aftercare professionals (N=9). Questions covered such areas as social background, reception, induction and discharge processes, life after release, supports received and their efficacy in assisting reintegration and preventing homelessness and reoffending. The main themes to emerge from professionals were:

- Aftercare resources were limited and where they existed they were overstretched and poorly targeted.
- Biographical details such as level of resources, mental health and presence or absence of drug and alcohol issues were found to be more predictive of post-release homelessness than sentencing factors (length/nature of offence).
- Prisoners who were interviewed pre-release indicated that inadequate preparation for discharge was their most significant concern. When those same prisoners were interviewed post release, they indicated that lack of information about and inaccessibility of outside resettlement resources including housing, and general difficulties in adjusting to a non-institutional environment were the main barriers to avoiding homelessness and reoffending and to social reintegration

The report concluded by making the following policy recommendations:

- Target most vulnerable prisoners (namely those homeless or living in social housing on arrest, the mentally disordered, the highly socially isolated and those with drug and alcohol issues);
- Provide case management of vulnerable prisoners' social work needs through the prison system and beyond;
- Introduce comprehensive welfare and housing advice at all prisons, making use of video and audio media to address prisoner illiteracy.

*Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners Project* (UK Cabinet Office Social Exclusion Unit 2001) has the express aim of ascertaining factors related to reoffending, homelessness and unemployment among ex-prisoners, particularly those having served short sentences, and of formulating policy to counteract socially damaging outcomes. Though a formal report on these submissions has yet to be published an initial analysis of the responses has been made available to the authors of this paper. With respect to the issue of ex-offender housing the following themes emerged repeatedly in the analysis:

- The need for specialised housing and post-release bridging throughcare workers in all prisons;
- The need for housing issues to be dealt with as a priority at induction;
- Changes in housing benefits to enable social housing to be retained by prisoners;

- Allowing prisoners day release prior to release to enable housing search/inspection;
- The design of a flexible system of housing able to cater to varied need, but still based on a core of supported accommodation;
- Less institutionalised ex-prisoner-only accommodation; and,
- The development of a spirited program for keeping homeless individuals out of prison in the first instance.

This *Reducing Re-Offending by Ex-Prisoners Project* preliminary report is a helpful summary reflecting the main issues noted so far in this review.

### *Theoretical response*

One theoretical response suggested as illuminating the emerging picture of ex-prisoners, accommodation and social reintegration is that afforded by control theory (Hirschi 1969; Lilly et al 1995) which has strong resonance with theory developing around social capital and social inclusion/exclusion. In this paradigm the failure of socially integrative mechanisms becomes the focus, rather than pathologised individual deviance. In control theory offending is seen as the result of the weakening or breaking of an individual's bondedness to society. These bonds only truly cement if they carry emotional resonance; that is, they must be more than a mere internalisation of norms. One's acquiescence to the social order cannot take place in a vacuum; it must be recognised and acknowledged by significant others. This bond is not purely the psychological property of individuals but is rather the "dynamic social product" of wider interaction between persons (Haines 1990). Any regulation or repair cannot come from one side of the process (mere sanctions or punishment will not suffice): the socially isolated offender must be brought back into the fold:

the concept of the social bond is both i) strongly empirically supported as relevant to offending in the after-care situation, and ii) provides a valuable organising concept for considering possible developments in after-care services (Haines 1990: 37).

Bare structural changes in and of themselves will not bring this bonding about as comparisons between aftercare programs indicate (Haines 1990: 36; Stark 1994; Paylor 1995: 186). One can identify a two-way interactive relationship between structural problems and personal issues: isolation is forged at the juncture of the two. Measures aimed at solely structural aspects may be necessary but remain insufficient (ie homelessness is *not just* an issue of housing stock). Haines asks whether this junction is not an appropriate target for interventions (1990: 34-5).

Caution though is in order in using such a theory to inform practice. The facilitation of attachment of ex-prisoners to society via the development of strong emotional and social bonds may be positive. But such an understanding (and its translation into policy and practice) may support an over-regulated compliance with an unjust social order, a social order that may well be the reason for lack of integration in the first place.

