

## **Finishing the Job: *Providing a roadmap for post release education and employment***

**David Gould, Jason Hainsworth, Kevin Manning and Toni McLackland**

*David Gould is State Manager Vocational Education and Training (AEVTI), Jason Hainsworth is Manager COS Operational Performance and Reporting Operational Performance Review Branch, Kevin Manning is A/Operations Manager Fairfield COS; Toni McLackland is Senior Compliance and Monitoring Officer Newcastle CCMG*

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### **Aim**

The aim of the project is to explore the potential benefits of addressing the disparity between vocational support services provided by CSNSW to offenders in custody, and to those on supervised parole in the community. The feasibility of moving existing resources from a custodial environment into the community was considered, as a means of providing increased efficiency of existing resources.

The project is closely aligned with meeting 2 key organizational priorities:

1. "Effective arrangements during times of transition from custody to community" (NSW Department of Corrective Services, 2009)
2. "Review and reallocate existing resources from custody to community" (NSW Treasury, 2011 p5)

### **Background**

It is well established that education and employment have a relationship to offending (Makarios et al, 2010 pp1384-1388; Tripodi et al, 2010, pp714-716; Andrews & Bonta, 2006, p451). The exact nature of this relationship and more importantly, whether improving education and employment outcomes can result in reduced re-offending, has been the subject of mixed research findings (For example; Bouffard et al, 2000; Harrison & Scher, 2004; Visher et al, 2005; Tripodi et al, 2010). It has been suggested that this mixed success of

both custody and community education and employment programs is at least in part due to the emphasis of many on job readiness, rather than the actual delivery of more tangible employment outcomes (Finn, 1998, p91).

Different forms of community based education and employment support programs for offenders have been implemented in numerous jurisdictions, both in Australia and internationally. The consistent themes of the more successful programs include; targeting of higher risk offenders, coordination of service

delivery between custody and community, and delivery of services as part of a coordinated case management approach (Bouffard et al, 2000, Harrison & Scher, 2004, p41, Bloom, 2006, Zhang et al, 2006, p563). Networks between corrections agencies and community service providers have also been identified as an important feature in producing tangible benefits to offenders (Kemp et al, 2004, pp2508-2509; Department for Skills and Education, 2005). These factors are consistent with principles which have been identified as important within key CSNSW offender management initiatives such as Through care, and the corporate goals identified earlier in this paper (NSW Department of Corrective Services, 2008).

Some examples of these types of program include:

- "Project RIO" (US / Texas): Large scale project providing pre and post release employment training and placement. Implemented following limited success of parole officers to acquire employment for offenders. 16% decrease in reoffending reported (Finn, 1998).
- "Through the Gates" (UK): Pre and post release support with an employment focus, also in conjunction with other services such as housing. 40% decrease in reoffending reported (Frontier Economics, 2009).
- "Corrections Services Employment Pilot Program" (Victoria): Pre and post release employment support for up to 12 months. 82% reduction in 'offences per day' reported (measure of recidivism by frequency over time). Reductions were highest for

offenders in the program who were successfully placed, but positive results were also achieved for offenders who simply participated (Graffam et al, 2005).

It should be noted that the reported increases, particularly for the latter 2, should be treated with caution due to methodological issues, in particular a lack of detail regarding comparison groups. Nonetheless, the results demonstrate the potential in this area.

### **Current Service Delivery in CSNSW In Custody**

Through the Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI), Corrective Services NSW delivers a range of educational and vocational services to offenders in custody. In 2009/10:

- 10,278 (53%) of inmates enrolled in one or more education and/or vocational training courses as part of their case management plan.
- 618 inmates completed short courses relating to further education and employment.
- 1,551 inmates were provided with education profile interviews to assist with education, employment and career aspirations
- 309 traineeships completed.
- CSNSW provided \$1.965 million to TAFE to provide vocational education and training to offenders in custody.
- Additional custody based external leave programs for minimum security (C3/Cat. 1) inmates at a number of correctional centres as well as the new Silverwater External Leave Program (SELP).

(NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General, 2010, p95)

### **In the Community**

CSNSW needs analysis data indicates that around 70% of supervised parolees in NSW present with risk factors relating to employment and education, and associated factors such as welfare dependency (CSNSW Offender Needs Analysis data, June 2010 to June 2011; CSNSW Community Offender Census 2010). However, AVETI does not currently provide services within the community.

