

# Disability and Employment: Improving Prospects for Ex-prisoners

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At December, 2015, there were 36,000 people in prison in Australia.

The monetary cost of imprisonment was \$2.6 billion for the year.

This is a 6% increase in one year.

At the current rate of increase, it will be 43,000 and \$3.5 billion in 3 years.

Median sentence length is approximately 3 years (+/-).

Are we moving in the wrong direction? Does the punishment fit the crime?

What “expectations” can an ex-prisoner have for their future post-release?



## Who is in prison?

Beyond the often indelible 'mark' that conviction and incarceration often leaves, there are personal and social disadvantages common to prisoners-offenders.

Two-thirds have completed Year 10 or less. Only 16% have completed Year 12.

One-third have at least one chronic health condition.

Estimates of disability range between 50%+ and 90%.

Two-thirds have been drug users in the year prior to conviction.

40% have a history of overuse of alcohol.

50% come from 6% of the post codes (low SES) (JSS study)

Add to this the Disability factor (referring only to the most prominent conditions)

- Intellectual Disability is 5 – 10 times more prevalent among prisoners than among the general population (variably reported as 10% - 25+% of prisoners-offenders).
- Traumatic Brain Injury is extremely high. US studies indicate TBI in 50% of non-violent and 75% of death row prisoners. Some studies have found almost 90%. A NSW study found 82% of prisoners with a history of TBI.

- Acquired brain injury requiring assistance in at least one of the “activities of daily living” is estimated to affect approximately 25% of prisoners.
- Mental illness / psychiatric disability is extremely high among prisoners. One-third are receiving treatment at the time of arrest. Half have a history of psychiatric treatment. In addition, to rates that are higher than the general population in anxiety disorders and depression, personality disorders, drug and alcohol induced psychosis, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia are highly prevalent.

Some experts have suggested that prisons are the ‘asylums’ of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Multiple disadvantage in the context of prison?

“Multiple Disadvantage” is a confronting / challenging term, suggesting a combination of conditions that together intensify difficulties experienced by people with disadvantaged circumstances or conditions.

We tend to oversimplify the real meaning of multiple disadvantage when the term is applied to people in the criminal justice system. It is more than ‘multiple’. They are multiple, complex, and interactive.

For almost all prisoners, prison doesn’t do anything for a person! It adds to the complexity of disadvantage.

# Barriers to Employment for Ex-prisoners

- lack of relevant personal and work-related skills
- educational disadvantage leading to low literacy and numeracy levels
- unfavourable employer attitudes related to ex-prisoners and crime
- racism on the part of employers and/or co-workers
- lack of work opportunities in their neighbourhood/community
- lack of job contacts because of segregated social networks
- financial difficulties affecting interview/job attendance
- difficulty making the transition from benefits to employment
- behaviour challenges
- low self-esteem, confidence and motivation
- absent or poor work experience/history
- lack of qualifications
- difficulty adjusting to the routine of work

# How well did JSA support ex-prisoners

From the commencement of JSA in July, 2009 – March, 2011, ex-offender job seekers constituted approximately **11% of total caseload**.

Over that period, 87,472 ex-offender job placements were achieved.

With respect to 13 week outcomes, 27,069 ex-offender outcomes were achieved.

With respect to 26 week outcomes, 13,985 ex-offender outcomes were achieved (figures courtesy of DEEWR).

Small annual **variations** in the numbers and percentages were reported by DEEWR and DoE throughout the JSA period.



# *jobactive* and the ex-prisoner

*jobactive* employment services –assist job seekers to find and keep a job and ensure employer business needs are met (44 providers)

Work for the Dole Coordinators – sourcing WFD placements and projects with NFPs

New Enterprise Incentive Scheme – supports jobseekers to start up and operate viable small businesses with training, mentoring and income support

Harvest Labour Services – support the harvest requirements of growers

At this point, we do not have data on the performance of *jobactive* as it pertains to ex-prisoners and offenders. Too early.

# Reintegration: Raising Expectations

Marc Gold (1971): “Disability is the inability of society to adapt to the needs of the people who live within it.”

Reintegration models have a focus on ‘people in context’; whole people and the context within which they live and strive to succeed. Resources and needs are the basic concepts. Ecological system analysis is relevant.

Rehabilitation models have been individual-focused and almost universally focused on addressing character defects and skill deficits. They tend to be program-oriented as well, not real world context-oriented.