### *Summary*

Earlier and more recent international literature and research reports on ex-prisoners' housing and its association with their social reintegration have indicated that;

- structural factors, such as poverty, social class, lack of attainable suitable accommodation, lack of service integration and lack of consistent provision of
- information to releasees;
- lack of well resourced after-care services;
- social isolation and lack of social support;
- and high levels of disabilities such as mental illness and intellectual disabilities amongst prisoners
- are associated with high levels of poor housing or homelessness amongst ex-prisoners.

Suitable supported housing (or lack of it) seems to be a key factor in helping to deal with some of these disadvantages. Authors point to programmatic factors, such as addressing housing issues at prison induction, pre-release information and well-resourced, non-stigmatising, flexible, supported housing, to help mitigate the current serious problems. The current ex-prisoner and accommodation research project has taken note of these social goods aspects by exploring service integration, the suitability of style of housing and the effects upon housing and integration of other factors such as disability and drug and alcohol problems. Authors have also pointed to non-programmatic factors such as social support. Perceptions of ex-prisoners themselves on their "success" post-release, as well as data on a variety of personal and interpersonal aspects, have been included in the research in an effort to explore these factors.

## **Australian Literature**

The only detailed work in Australia specifically addressing the broad issues and outcomes for ex-prisoners and housing is that of Julie Conway. Her *Housing Needs of Prisoners and their Families* (1999), based in Queensland explores the relationship between post-release housing and crime, drawing on documentary and anecdotal evidence. Managers of correctional facilities, professionals working in ex-prisoners' supported accommodation and other workers, paint a grim picture. Estimates of prisoners with no fixed address post release varied between sources from one third to three quarters. Groups of ex-prisoners found to be most in need were sole adult households, those with no fixed address on release, those who underwent relationship breakdowns while in prison, Indigenous prisoners, young offenders and those with drug and alcohol issues. Conway joins the international calls for scattered, self-contained, non-institutional housing with floating support delivered on a needs basis; for cross portfolio coordination of services; and, of course, for a general increase in funding for services.

The explication of the relationship between social support and reincarceration in general, and more specifically, of the relationship between housing support and reincarceration, were two of the main objectives of the Inquiry by the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Order into crime prevention through social support (2000). Unfortunately, due to the absence of any rigorous empirical studies evaluating the impact of supported accommodation on recidivism in NSW, the Committee was unable to recommend Treasury release more funds to this area. However the Committee did call for the Departments of Corrective Services, Housing, and Community Services to collaborate on such an evaluation: "And if the evaluation demonstrates need then funding should be sought from Treasury to this end" (p.139).

In a related study Broadhurst and Maller (1990) conducted a wide-ranging quantitative analysis of the correlates of recidivism among ex-prisoners in Western Australia who had been released following their first offence. Employment, level of education, cash on release and level of post-release supervision were positively associated with non-recidivism. Curiously, and in contrast to all prior studies, quality of accommodation subsequent to release was not found to be associated with non-recidivism, except perhaps for indigenous participants. (p. 97) It must be noted though that housing was not a focus of the study and that accommodation was evaluated on departmental information not on the basis of direct interview or evidence.

The current research is intended to respond to this lack of information by providing valid and reliable data and some qualitative information on ex-prisoners' experience of re-integration in NSW and Victoria.

## **Summary**

Literature and research in English addressing the core matters of this current project on ex-prisoners and housing are rare. Most empirical research has been done in the UK with only one major paper in Australia. What has emerged consistently across time and continents, is that:

- a large minority of people being released from prison do not have suitable accommodation to which to go,
- pre-release information and support in securing accommodation are grossly inadequate,
- there is almost a total lack of coordination / integration amongst appropriate government and non-government agencies in this matter,
- there are particular subgroups amongst ex-prisoners, such as those with a mental illness, young unattached males serving short sentences, single women with children, who are more vulnerable and more likely to end up without adequate housing, and
- social isolation is a core experience for many ex-prisoners who end up homeless or with unstable, unsuitable housing.

It is suggested that sending ex-prisoners to ex-prisoner hostels may be a continuation of the labelling practices of the prison and that a greater variety of accommodation, especially self-contained units, with support being available in situ be provided.

The linking of ex-prisoners and housing with related issues, such as aftercare services and mental and intellectual disabilities, is addressed by a somewhat wider range of literature. As this paper has not the space to review that literature a brief precis of the main issues follows.