The Pathways to Education, Employment and Training (PEET) program, funded through the Drug Summit initiative, represents the only comparable vocational support provided by CSNSW to offenders following their release. This program is also available to offenders on good behaviour bonds. In 2010-11:

- 206 (4%) parolees were referred to PEET (CSNSW Offender Information Management System programs data, extracted 01/08/2011).
- Only 23 (40%) COS offices delivered PEET at all during the year (NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General, 2010, p99).

The commencement of PEET coincides with TAFE semesters, restricting the ability of many offenders to be referred into the program quickly following release. Subsequently, there was on average a 4 month delay between release from custody and commencement in the program. The promptness of service delivery is an important consideration - approximately 20 to 30% of offenders will already have reoffended or returned to custody within 4 months of release from custody (Watkins, 2011, p4; Jones et al, 2006, p6).

Unlike offenders in custody, offenders in the community have access to all the education and employment services available to any other member of the general public. Nonetheless they are often at significant disadvantage. Recent research suggests that Australian employers and employment service workers tend to perceive offenders negatively, viewing them as less employable than most other disadvantaged groups, except those with intellectual or psychiatric disability (Graffam et al, 2008, pp682-3).

Some employment support may be provided by supervising probation and parole officers. The limited evidence available suggests it tends to fit what has been described as a 'passive' approach to employment and education support (McDonough & Burrow, 2008; Kennedy, 2009; Ongoing review of offender records by Operational Performance Review Branch staff; Also see Bonta et al, 2008, pp259-260; Bourgon et al, 2009). That is, the offender is directed to gain employment, and possibly given simple information on available services. This assumes the offender possesses the relevant skills, motivation and confidence to identify the most appropriate course of action, and to be competitive in obtaining employment. Offender attitudes and expectations to employment are also strongly related to offender success or failure, with one recent US study suggesting it may be more critical than employment itself (Bucklen & Bret, 2009, p253). Providing offenders with informed support to develop reasonable expectations and attitudes may be, for example, one reason why some employment programs seem to produce benefits even where placement does not occur.

A more 'active' approach to employment and education recognises the difficulties experienced by offenders and works to assess, develop and achieve appropriate pathways for each individual. Proactive engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including offenders, supervising officers, employers, service providers, and training organizations supports both intrinsic offender expectations and attitudes, and practical access to external services. Ensuring there is continuity between custody based training and community activity ensures both resource efficiency, and makes use of skills and achievements the offender already has. In many respects, this is simply large scale implementation of the responsivity principle proposed by Andrews and Bonta (2006). Research has demonstrated that program effectiveness is highest when delivered in conjunction with risk and needs principles, with up to 20% reductions in reoffending being achieved with all 3 in place (Ibid).

### **Proposed model**

Based on the factors identified above, the team project proposed a simple model for a pilot program; to transfer one education / employment officer from custody into the community. This position would work on improving linking newly released parolees to the right education/ employment opportunities, in particular building on any work that was started in custody.

By targeting medium risk and above offenders, with education and employment problems, the model

