



Corrective Services NSW

FAMILY MATTERS STRATEGY





Introduction

The incarceration of a family member can be a distressing and emotional time for the family of offenders. It may also be the culmination of a series of events that have placed pressures on familial relationships. Families, many with dependent children, are left to continue their lives and adapt as best they can to the absence of an incarcerated mother or father. The struggles and experiences of these families are often invisible to most.

The benefits of maintaining and strengthening family relationships are well known and can extend to both the offender and family members. For offenders, regular contact and support during a period in custody can promote well-being and a more positive attitude towards rehabilitation. Preparing for release and putting in place critical supports for resettlement can be greatly assisted by direct input from family. For families, and particularly children, regular meaningful contact and involvement with the family member in custody can mitigate anxiety and negative behavioural issues that can often be a consequence of separation.

While many offenders rely on family or friends for support, there is a cohort who lack this support or for whom the family unit or peers, can be a source of anti-social influence. Greater focus is required on the early identification and targeting of the needs of these offenders.

There is also further work to do to consider the negative impacts on family that may result from the resettling of offenders back into the family and how Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) can best work with other government and non-government agencies to provide practical support. This work is always a balance between supporting family relationships and addressing community safety concerns.

Recent CSNSW initiatives, including the implementation of Case Management Units and High Intensity Program Units in correctional centres, share a common objective of reducing reoffending. Importantly, these reforms are also providing greater opportunities for offenders to improve their relationships with family and friends.

Family Matters Strategy (2018-2021)

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What are we going to deliver?

CSNSW is building on work to date to ensure that the impact on families of offenders is better understood and that greater effort is made to directly involve families in the pre-release work to reintegrate offenders back into the community following a period in custody.

The '2018-2021 Family Matters Strategy' (the Strategy) will drive the importance of social bonds and family throughout the work of CSNSW in custodial and community settings as well as continue and expand a number of initiatives that directly promote closer family ties and strengthen key support networks.

Through strategic partnerships with non-government organisations, CSNSW is supporting greater positive family contact between offenders and their families. These partnerships work for the benefit of both offenders and their families and also fit with the broader objectives of CSNSW programs and services to reduce reoffending and the likelihood of intergenerational crime. CSNSW is committed to creating better connections between families and offenders and ensuring that working with families is not seen as 'something else' but is part of the mainstream work of CSNSW.

Overarching principles underpin priority areas

In our work with the families and children of offenders, CSNSW is committed to:

- Understanding and recognising the pressure on families with a relative in prison
- Promoting the value of family connections throughout an offender's contact with the corrections system
- Recognising families as an important source of support for inmates while in prison and a motivating force to desist from reoffending
- Working with a flexible definition of family that includes people that provide emotional and other support as well as direct family
- Understanding the importance of kinship and culture to Aboriginal offenders and their families
- Understanding the unique challenges that children face when a parent or primary carer is sent to prison

Three key priority areas have been identified and serve as reference points by which CSNSW will focus its efforts to promote family connections and underpin further research on the impact of family support on reducing reoffending. These priority areas are:





Priority Area: Case management and reintegration support

The support of family following an offender's release can be a critical positive factor in successful reintegration into the community. This support is most often in the form of accommodation, assistance in finding employment and financial support as well as the emotional and pro-social environment that families can provide. There is much research that supports the connection between greater contact with and support from pro-social family members of offenders and successful resettlement into the community. CSNSW is creating greater opportunities for family members to participate in case management and reintegration planning under the new case management model as well as other initiatives including the High Intensity Program Units.

The period immediately prior to and after release from custody is a critical time in supporting offenders to desist from reoffending. Work to ensure that family and other supports are informed, capable and available to assist, can however start at an earlier point. Family focussed approaches in case management and reintegration planning can benefit offenders, their families and the wider community and provide an opportunity for the early involvement of families. Under the CSNSW model of case management, specialist staff consider and address offenders' needs from the point of intake, to preparing to move from custody back into the community. Case management plans are informed by assessments of an offender's risks, needs, responsivity and readiness together with the available and necessary support including that able to be provided by family. Case Officers are pro-social role models for inmates, supporting the inmate with issues related to prison accommodation, family and access to services.