## **CHAPTER 4 LITERATURE REVIEW ON ADDITIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO EX-PRISONER RE-INTEGRATION**

### **Aftercare**

Aftercare for ex-prisoners was modelled on the idea in addiction studies and treatment that any institutionalised treatment needs to be followed up by longer-term community-based treatment (that is *after-care*) if it is to be truly effective. This included recognition of the need for suitable accommodation. Over the past two-three decades however, aftercare has been relegated a low priority within correctional regimes in the English-speaking world (Castellano 1995; Smith and Stewart 1997; McFarland et al 1995; Maxwell and Mallon 1997; Anscombe 1999; Garland 2001).

Aftercare literature points to large numbers of ex-prisoners failing to even have the most basic aftercare needs met (Hardie et al 1998; Anscombe 1999; Chase 1999). The case studies presented as exemplars of good practice (Chase 1999; Hardie et al 1998; Johnson et al 1998; Twill et al 1998) feature: systemic, ecological and familial foci; individualised non offender-specific services; cognitive behavioural interventions around anti-social behaviour; future-oriented focus on issues amenable to change; and addiction treatment. Evaluations have supported Ramsay's (1986) thesis that interpersonal/relational factors in the reintegration process are crucial (Rauma and Berk 1987; Johnson et al 1998; Soothill et al 1999; Chase 1999). They also indicate that unmet psychosocial needs combined with prior disadvantage and oppression, tend to produce a multiplied effect predisposing particular ex-prisoners to reincarceration (eg Corden 1983; Broadhurst and Maller 1990). It is agreed that the 'plenty of stick but no carrot' approach to aftercare appears doomed to fail (Merton 1968; Solomon and Draine 1995).

### **Homelessness and Criminality**

A majority of research papers cite homelessness as a significant criminogenic factor. Views here fall within a range: from a weak position where homelessness is seen as a correlate of criminal behaviour but where the jury remains out on the issue of direct aetiology, to an unwavering, heavily situationalist stance where homelessness in and of itself is assumed to cause criminal behaviour. Writers holding the former position include Benda (1993) and De Lisi (2000). Stark (1994) and Vitelli (1993) occupy the middle ground arguing that homelessness is strongly associated with criminal behaviour but that it is seldom, if ever, the primary cause. At the hard situationalist end of the debate we find McCarthy and Hagen (1991) who found homelessness to be a sufficient cause of criminal behaviour among homeless youth.

### **Mentally Ill or Disordered Prisoners**

Much of the literature begs the question of whether being homeless is a criminogenic factor in its own right or the reflection of a pathology, namely mental illness. The question as to whether de-institutionalisation of mental health services is at the bottom of it all, is heavily embedded in this literature. The bulk of the work in this area has been carried out in the USA with some also in the UK. Virtually nothing is known about the prevalence of mental illness amongst indigent ex-prisoners in Australia. Belcher (1988), Aderibigbe (1996) and Harrington (1999) found that persons suffering from a serious mental illness or disorder were significantly over-represented in the USA jail and prison populations. An even higher number of homeless were found to suffer from a mental illness/disorder and high numbers of mentally ill/disordered homeless persons were found to have been incarcerated. NACRO (1992) and James et al (1999), in the UK and Lamb and Weinberger (1998) in the USA all confirmed that homeless mentally ill persons were much more likely to be incarcerated than non-homeless.

The relevance of the studies on mentally ill/disturbed prisoners to housing and reintegration lies in their consistent findings that those leaving prison with a mental illness are more likely than others to become homeless, to be socially isolated and to be re-arrested after a short period of time. Where interventions have included integrated supported accommodation services, such ex-prisoners have fared better.



## **Intellectual/Learning Disability**

There is a welcome availability of information on prisoners with an intellectual disability in NSW in the work of Professor Susan Hayes. There is evidence that there is an over-representation of such persons in prison (Hayes 1991; 1996). Lyall et al (1995) studied prisoners with an intellectual disability in the USA. It may be surmised that these ex-prisoners may have particular problems in finding suitable accommodation. Nevertheless there are no reports investigating ex-prisoners' with an intellectual disability and their housing experiences.

## **Women Ex-Prisoners-Specific Literature**

Women are a very small (but rapidly growing) minority of the prison population. Therefore the relatively high number of studies on women's post-release experiences is somewhat surprising.