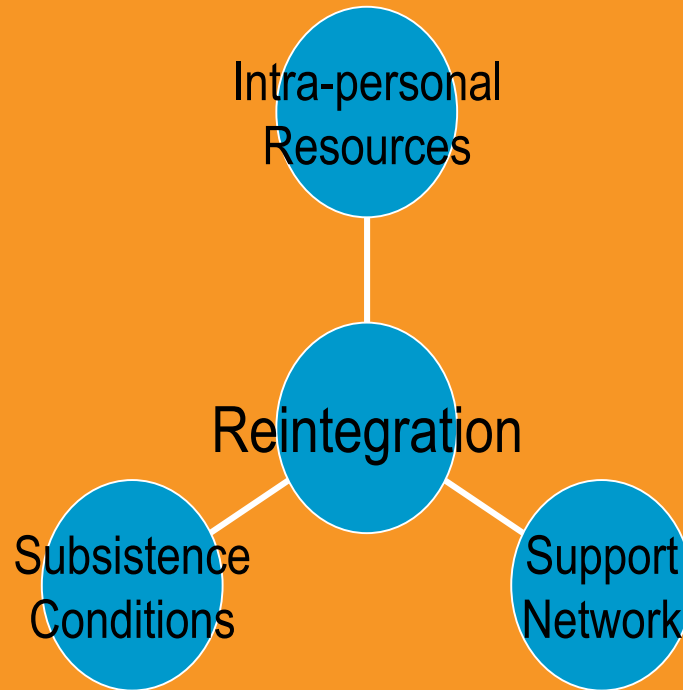
# Reintegration as an outcome of ecological conditions

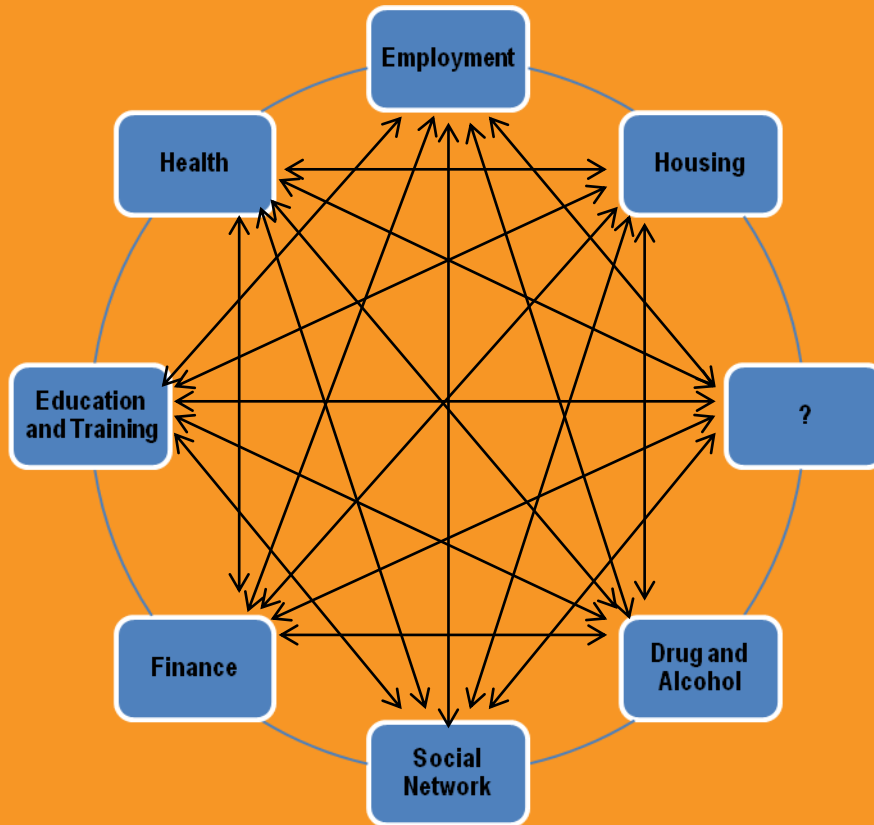
Local Environment

Societal Environment

Political Environment

Legal Environment





# A Future Beyond The Wall

An ARC-funded three year study conducted by UNSW, Deakin U, Edith Cowan University and several industry partners

The focus is on post-release employment and recidivism. Because of the prevalence of disability in prison, it has a disability focus as part of the total project.



# Comprehensive Review of Literature

Two comprehensive reviews of Australian and key international ‘white and grey’ documents pertinent to approaches to supporting people completing correctional orders and in particular indigenous and ex-offenders with disability in their return to community have been compiled.

The reviews consider the academic literature, government and major institute inquiry reports, policy and program papers and evaluations not available in the peer reviewed literature on a range of rehabilitation and reintegration programs and what is known of their employment and recidivism outcomes.



# Study 1: A national 'map' of available services

The availability of VET and employment services for people exiting prison is an important 'first' question. On the basis of a national audit, a 'map' of all known government and non-government vocational education and employment service provision for prisoners pre- and post-release in all Australian states/territories will be constructed.

This audit will encompass two snapshot time points (mid 2013 and end 2015) in order to capture the fluidity and dynamism of the sector.

We will produce a report to industry and papers on the variability and fluidity of service availability and the challenges for prisoners and ex-prisoners seeking vocational educational training or employment assistance.



## Study 2: A national survey of service effectiveness

This component of the research includes an analysis of vocational training and employment participation and recidivism rates associated with pre- and post-release programs.

De-identified data on all sentenced individuals released in 2009 is being provided by three jurisdictions. Recidivism rates will be determined across a 5-year follow up period. Survival analysis (length of time from release to reconviction) will be applied, taking into account participation in training and employment programs.