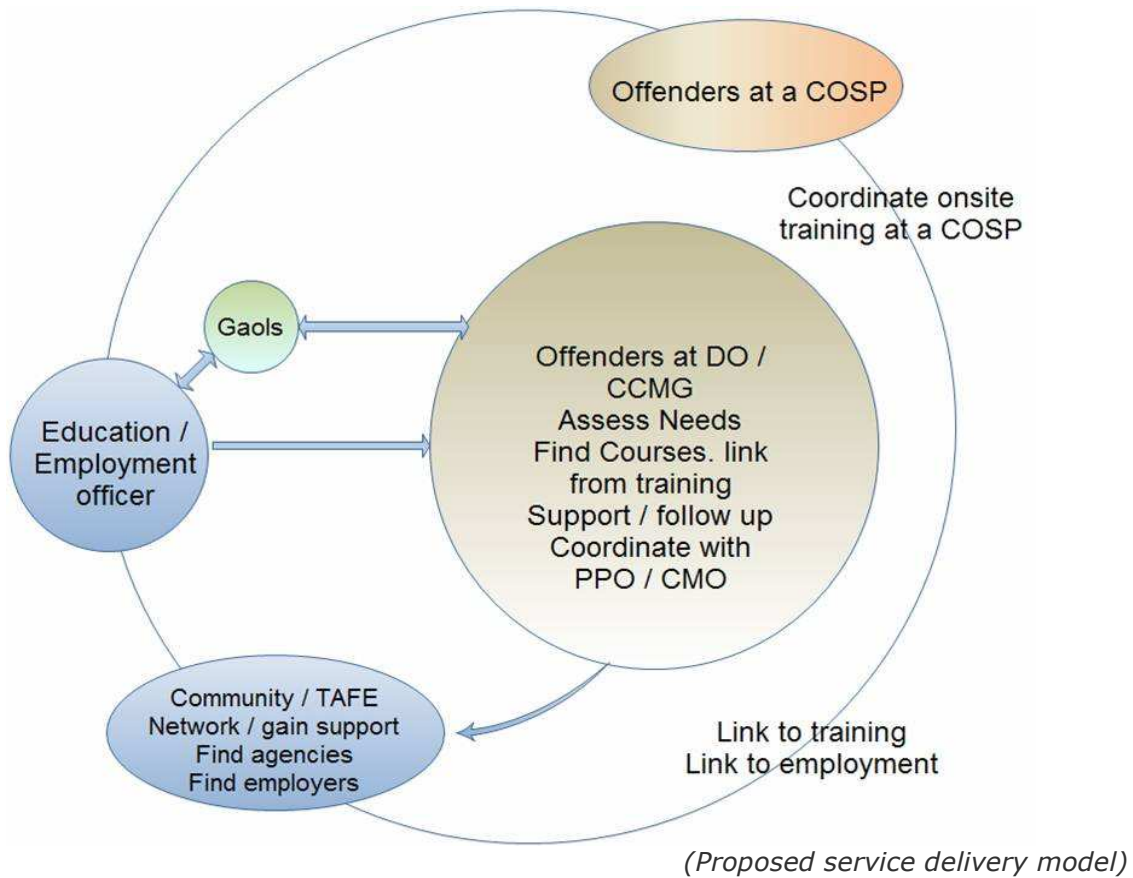
would seek to achieve all 3 elements of the risk-needs-responsivity model. Whilst the first two are self evident, the principle of responsivity will be addressed both by the environment (i.e. community based) and the mode of operation (i.e. an 'active' approach, as described above)

The proposed location for is the Campbelltown / Fairfield / Liverpool COS areas. This proposal was based on a number of factors, including:

- An average of around 20 new parolees per month (total) received between these locations, who have:
  - Education / employment needs identified
  - Medium risk LSI-R or above

(CSNSW Offender Needs Analysis data, June 2010 to June 2011; Campbelltown, Liverpool and Fairfield)

Although 20 offenders per month could potentially result in a build up of a large volume for a single staff member to manage, it is considered very unlikely that referral and retention rates would be more than 50% at most. Many offenders will have competing issues such as mental health that will make them unable to engage, some will only require brief assistance, and some will inevitably leave the area or breach and return to custody early on. Additionally, the role is primarily a networking and advisory one, with the day to day case management work still to be undertaken by the supervising PPO /CMO.



It was also considered preferable in the first instance to have access to a larger pool of offenders, and if necessary reject some suitable referrals on resource grounds, rather than risk inappropriate referrals to sustain adequate numbers.

Additional considerations for this area were aimed at reducing potential logistical complexity, and include:

- Higher density of potential employment opportunities
- Availability of other service providers within the area
- Availability of public transport

The new position would ideally roam between within these locations, but could also operate out of correctional facilities with current community based

work programs, such as the Silverwater External Leave Program. The Campbelltown COSP was initially considered as a possible 'base', but rejected on the basis that the constant physical presence of residents, most of whom would not be suitable, may distract service delivery toward the COSP rather than offenders in the community.

This project envisages that a small portion of AEVTI's existing resources would be, as stated in the 2011-2012 Budget Estimates, reviewed and reallocated from custody to community. Thus AEVTI personnel and other resources are placed in community settings to:

- Liaise with CSNSW staff at release
- Review AEVTI student file to check for and tie up loose ends

- Help released offenders continue the learning / employment pathway plans initiated in custody
- Liaise with employers, relevant agencies and registered training organisations on behalf of offenders
- Consult broadly with the wider community
- Source federal and state government funding opportunities and programs
- Liaise with CSNSW staff regarding continued case management plan implementation
- Feedback information to CSNSW regarding how the education and vocational training programs offenders have completed in custody are having an effect on their lives post-custody.