Wilkinson's 1988 UK study found that an appreciable number of women prisoners were homeless at arrest or were in unstable housing arrangements. Women without male partners found it exceedingly difficult to retain housing. Many women had to return to domestic violence situations to avoid homelessness. Moreover, fully 50% of the women were homeless on release and a staggering 66% of the women who were homeless prior to their last sentence were reincarcerated within months. Shewan et al (2000) found that 1/4 to 1/3 of all female drug fatalities in a region in Scotland were women who had been released from jail in the prior 12 months and implied that supported housing could reduce such fatal overdose rates. Similar findings in Victoria (Australia) by Davies and Cook (1998) indicated that of 62 women who died shortly after release, 45 died of drug-related causes. Of these women 37.8% died in temporary accommodation, either at the home of a friend or acquaintance, or in boarding houses or hotel rooms. It also indicated that 90% of the women who died shortly after their release from prison had no fixed address at the time of death. They came to the same conclusions as Wilkinson pointing out that more suitable, stable, supported accommodation may have reduced these distressingly high numbers.

Fabb (1991) and Robson and Nancarrow (1991) in Victoria and Lewis and Hayes (1997) in NSW suggested that women ex-prisoners' inability to establish positive social connections post-release may be associated with their inability to secure suitable housing. In Carnaby's retrospective and reasonably large study (1998) of women ex-prisoners (N=24) and agencies (N=45) in Victoria, 80% of the women claimed that securing appropriate housing was a significant factor in precluding their reoffending. They also said that they had had difficulties in finding accommodation due to their being ex-prisoners, sole parents with young children and impecunious and not having a car. Drug problems loomed large in relation to housing as did their wish for sole occupancy housing away from former associates. Dutreix (2001) following and supporting Carnaby, notes that there are strong social forces leading women prisoners to be homeless upon release including loss of prior accommodation due to lack of income to maintain rent payments and making plans to stay with family or friends that then go awry (p.3). She asserts that:

[Women ex-offender's] crime rates can be reduced further as a result of different housing policy. However [this women's] housing policy needs to address the issue from a broad and holistic perspective. This would include increasing public housing stocks, further funding for emergency and transitional accommodation and providing appropriate support services (p.3).

## **Summary**

The few studies that have looked at the relationship between social issues and difficulties amongst prisoners (such as homelessness, mental disturbance, intellectual disability, drug abuse), and post-release experience have indicated consistently a high level of difficulty in securing suitable accommodation upon release. They also indicate a higher rate of incarceration of persons with such problems than in the general population. Similar problems seem to exist for Indigenous persons. Women, especially sole carers of children and those with a drug problem, appear to have major difficulties in finding affordable suitable housing upon release. The current provisions for ex-prisoners with particular problems or in minority groups are reported to be grossly insufficient and not in line with what most report they need,

namely independent but supported housing. This emerges as a common theme in the literature. Ethnicity, other than being Indigenous, has not yet emerged in the Australian literature as a major factor post-release. The current research project is gathering information on ex-prisoners in each of the vulnerable groups mentioned above and will explore their post-release outcomes in the light of their housing and other social experiences.

## CHAPTER 5 A NOTE ON THEORIES OF POST-RELEASE MANAGEMENT

A number of theoretical perspectives have been alluded to in the body of this paper as they relate to aspects of the discussions on ex-prisoners, accommodation and social reintegration. At present the field of ex-prisoner accommodation is under-theorised as it is under-researched and apparently under-serviced. Attempts to gain a conceptual understanding of this field will need to take account of emerging developments in what has been described as the decline of penal welfareism, (Garland 2001).

The idea of the prisoner as a maladjusted, under-socialised individual has been, since the 1980's, increasingly challenged (Clark 1983, Wilson 1983). A new conception of the prisoner as representing a risk of further victimisation on the one hand, and a rational economic actor on the other, appears to be gaining strength in both the policy and academic literature.

In western jurisdictions of the kind represented by New South Wales and Victoria, the practice of corrections, in both its institutional and community forms is becoming more security minded and protective of the public. At the same time the rehabilitation and welfare of offenders is becoming more muted as a consciousness of risk gains priority.

