



Strong Foundations
and Clear Pathways²

WOMEN'S ACTION PLAN 2019▶24



Government
of South Australia



Butterfish, Silk
painting by
Mary, 2018 AWP
Arts Health
and Wellbeing
Project

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The State Government would like to preface this report with an Acknowledgement of Country.

The State Government acknowledge the Kaurna people as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kaurna people today.

The State Government would also like to pay respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal people from other areas of South Australia and Australia who have contributed to the development of the Report and who will be involved in, or impacted by, the ongoing delivery of its recommendations.



Our responses take into account the gender and cultural needs, characteristics and life experiences of women within broader offender management practices and as part of development of infrastructure, environments and service pathways.

**DCS Policy 02:
Management of Women in Prison
and Community Corrections**

FOREWORD

In 2014 the first Strong Foundations and Clear Pathways strategy for women offenders commenced in South Australia.

Over the course of 5 years the strategy acted to significantly elevate and embed a gender focus within the Department for Correctional Services (DCS) strategic policies and operational practice for women. Although women are a much smaller cohort within our system, they are now equally represented and equitably targeted in our correctional service initiatives.

Women's needs and the complexity in the lives of many of the women entering DCS cannot be ignored. As a Department we also promote individual responsibility for breaking the law, and understanding of the implications of offending on victims and community. Our approach for women seeks to enhance women's self-efficacy and personal development.

We strive to support women to address the significant interplay between their offending and their common experience of accumulative trauma, mental health issues, substance dependence, unhealthy relationships and poverty.

During the last 5-year period many policy and operational changes have occurred within DCS, notably expansion of home detention, pre-release and front-end sentencing.

This has been complemented by a comprehensive suite of rehabilitative programming, reintegration support services, and gender centric supervision models. Informed by theories on what works for women, the underlying drivers to women's incarceration and criminal justice involvement have been targeted. Key partnerships between DCS and a range of services and agencies have also formed and assisted us in achieving many outcomes for women.

As we move to Strong Foundations and Clear Pathways², the achievements of the first plan provide a strong platform for a further 5 years of focused activity for women within DCS. As an agency, we will continue to strive to increase women's capacity for offence free lives, as well as work to expand initiatives for their children, to prevent intergenerational cycles of criminal justice contact.

David Brown
Chief Executive

Our plan for the next 5 years:



OUR PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Gender and culture matter
- ▶ Environments, services and practices are responsive to the reality of women's lives and needs
- ▶ Relationships matter
- ▶ Informed by best practice



Correctional services and programs meet women's diverse needs and reduce reoffending

Action areas

- 1.1 Implement gender centric strategies that reduce reoffending and contribute to women's and community safety.
- 1.2 Deliver a gender centric approach to women's incarceration and movement through prison to community.
- 1.3 Drive approaches that bring focus to women and children's relationship and risk of domestic and family violence and abuse.
- 1.4 Deliver gendered and evidenced programming to address women's pathways into the criminal justice system.
- 1.5 Build women's vocation and job ready skills through training, employment and prison industries.
- 1.6 Drive initiatives that respond to women's diversity and complexity in custody and community.



Correctional policy and planning is gender responsive

Action areas

- 2.1 Enhance and retain a gender responsive workforce.
- 2.2 Deliver training to new and existing staff in best practice approaches for women.
- 2.3 Enhance data collection, research and evaluative mechanisms to bring a gendered and cultural lens.
- 2.4 Enhance policy and procedure development to further incorporate the impact for women.



Pathways to community, cultural linkage and support are established for women in custody and community

Action areas

- 3.1 Drive community connected and interagency initiatives to support women's successful reintegration and diversion from custody.
- 3.2 Engage our partners to assist in reducing Aboriginal women's over representation in custody and the criminal justice system.
- 3.3 Establish pathways to community through community and cultural linkage.
- 3.4 Expand provision of service information for women and stakeholders.

Our story so far...