What we heard

The key themes that emerged from an analysis of the outcomes of the 'CSNSW Pilot Involving Families in Offender Case Management', and feedback from stakeholders and research included:

- Most offenders rely on family members for assistance with housing post release
- Impact on family is wide ranging - housing, transport, finance, relationships, meeting parole conditions, changes in home dynamic, rehabilitation programs and employment
- Many Aboriginal offenders, particularly women, do not have appropriate family or community support
- A flexible definition of family should recognise that 'families' can mean more than blood relatives and partners
- There are often limited support options and services that meet specific needs of Cultural and Linguistically Diverse offenders
- Greater support may be required for offenders with no supervision obligations post release

Standards

- CSNSW will apply a broad definition of 'family' defined as a blood or legal relative, including immediate, extended family, significant friends and pro-social community supports
- Families are recognised as key external stakeholders in case management
- Case Management Units and Community Corrections will share critical information about offenders before they are released
- CSNSW will encourage offenders to include family members in parole visits
- CSNSW will encourage offenders to contact family members regularly while incarcerated
- Positive family relationships are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity
- Information about case management and reintegration planning is easy to access by family members on the CSNSW website, visit facilities and 'The Families Handbook'



PRIORITY AREA:
Case management
and reintegration
support

Continue

Build on existing work

- Rollout new Case Management Units across NSW correctional centres
- Deliver rehabilitation services and programs in the community including partnerships with community providers to offer counselling and support to families
- Ensure continued focus on families in the NEXUS program targeting reintegration needs
- Promote Family Community Agency Expos

Expand

Enhance our focus in areas that we know work

- Funded Partnership Initiative providing support to high risk offenders with post release and mentoring services
- High Intensity Program Units reintegration planning to include 'Family Contact' sessions
- Implement the Time to Work Employment Service in correctional centres with employment transition plans for offenders

Explore

Look at new ways to enhance visits and post release support

- Proactively send nominated family members information on visits, policy changes, case management and post release information
- Provision of post release support for families - eg family engagement workers
- Trial volunteer mentors for post release offenders with no pro-social family support
- Scheduling family reunification meetings prior to release



Priority Area: Supporting parents and children

A total of 45.7 percent of NSW inmates are parents of at least one child aged under 16. Almost one in five had a parent who had been incarcerated during their childhood and more than 10 percent of female inmates reported that both their parents had been incarcerated during their childhood.¹

Through the Strategy, CSNSW is highlighting the need to address factors that relate to intergenerational incarceration and provide practical opportunities for incarcerated parents to be positively involved in their children's lives.

CSNSW parenting programs are designed to build and improve the parenting skills of inmates and the relationship between parents and children during the period of incarceration. These programs focus on enhancing parents' understanding of the development needs of their child, communication skills as well as promoting self-confidence. Research suggests that improving parenting skills and promoting more positive relationships between inmates and children can reduce risks associated with reoffending. Evidence has also shown that active participation in parenting can be a strong motivator for change in male offenders.

The CSNSW Mothers and Children's Program works to foster the mother-and-child relationship and break the intergenerational cycle of crime while developing the mother's pro-social skills that contribute to reducing reoffending.

CSNSW also funds non-government organisations to provide direct support for families of inmates including counselling and advice on how to navigate the justice system.

¹ Network Patient Health Survey 2015, Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network

What we heard

The key themes that emerged from feedback and CSNSW research on the impact of incarceration on parents and children included:

- A total of 14.3 percent of inmates surveyed as part of the 2015 Network Patient Survey stated that they had been placed in care at some time before they were 16 years of age
- Almost one third of inmates had been incarcerated as a juvenile
- The majority of women who come into custody are mothers who may have sole responsibility for the care of children
- Women inmates receive less family support than male inmates when in custody and on return to the community

Standards

- The interests of, and impact on, families are considered in the development of policies and procedures that apply to offenders' case management
- The best interests of the children whose mothers are under CSNSW supervision in the community or in full-time custody are addressed
- Best interests of children are measured against the principle of physical and psychological care. This includes stability of placement, minimisation and management of risk, maintenance of family and significant relationships, continuity of care and timely decision-making in achieving permanent arrangements for the child
- Through the Mothers and Children's Program, CSNSW is committed to ensuring that children of mothers who have committed a crime are not further disadvantaged and can grow in a safe environment reflecting contemporary community standards for child rearing and development
- CSNSW recognises that offending is not to be construed as evidence of a parent's lack of desire, or ability, to perform their parental duties



Continue

Build on existing work

- Family, Friends and Children's Visitor Support Service
 - Support to children during visits
 - Child/parent activity days
- Family case work under the Funded Partnership Initiative
- Mothers and Children's Program

Expand

Enhance our focus in areas that we know work

- Family support for offenders in CSNSW High Intensity Program Units
- Promote awareness of and participation by eligible offenders in domestic violence programs both in custody and the community
- Improve and expand information available on the CSNSW website