The change in the understanding of the offender is perhaps particularly noticeable in the parole phase of sentencing where traditional re-integrative functions appear to be losing their priority as offenders are characterised less in need of support and more as responsible for their own social and economic re-integration. In this new framework of risk management the services and resources, such as accommodation provided to the parolee and ex-prisoner are to be seen from the point of view of the community as an investment.

If rehabilitation is being redefined, as the adoption of an economic style of reasoning and the change in the tone of official discourse suggests, the conceptualisation of the field of ex-prisoner accommodation must take account of this emerging policy environment. In this new environment the responsibility for acquiring such personal and other resources as will prevent repeat offending has now shifted to the motivation and social and employment skills of prisoners and ex-prisoners. The corollary of this is the reasonable expectation on the part of the community that essential quantifiable resources, such as housing stock, must be provided, particularly in the critical period immediately following release, to ensure a continuation of the re-integration process.

While a level of social responsibility is now placed back upon the prisoner that was not evident in earlier images of the prisoner as a recipient of rehabilitation, it follows that adequate resources must be available to allow for the exercising of that responsibility. The new pragmatic approach, which argues that offenders can, for policy purposes, be regarded as fully rational agents responding to incentives and disincentives, carries with it the requirement for realistic and quantifiable incentives. It is within the context of this new policy environment that the theories and conceptualisations of the field of ex-prisoner accommodation and re-integration into the community must be located.

But how can we explain and understand the relationship between housing and an ex-prisoner's experience of social re-establishment post-release in Australia when we do not even know what happens to most ex-prisoners, what kind of accommodation they secure and whether they are able to link with supportive persons or organisations.

To address the lack of knowledge in this field in Australia, the current project has been designed to try to find out what happens to prisoners upon release, particularly in relation to housing and to attempt to provide information for theory building and direction for policy and practice.

## CHAPTER 6 EX-PRISONERS, HOUSING AND SOCIAL RE-INTEGRATION STUDY METHODOLOGY

There are assumptions upon which policy and practice regarding post-release accommodation, are based. These are that:

- Supported accommodation for ex-prisoners increases their chances of "successful" social re-integration;
- Suitable accommodation for releasees is not readily available in the private housing / rental market;
- and
- Suitable accommodation reduces the risk of recidivism.

These assumptions, although supported to some extent in international literature as reviewed above, have not been tested with any vigour in Australia.

There is so little knowledge or data available on ex-prisoners' accommodation in Australia that there are basic questions to be answered:

- What kinds of accommodation do released prisoners have?
- Do they find affordable accommodation?
- How often do they have to move?
- Is their accommodation related to their family situation & in what way?
- Do those who have supported accommodation fare better over a particular period (6 months in the case of this research) than those without? Are there significant differences in their outcomes?
- Do particular groups of ex-prisoners (eg women with children, Aboriginal men, those with drug addictions) fare better or worse in the accommodation "market" than others?
- Are there significant gaps in accommodation for ex-prisoners?
- Is what is happening now in relation to ex-prisoners' accommodation socially and financially effective?
- To address these in relation to the whole of Australia is a task beyond the capacity of this project and New South Wales and Victoria will be the sites of research.

The aims of the research are to:

- Provide an understanding of the housing needs and circumstances of persons being released from prisons in New South Wales and Victoria.
- Ascertain the importance of type of accommodation, in association with the other factors, which contributed to successful resettlement of ex-prisoners.
- Evaluate and compare the different housing forms experienced by ex-prisoners in relation to a variety of social support programmes.
- Analyse to what extent there is programme integration and how effectively it supports sustainable accommodation / tenancies for ex-prisoners.
- Compare accommodation types and social outcomes of the marginal and "at risk" sub groups within the ex-prisoner sample (eg psychiatric, intellectual disability, women sole parents, women experiencing domestic or other violence, family breakdowns) and also Indigenous peoples.
- Provide data for use in comparative studies between this at risk group and other at risk groups.

### Method

Categorical data that can be analysed using non-parametric statistical means and used for comparative and evaluative purposes is being gathered in this study.