Launch of first DCS women's strategy



AWP visits centre and child playground opened



Community Centre installed AWP Living Skills precinct



Co-located community model of supervision for women piloted

2014

Women move into new AWP Opal Unit



2015

AWP Grey Hound Program commences



2016

Opening of the AWP Healing Circle

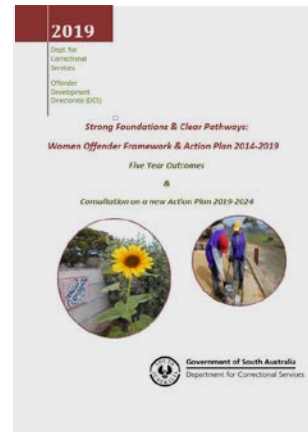




AWP women prisoner Infrastructure Team formed



Women move into the new AWP Ruby Unit



Consultation on the next DCS five year action plan for women

2017

2018

2019

First DCS child centred strategy released



Pilot of a group supervision model for women



Creative industry project commenced at AWP



Women's common pathways
into the criminal justice system:

Key areas of focus for the action plan

The 2019-2024 action plan will continue to address the factors underlying women's correctional service interface and risk of offending. Our work with women responds to and seeks to redirect women's common pathways into our system.

This brings focus to women's safety and choices in relationships, to stabilising mental health and enhancing resilience, as well as developing skills and vocational opportunities. We focus on addressing the interrelated factors that often characterise women's trajectories into the criminal justice system and impede their progress moving forward. Our end aim is for women to have healthy lifestyles, supportive relationships and meaningful opportunities in their life, devoid of offending.

Trauma histories and current domestic family violence and abuse

Significant trauma histories and current domestic and family violence (DFV) and abuse are central issues in many women's lives. There is growing evidence that 70% to 90% of incarcerated women have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused as children and adults (*Gleeson, 2018*).

The interplay between this accumulative trauma and victimisation and women's involvement in the criminal justice system is now well documented in the literature (*Stathopoulos and Quadara, 2014*). A high proportion of women's offending has also been found to occur within the context of these intimate and family relationships.

DCS data indicates that at the Adelaide Women's Prison, 69% of Aboriginal women and 52% of non-Aboriginal women (as at March, 2019) had an Intervention Order listed on their case file, either as a victim or defendant. Intervention Orders are one indicator of the abuse and violence in many women's lives.

Poor mental health

Poor mental health and expressing high level trauma and recent suicide attempts and self harm is a common presentation of women on admission to custody (*DCS Data, 2019*). Studies identify that women in prison are 20 times higher than the general population to have suicidal and self harming ideation (*Robineau, 2016*).

A significant proportion of these women at risk of self-harm and with trauma histories may also meet the diagnostic criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder (Walker and Kulkarnie, 2019). Additionally, post-traumatic stress disorder, a response to trauma, is much more common among women incarcerated than in their broader community counterparts (*Friedman, Collier and Hall, 2015*).



Substance abuse and dependency

Substance abuse and dependency is a further key issue for many women and for many is interconnected to current and past abuse in relationships. Women will often use drugs and alcohol as a coping strategy and to self-medicate, and for many, substance dependence and addiction has become a central feature of their lives.

Substance abuse can also be a contributor to women's poor health and functioning. Being under the influence of drugs and alcohol, or to support or fund addiction, can be a key driver of women's offending.

Many women's contact with the criminal justice system is closely associated with substance use and it is well established that a high proportion of women in prison are drug dependent and exhibit gender specific patterns of use for both illicit and licit substances (*Casey, Day and Gerace, 2015*).

It's changing me now, I can feel it....the hope of having a better life, taking my life back is what this is doing, instead of being led.

Woman in custody at AWP working and training on the AWP Infrastructure Program

All my life I have supported everyone else to make changes when really, the only one I have control over, to change, is me.

Woman in custody at AWP reflecting on setting boundaries during Women's Safety Services' Domestic Family Violence Program, 2019.



Economic pressures and socio-economic disadvantage

Economic pressures and limited vocational histories are a common experience for many women who enter DCS prison and community correctional settings; on intake to correctional facilities women report high levels of need in the areas of education and employment (Casey, Day and Gerace, 2015).

For women, a limited employment history can mean they have lesser ability to establish financial autonomy in the community or they struggle to develop a clear vision of future occupation.

Habits of addiction, family responsibilities, as well as constraints on employment options as a result of a criminal record, are further factors that reduce women's employability on release and can hinder successful community reintegration. Creating vocational pathways is important to building stronger futures for women, enhancing stability in community, access to housing, and desistance from crime.

Relationship and community connection

Relationship and community connection is a key cornerstone of women's rehabilitation. Relationships are increasingly described as women's most prevalent criminogenic need (Farmer, 2019).

Women require support to be safe and to recognise patterns of abuse and unhealthy relationships in their lives. Many women are also primary carers to children and other family members. Assisting women to navigate their parenting and family responsibilities is essential.