It will provide support and liaison services to assist newly released parolees and parole officers to build upon and utilize the offender's custody based training, and identify and access relevant community based education and employment services.

The specific source of the position is yet to be identified, and would be assessed and negotiated with relevant staff should approval be given to continue the project. However, the closure of Berrima, Parramatta, and Kirkconnell correctional centres, coupled with a declining inmate population presents an opportunity to identify possible excess services.

It may also be pertinent to note that the new requirement for pay rises to be linked to increased productivity may provide incentive for supporting the expansion of the role of education officers. Although the current proposal recommends relocation of one position in a full time capacity, an alternate model could include officers working

between both custodial and community environments. This may in particular be appropriate in more remote locations with smaller volumes of offenders.

### **Stakeholder engagement**

The feasibility of this model was explored in consultation with a number of stakeholders has, including local staff, senior management, AVETI staff, and external providers such as TAFE. Overall responses overwhelmingly supported both the premise of the project, and the proposed model.

*Assistant Commissioner, Community Offender Management, CSNSW*

- Highly supportive of the concept, and recognised potential benefits. Main concerns related to ensuring the position remained focused on networking role, as opposed to direct training. Felt that district offices in proposed area were more appropriate 'base' location than COSP.

*Director, Social Inclusion and Vocational Access Skills Unit, TAFE*

- Highly supportive of the concept. Critical of current arrangements for offenders with prior training, and believed that the proposed model would be beneficial.

*Management and staff at Fairfield, Liverpool and Campbelltown COS offices*

- Highly supportive of the concept. Probation and Parole Officers at these locations in particular identified a need to improve the links between educational, employment services and offenders. Saw considerable benefits for offenders who could gain a recognized qualification, and

ultimately gain employment that reflects their qualification.

regarding the continuation, expansion, or cessation of the program.

#### *Manager, Campbelltown COSP*

- Highly supportive of the concept. However, noted limited employment prospects within the COSP population due to specialised / high needs nature of the residents. Residents at the centre more likely to benefit from like skills training.

Ongoing data collection will be undertaken during the pilot program to assess and measure service delivery outcomes. That is, to assess to what extent the program develops and / or enhances links between:

- Offenders
- Supervising officers
- Any prior service delivery in custody
- Employers in the community
- Job network agencies
- Training providers

#### *AEVTI Senior Correctional Education Officers*

- Highly supportive of the concept. However, some noted concerns about additional work loads. All saw it as necessary that AEVTI have a presence in Community based environments to help offenders continue and complete the education and vocational training started in correctional centres. Many expressed enthusiasm for the initiative seeing it as opportunity to enhance the profile correctional education within CSNSW and the wider community.

Maintenance of data relating to tangible outcomes for offenders (i.e. enrollments, qualifications, employment) will also need to be undertaken. This will occur both through records maintained locally relating to agency interaction, and through use of offender management systems, in particular the Programs and Services module within OIMS.

Preliminary findings regarding these outcomes can be reviewed six monthly, and provided at the end of the pilot period.

At time of writing, efforts to arrange a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner, Offender Services and Programs had been unsuccessful due to schedule conflicts.

Longer term data analysis can assess whether the program has any impact on rates of return to custody, against control groups sourced from similar locations. Initial data could be reported within two years of the commencement of the pilot (using a 12 month rate of return), with follow ups as required.

It was considered that consultation and networking with non government service providers in the local area may be inappropriate within the immediate context of the project, and would be undertaken by the position as part of the pilot.

Any decision for further action / inaction following the initial pilot should therefore in the short term be based primarily on the success or failure of service delivery outcomes.

### **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the pilot will be essential to informing future decision making

## Recommendation

That one custodial education / employment officer position (specific position to be nominated in consultation with relevant staff) be relocated from custody to the Campbelltown / Liverpool / Fairfield COS area, for a 12-18 month evaluation period.

That further work is undertaken to fully scope out the roles and responsibilities of the position.

## List of Abbreviations used

**AEVTI** – Adult Education Vocational Training Institute  
**CCMG** – Community Compliance Monitoring Group  
**CMO** – Compliance and Monitoring Officer  
**COS** – Community Offender Service  
**COSP** – Community Offender Support Program  
**CSNSW** – Corrective Services New South Wales  
**DO** – District Office  
**LSI-R** – Level of Service Inventory-Revised  
**PPO** – Probation and Parole Officer  
**TAFE** – Technical and Further Education

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