Explore

Look at new ways to enhance visits and post release support

- Develop a proposal for a Mother and Children's / Aboriginal Offenders Pilot Program
- Support for Aboriginal women offenders through psychological and other services that address the impact of violence and trauma
- Examine further the impact and incidence of out of home care placement on inmates and their children
- Examine ways to improve social and parenting communication skills including confidence to be a good parent for offenders in custody
- Consider opportunities for greater involvement of offenders in their children's lives
- Provision of additional and/or longer calls to children and identified pro social supports



Priority Area: Visits

Visits are an important element in sustaining and strengthening positive relationships between inmates and family members including children. Visits can work to maintain or re-establish connections that enable inmates to better understand what is happening in the lives of their family and promote well-being, hope and practical consideration of a future outside of prison.

Inmates who are better connected with family are often in a stronger position to plan their post release life as their families are in many instances the most willing to provide pro-social support. This link to a more stable and supported transition after release is an important influencing factor in reducing reoffending.

The frequency and timing of visits in relation to the date of release and the type of relationship between the visitor and inmate can influence the likelihood of reoffending. The longer the period of contact and work on building family connections during incarceration, the more positive the impact on reintegration and reoffending is likely to be.

Digital technology now provides greater flexibility and more options to promote inmates' family relationships. CSNSW is well advanced in implementing further digital options for family visits and is committed to further exploring this area to strengthen family contact.

Through the Contact Coordination and Support Service, families and friends of inmates can access assistance to maintain contact with a loved one in custody. This service includes brokerage funds to support families, friends and children in maintaining contact and also provides advocacy and general assistance to the target group.

What we heard

The feedback CSNSW received during the development of the Strategy included the experience of inmates and their families. The key themes emerging from this consultation were:

- Better facilities in visits areas are required
- Frustrations of families and other visitors on late transfers and lack of advice
- Greater funding of the Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme
- Booking visits is too difficult
- Easy to use digital options should be more available
- Family members are often unaware of initiatives such as Family Days or Visitor Volunteers

Standards

- Visits are managed in the context of maintaining the security of the correctional centre
- Security checks are conducted professionally and with courtesy
- Child offence related inmates are identified and assessed in relation to visits with children
- Inmates, especially those with high needs, are wherever possible kept in close proximity to family
- Assistance provided to inmates with little or no social support to receive visits
- Comprehensive information about visits for each centre is easily available
- New correctional centre visit facilities are tested against design principles that provide for:
 - child-friendly play areas, colour schemes
 - audio visual technology in waiting areas for display of CSNSW information
 - suitable space available for nursing mothers



Continue

Build on existing work

- Partnerships with community organisations that provide assistance to attend correctional centres and child care facilities
- Child/Parent activity days occur twice yearly at most centres
- Contact Co-ordination and Support Service
- 'Visiting a Correctional Centre' booklet is regularly reviewed and updated

Expand

Enhance our focus in areas that we know work

- Visitor Information Volunteer Scheme
- Family Days
- Just Connect online booking system
- Family Video Contact and iPad 'contact' visits
- Enhance cultural understanding of CSNSW staff
- Improve and expand information available on the CSNSW website

Explore

Look at new ways to enhance visits and post release support

- Develop a resource for 'First moment' of contact for families of offenders recently incarcerated
- Examine ways to provide support to inmates who receive no or little family/social support
- Look at frequency and timing of visits including increasing leading up to time of release
- Examine new design standards for visiting facilities
- Develop learning module for Custodial officers responsible for oversight of visit facilities



Governance and oversight

Oversight of progress of the Strategy is the responsibility of Corrections Strategy and Policy. Regular status reports on key initiatives and case studies will be provided to the Children and Families of Offenders Steering Committee (CFOSC). Reports to CFOSC will include advice on the following:

- Visit statistics
- Eligibility and referral information on CSNSW parental programs
- Delivery of programs and services with a family and kinship focus in High Intensity Program Units
- Review and assessments of existing CSNSW programs and services that relate to visits or parenting
- New research on the impact of family support on reoffending
- Development of new proposals under the priority areas

Implementation of the Strategy is the responsibility of all business areas in CSNSW.

Corrections Strategy and Policy will work with all business areas as needed to provide assistance and advice on matters relating to families including liaising with the CSNSW Women's Advisory Committee and the Aboriginal Advisory Council.

Research priorities

The following priorities have been identified:

- Factors leading to children of incarcerated parents being disproportionately represented in prisons
- Impact on children of offender resettlement into family settings
- Community attitudes to resettling inmates into the community
- Effectiveness of mentoring and other support mechanisms on desistance for offenders with no or limited pro-social network support