Relationships can be pivotal to how women frame their identities; a sense of self is often shaped through roles as partners, mothers, and daughters. If women's experience of these roles has been problematic or their trust has been abused, they will often have a fragile sense of self and vulnerability. Relationships with pro-social family, friends and service providers can be key to contributing to whether women believe they are worthy of something different, and to their willingness to embrace future possibility and to turn their lives around.

Cultural connection and identity

Evidence indicates Aboriginal women experience similar pathways as other women into the criminal justice system however their criminalisation and in particular incarceration occurs at a disproportionate rate; Aboriginal women remain the nation's fastest growing subgroup, with their imprisonment numbers almost doubling since 2000 (ABS, 2019).

In South Australia approximately 30% of the women's prison population self identify as Aboriginal (DCS, 2019). Aboriginal women's pathways into the criminal justice system can be compounded by high levels of intergenerational trauma and disadvantage. Cultural connection and identity therefore are key considerations in our work with Aboriginal women.

Strategies are needed to curb the additional disadvantage they may experience, in ways that enable the cultural identities, strengths and connections of Aboriginal women to be brought to the forefront. Aboriginal women tell us that in designing services for them it is important that a one size fits all approach is not taken.

Mainstream services and culturally specific support options are needed; Aboriginal women, like all women, need choices to meet their specific needs.



Connections, Group Silk Painting, 2018
AWP Arts Health and Wellbeing Project

Doing art gives me self-esteem and inspiration to be able to do things. I loved the program because it connects with your culture and keeps us together.

Woman in custody at AWP providing feedback on the Aboriginal Women's Arts Health and Wellbeing Project, 2018

Community Corrections

There are significant benefits in women meeting their criminal justice obligations in the community and in them accessing Home Detention (HD).

In particular HD enables women's family, community and cultural connections to be maintained. Increasing opportunity for women to access HD and ensuring women have suitable accommodation, services and supports, and meaningful activity in their lives, is a key focus for this plan and a strategy to foster women's safe reintegration.

Our experience under the last plan was that DCS can operate effective community supervision models for women outside mainstream community correctional service approaches. We partnered with community health in Port Adelaide to deliver a gender centric service hub. This structured, coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach enabled the marshalling of the level of resource required to meet the needs of the women under supervision. It also provided a pathway to services for women exiting community supervision.

With partner agencies we intend to replicate this model in other locations, as well as trial group supervision for women.

From the research, we know that for women, substance use, family violence, homelessness and poverty are important factors that lead to their instability while in the community.

Strengthening of our community based options and individualised services for women is one way to enhance the confidence of the judiciary and to provide reassurance that, through assigning community based orders, women will receive supervision and support that is responsive to their needs.

Bringing focus to supports that assist women to succeed in community is important given what we know about the population.

On average 50% of the sentenced women's population are serving less than 30 days and over 80% are serving 6 months or less.

Across the last 5 years remand rates for women have also remained consistently high in South Australia; 44% of women's prison numbers were on remand (at July 2019).

Aboriginal women are also at least 20 times more likely to be incarcerated on remand than non-Aboriginal women.

The constant movement of women through the prison system is destabilising for the prison environment and allows limited time for rehabilitative activity. These short incarceration periods can also act to exacerbate women's cycle of community instability.

Given this, we will seek out opportunity to expand women's access to diversion and alternative community accommodation to prison as well as enhance gender centric community supports.

Particular emphasis will be placed on increasing formal partnerships to build cultural support systems for Aboriginal women, either as individualised support systems or supervision models.

South Australian Population



55%

Are Women



5.6%

Identify as Aboriginal People

South Australian Community Corrections



1007 (daily average)

Women under Community Corrections supervision



17.2%

Are Women



24%

Identify as Aboriginal Women

South Australian Prisons



198 (daily average)

Women in Prison



6.9%

Are Women



30%

Identify as Aboriginal Women

Women in South Australian Prisons



70-90%

Have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused as children and / or adult



20 Times Higher

Than the general population to have suicide / self harming ideation



60%

Report post traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety and depression



60-65%

Identify as having children

30-40%

Identify as a current carer to a child

Prisons

Women in South Australia are accommodated at two prison sites, Adelaide Women's Prison/ Adelaide Pre-Release Centre (AWP/APC) and Sandalwood Unit at Port Augusta Prison.

In the last 5 years considerable infrastructure development has occurred at the Adelaide Women's Prison. Focus has also been placed on the timely movement of women through the AWP/APC prison precincts, as well as on engagement of women in rehabilitative programs and skills focused activities.

