



**Australian Red Cross**

THE POWER OF HUMANITY



# Offenders and their families - making a difference

**CRISIS CARE COMMITMENT**

**Red Cross is committed to an inclusive society where all people are valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs are met so that they can live with dignity. In order to reach this goal, we will work to overcome social exclusion and will undertake programs and initiatives to advocate for those people who are on the margins of Australian society.**



## **Offenders and their families – making a difference**

Offenders and their families are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded people in Australia. People are not only excluded from society when they are in prison, but on release they generally experience considerable difficulty reintegrating back into the community.

Research highlights that offenders are often impacted by broader patterns of exclusion and disadvantage, with histories of abuse, neglect, inadequate education, unemployment, mental health, drug and alcohol issues, homelessness and intellectual disability.

The families of offenders play a critical role in making a difference. Best practice locally and internationally suggests that maintaining family connections help to break cycles of reoffending.

It can also protect children of offenders from becoming offenders themselves.

Red Cross works with offenders and their families using approaches that have been proven to have a positive impact on the wellbeing of offenders, those at risk of offending, and the families of offenders.

Our aim is to improve the lives of offenders and their families and to contribute to improved community outcomes. By reducing rates of reoffending and diverting people from crime we can:

- make communities safer, stronger and more resilient; and
- help reduce the financial cost to society.

**‘Mostly prisons are warehouses for people failing to cope with the demands of modern life and who cross the line of criminality in states of chaos, crisis and desperation.’**

- Julian Corner, Chief Executive Officer of the UK organisation Revolving Doors

## Red Cross works to achieve the following outcomes:

- **Young people** considered most at risk of imprisonment or detention **gain the support necessary to stay out of detention.**
- People in prison are better able to manage their **safety, health and well being** and remain connected to their families and communities.
- **Families are better able to cope** with the stress and stigma of having a family member incarcerated.
- Following release from prison or juvenile detention, people will gain **improved opportunities, greater resilience, and have positive social connections.**



# Red Cross Programs

## Supporting offenders in and out of prison

The **Prisoner Support Program** was developed in consultation with Tasmanian correctional staff to address high levels of self harm, bullying and attempted suicide within Risdon Prison.

Offenders train as Peer Supporters to provide information, advice and support to other inmates – particularly those who are new to the prison or are at risk of suicide or self harm. Peer Supporters are trained in a number of areas including mental health first aid, drug and alcohol issues, blood borne viruses, communication skills, and maintaining confidentiality and advocacy. On completion of training Peer Supporters receive a Certificate II in Community Services, enhancing their employment opportunities following their release.

Currently a post-release mentor scheme is being developed within this program. Offenders will be matched with volunteer mentors in the period

leading up to their release. The mentor will facilitate and support people when they are released to establish positive networks in the community with a focus on pursuing their sporting, recreational, cultural or artistic interests.

This program is currently provided in Tasmania.

## Support for families and visitors

The **Prison Visitor Resource Centre** is a program to help improve the experience of visiting family or friends in prison. It is particularly focused on maintaining contact with family and friends to support people while they are imprisoned and to make it easier to reintegrate into the community on release from prison. This program is provided in partnership with the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO).

The program provides the following services to prison visitors:

- A dedicated place for family and

friends visiting prisons to access personal and practical support, and information about prison rules, regulations and what to expect when visiting a prison.

- Red Cross volunteers meet and talk with family and friends, providing them with emotional reassurance and support and linking them to specialist support services, including counselling, accommodation, public transport and material aid services.
- Developing awareness about and de-mystifying prison policies, procedures and the broader correctional environment.
- Activities and refreshments for children.

This program is currently provided in Victoria.



## Nutrition education

**FOODcents** is an innovative program that involves Red Cross staff providing assistance to vulnerable people wanting to make significant diet and lifestyle changes. Participants gain knowledge, skills and confidence, and learn how to choose, prepare and cook tasty and affordable food. Red Cross currently delivers the FOODcents program to the Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison.

This program is currently provided in WA.

## Reducing harm from substance use

**save-a-mate (SAM)** training courses teach participants how to prevent, recognise and respond to emergencies resulting from alcohol and other drug use. They aim to reduce harm associated with substance use, particularly for young people.

This program is provided for people in prison or youth detention centres. On successful completion of the course, participants receive an accredited CPR certificate. SAM is also provided to prison and youth detention centre staff to better enable them to deal with alcohol and other drug use.

This program is currently provided in Tasmania, Queensland, NSW, ACT, WA and SA.

## Social interaction through sport

**The Melbourne Youth Justice Centre (MYJC)** sporting program is provided in partnership with the YMCA and involves friendly games of soccer, basketball, netball or volleyball between young Red Cross volunteers and young people at the MYJC. The aim of the program is to provide young offenders with opportunities for positive social interaction through sport.

This program is currently provided in Victoria.



## Building resilience and enhancing emotional wellbeing

**Talk Out Loud** is a program for young people offered in prisons and youth detention centres.

Participants undertake training to:

- strengthen self care and encourage participants to seek out help;
- increase mental health knowledge and understanding;
- reduce stigma associated with mental illness; and
- increase positive mental health and resilience in young people.

This program is currently provided in NSW, SA and Tasmania.

## Key facts

- In 2009, 29,300 people were held in Australian prisons, an increase of 39% in ten years.
- 90% of female and 78% of male offenders are reported to have a mental illness prior to arrest.
- Prior to incarceration, 71% of offenders are unemployed and many are not functionally literate with up to 20% having an intellectual disability.
- Approximately 37% of men and 60% of women in prison have been sexually abused as children.
- Mortality rates for ex-prisoners are six times that of the general population, with death usually occurring within weeks of release, often through overdose or suicide.
- Recidivism is a major issue, with 56% of all prisoners having served a sentence in an adult prison prior to their current incarceration.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are incarcerated at a rate 14 times higher than that of the general population and comprise about 24% of all people in Australian prisons (whilst making up only 2.5% of the population).
- Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, aged 10-17, are 23 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous people of the same age.

## The effect on families

- It is estimated that in Australia 5% of non-Indigenous children and 20% of Indigenous children have lost a parent to incarceration.
- 30% of children with incarcerated parents have mental health problems compared to 10% of the general population.
- A parent's incarceration can often lead to regressive behaviours in children, poor school achievement and social isolation.
- Families suffer stress from stigma, social isolation, financial difficulties and changes in living arrangements as well as physical and mental health problems.
- Imprisoning a parent increases the likelihood of their children being incarcerated by six times that of the wider population.
- Maintaining contact with their parent can improve a child's emotional response to incarceration and support parent-child attachment.

**Red Cross works with the most disadvantaged people, in their most vulnerable times and in the most disadvantaged places.**

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