Outputs will include a report to industry on the results of this study as well as papers on recidivism and changes in 'lifestyle' associated with participation in VET and/or employment support services.





## Study 3: practice models

VET and employment service providers will be invited to participate in a semi-structured interview:

- VET and employment service providers in all Australian jurisdictions will be approached as well as reintegration service providers who have an employment component
- Each to provide documents on business model, eligibility criteria, policies and practices, along with employment outcomes and program performance data and contribute staff and client interviews.

The purpose is to identify which models demonstrate greatest success and best support their success post-release. A report to industry will be produced as well as papers on preferred service and business model(s) and 'best practice'.

# Project Outputs

A comprehensive report on availability of VET and employment services for prisoners and ex-prisoners across Australia as well as the relationship between participation and recidivism and practice models that are most effective in leading to employment and reduced recidivism.

Two large literature reviews, one academic and one technical/political which will cover the full range of issues.

A website that provides information about the project and its findings and all publications and events associated with the project.

A number of academic research publications.



## Project Outputs cont...

Several plain English practical reports to industry and government.

A discussion paper on theoretical and conceptual frameworks relevant to understanding prisoner/offender reintegration, crime desistance, and rehabilitation.

A roundtable discussion of key issues at the *Reintegration Puzzle* Conference in 2017.



# National Survey of Employment Services

## National Survey of Employment Services

### Focus on

- Identifying current services provided to prisoners and ex-prisoners by employment agencies
- Identifying barriers to successful reintegration

### Methodology

- Online survey to DES and Job Active Providers and Group Training Organisations



# National Survey of Employment Services

## Results

- 58 different agencies (small and large)
- Agencies have 6 to 600 Total staff and 2 to 350 Employment Services Staff
- Organisation budgets – up to \$24million
- Case loads 23 to 83,000 (total # of ex-offenders up to 1400)

# National Survey of Employment Services

## Which service model do agencies use?

- 42.9% - Holistic case management
- 40.5% - Employment specific case management
- 9.5% - Integrated case management
- 7.2% - Other

Most agencies (79%) provide ex-offenders with the same service as non-offenders

# National Survey of Employment Services

## What do practitioners tell us about overall system difficulties?

- Incorrect streaming
- *jobactive* contract does not address non-vocational barriers
- Lack of support for “up-skilling”
- Unable to provide the required level of case management
- Limited ability to advocate for clients
- Performance measurements - Quantity (outcomes) not quality (delivery)
- Client transience (leave jobs before 13wk/26wk outcome measures)
- Funding (no employment fund for non-accredited training)
- JSCI jobseeker screening classification instrument

# National Survey of Employment Services

## What practitioners identify as the greatest employment barriers for ex-prisoners

- Lack of education/skills
- Poor work history
- Criminal history
- Disability
- Housing
- Employer attitudes
- Community attitudes
- Compliance/parole
- Drug and/or alcohol issues
- Ex-prisoner behaviours, attitudes, confidence
- Lack of support from family or agencies
- Lack of transport



# National Survey of Employment Services

## Agency suggestions for improvement – System

- Move support outside the star-rating system
- Increase weightings in JSCI (similar to Indigenous clients)
- Recognition that ex-offenders are significantly disadvantaged
- Strategic focus at point of entry
- Automatic entry into system at higher stream level (B or C)
- Establish routines & training opportunities early

# National Survey of Employment Services

## Suggestions for improvement - Funding

- Assistance to take a longer-term approach where necessary
- Increased funding for ex-offender jobseekers
- More accurate streaming
- Increased funding for programs (including pre-release)
  - Anger management
  - Conflict resolution
  - Coping strategies
  - Financial management (budgeting)
  - Literacy and numeracy and computer skills
- Quarantined funding for work-readiness training

# National Survey of Employment Services

## Other suggestions for improvement

### Support

- Resilience training
- Remove restrictions on person-directed service delivery

### Employer incentives

- Increased incentives and wage subsidies

### Marketing campaign

- Govt. Fresh Start / Second chance marketing campaign

### Collaboration with prisons

- Clarify 'work ready' criteria
- Input from Employment Assistance Industry assessing work readiness

### Collaboration with other services

- Partnerships and integrated service provision

### Early diagnosis of disability

- Access to information
- Diagnosis in prison



# National Survey of Employment Services

## Take home messages

- Most ex-prisoners face multiple barriers to employment that need to be addressed to ensure successful reintegration and ongoing employment
- A holistic approach to reintegration that includes employment addresses a range of barriers ex-prisoners face
- Many ex-prisoners have a disability that is not diagnosed or clearly understood
- Parole and other surveillance conditions can impact on both employment seeking and work
- Many ex-prisoners need time to adapt to “the outside world” including changes to the modern workforce

# How DES Services Can Get Involved

Go to the Website

<https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/>

Contact us about being involved in an interview

[jcrosbie@deakin.edu.au](mailto:jcrosbie@deakin.edu.au)

(03) 9251 7887

Questions??