This population group is one of the hardest of all from which to gather data. Ex-prisoners, on the whole, do not want to be known as such. Most of them want nothing to do with reminders

of prison and many of them are institutionalised to some extent. When the problem that many have of drug or other addiction is added, many find it hard to maintain appointments. Many do not have a secure address to go to when released, so following them up in the community is most challenging. Of course, those who are on parole or in supported accommodation are much easier to contact, that is why the little research in this area has been on these sub-groups of ex-prisoners. This study is including a cross section of all releasees.

Ethics approval was granted by the NSW and Victorian Departments of Correctional Services allowing researchers to arrange interviews with prisoners in various correctional centres. Face to face interviews are being sought with male and female prisoners leaving prison consecutively over a three month period until at least 200 in NSW and 150 in Victoria are obtained. The sample will be a consecutive random one of releasees. The researchers arranged a day in the week suitable to the staff, to attend each Correctional Centre and interview prisoners preparing for release in the coming week or two. The only inclusion criterion is that prisoners are about to be released. The only exclusion criterion is that prisoners are not about to be released. After informed consent has been gained the interviewer seeks information pertaining to inmates' personal circumstances (for example marriage status, employment, education, number of dependents, number of previous convictions, addictions) as well as their hoped for accommodation upon release and the information is being entered onto a standard interview schedule. Follow-up contact numbers and addresses are being sought along with agreement that the researcher has permission to follow up at 3 and 6 months intervals, and possibly at another later date using departmental means if the contacts given are no longer valid. Professional Interpreters are used in cases where participants are of Non English Speaking Background.

During the three months after release and prior to the 3 month follow-up interview, periodic contact is being made to try to keep in contact with each participant. If the person is not at the address, other means, such as via the Probation and Parole Services (see attached letter) and support organisations (which the participant would have already given permission for) are tried. At the 3 month mark, the participant is asked over the phone or in person, questions regarding the type of accommodation they are in, how many times they have moved since prison, services being used, relationship with family, employment status, parole status, any breaches or further court appearances as well as being provided with the opportunity via an open ended final question to shed light on why things have turned out as they have.

The same procedure is used at six months.

If at the 3 or 6 month interview time the participant has been re-incarcerated, permission has been granted to interview the participant in prison.

The Senior Researcher conducted a pilot study in the 1990s and found that contacting the participants for these follow-ups was most difficult. Experience gained in the pilot study indicates that persistence and respectful but determined attempts yield results. Nevertheless, a reasonable proportion of the ex-prisoners can be expected to be interviewed later than 3 / 6 months due to this difficulty in contacting them and a certain portion will be lost to the study.

The data gathered is being entered into SPSS and subjected to multivariate analyses to determine the importance of type of accommodation in association with the other factors. Internal comparisons between "at risk" and marginal groups (eg psychiatric disability, sole parents) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within the sample will be made where possible. Thus, for example, older prisoners compared with younger; Indigenous with non-Indigenous; those with drug problems with those without; sole parents with partnered parents; and all subgroups with each other. It will also be possible to differentiate those with multiple / layered at risk factors such as women ex-prisoners, who are single parents with a drug addiction. Their supported accommodation needs and outcomes will be ascertained and compared with others where numbers allow. Qualitative information, that is being thematically analysed, is being obtained via two open ended questions and this will add understanding and depth to the quantitative analysis.

Documents describing policy and practice by governments and NGOs are being gathered to provide a more detailed context for the project.

## **CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION**

There is little empirically based information in Australia regarding what happens to prisoners after they are released from gaol. Evidence from workers suggests that help with accommodation and other re-establishment needs is scarce and that most prisoners (shorter term, non-parolees) leave prison with under-developed or no resettlement plan. These observations accord closely with the studies carried out in the UK and information from other international studies and reviews. There is almost total agreement that housing, in particular supported accommodation, is a crucial factor in assisting ex-prisoners in their post-release period.

The authors of this paper are conducting a study in Victoria and NSW that is attempting to gather information from prisoners being released and again at three and six months post-release. Data on what happens to them, particularly in regard to housing will then be analysed to help provide a picture of whether there are factors associated with ex-prisoners finding suitable housing and with social reintegration.

The research team will be producing a project status report and seminar paper at the end of March 2002 and a conference paper on the work in progress for the Australian Institute of Criminology and Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Conference in Melbourne on Housing, Crime and Stronger Communities in May. The Final Report and a Research and Policy Bulletin will both be available at the end of July 2002.

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