Enhancing and strengthening prison quality to reduce reoffending is a key goal under the Department's Better Prisons (2019) strategy. Delivery of the Better Prisons reform will result in operationalising further new infrastructure in prisons for women. This new infrastructure ensures quality environments in which women can be managed according to their risk and need.

For most women this will mean residing in the least restrictive environments possible balanced with their and the communities need for safety. We know that for our prisons to be effective rehabilitation environments our staff need to model pro-social behaviour and communicate and engage effectively with incarcerated women.

We recognise the importance of enhancing and expanding the training and support our staff receive to undertake their important work and to them bringing an approach that is trauma informed.

To ensure women continue to be meaningfully engaged through the day implementation of a structured day model is planned for AWP. This will build on the expansion of education, training and work options already delivered through the first plan.

Maintaining a comprehensive suite of programs for women in custody will also remain an ongoing focus, to ensure that we continue to respond to women's needs both criminogenically and holistically.

Brief interventions in custody will also be a focus, as will women's safety and service connection strategies, especially important given the number of women on remand and serving short prison sentences.

We intend to grow these opportunities in forward years and to ensure meaningful employment pathways are paired with individualised supports for women exiting prison.

Women need this assistance to enable them to create themselves a new life in the community.

Programs that have delivered training and employment for women have proved highly successful over recent years.

Women's Action Plan 2019-2024:

Outcomes to be achieved



We will annually track our progress through the following measures:

- ① Women's imprisonment rates.
- ② Women's rate of reoffending.
- ③ Women's completion rates on community orders.
- ④ Women's safety in prison.
- ⑤ Women's participation in criminogenic and holistic programs delivered in prison.
- ⑥ Women's participation in education, training, and employment in prison and on release.
- ⑦ Staff trained in working with women.

Governance mechanisms will also monitor and contribute to the delivery of actions:

- ▶ Strong Foundations and Clear Pathways2 Ministerial Work Group
- ▶ Strong Foundations and Clear Pathways2 Governance Committee
- ▶ Stronger Together Inter-Departmental Advisory Committee
- ▶ Ongoing consultation and engagement with internal and external stakeholders, including women with lived experience, will inform and feedback on reforms.

Case Study

Jess (not her real name), serving a 3 year prison sentence at AWP, struggles with drug dependency and has had previous imprisonments.

Prior to entering prison drug use was a key feature of Jess's life as well as in her relationship with her partner and co-offender. It is also something Jess uses to manage feelings of depression and anxiety.

While in the AWP Jess was assessed for and engaged in group programs. This included: the DCS Psychological Skills Program, a dialectical behaviour therapy program, Women's Safety Services SA Healthy Relationships Program as well as Smart Recovery, a drug and alcohol, addictive behaviour program delivered by OARS. Due to a health issue Jess was also linked in with a worker from Relationships Australia and engaged in 1-1 counselling.

During the course of her incarceration Jess recognised with her DCS psychologist that she was less motivated and felt 'flat' when she didn't participate in structured activity. As a result Jess increased her weekly exercise as well as joined the prison's Infrastructure Work Gang, where she gained TAFE civil construction training and worked alongside DCS staff and Mossop trades contractors in the rebuild and refurbishment of the prison.

Trade staff from this program assisted Jess to source employment through their labour hire company when she was released back to community.

On transition onto Parole, Jess was also referred to the Aspire Program. Aspire, a social impact bond initiative, assisted Jess to source housing in the community and provided her case management and support. Jess was also able to maintain counselling with her Relationships Australia worker, while also receiving DCS community case management and supervision.

On return to community Jess faced some challenges. She had a particularly shaky period when her ex-partner and co-offender came out of custody and she lapsed into previous patterns of behaviour. Jess navigated these times with support from her wrap-around services and sustained her job, her house, as well as not reoffending.

Slowly Jess has distanced herself from negative peers and is forming new relationships with work colleagues and neighbours. Jess has also re-established regular contact with her children, as well as "getting used to her own company".

Jess completed her Parole Order with no further reoffending.

At her last meeting with her DCS case manager they discussed her commencing an apprenticeship. They also reflected on her old relationships and past drug use and Jess indicated that going back was no longer an option; working and spending time with her children was too important to her.

I feel great mentally and physically, it's probably the best I've ever felt. It's an opportunity and I want to take it....the more I do, the further I get away from that life.

Following Our True Path, Silk Painting by Nikki,
2018 Arts Health and Wellbeing Project





**Government
of South Australia**

400 King William Street Adelaide South Australia 5000

GPO Box 1747 Adelaide SA 5001

08 8226 9000

CORRECTIONS.SA.GOV.AU