Cairnlea Housing & Support Model

Evaluation Report

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FOREWORD

In 2002 the Cairnlea Housing and Support Model evolved collaboratively with the Office of Housing, Vic Urban, Victorian Women’s Housing Association, YWCA, Women’s Housing Limited and Melbourne Citymission and the financial support of the JT Reid Trust. This was a Social Housing Innovations Project that provided a unique and exciting opportunity to Melbourne Citymission to trial a housing and support model that sought to provide long term, safe, affordable and, most importantly, secure accommodation for a small number of women who have experienced incarceration. In addition this model also provides access to support as required, by tenants.

The partnership group planned, developed and implemented the project. The group proposed that the project be considered a pilot, therefore providing the necessary scope for the model to evolve further over time. An evaluation was considered an integral part of the project to inform and drive relevant homelessness, housing and justice policy and programs for this population.

The Cairnlea supported housing model was informed by Melbourne Citymission’s decade long experience in pre and post release work with women exiting prison. This work has comprised case management support, family support services, employment and social and recreational programs for women exiting prison. Delivery of these services has strengthened Melbourne Citymission’s understanding and knowledge of women’s needs when they exit prison. These services Melbourne Citymission has identified that secure accommodation is the decisive factor in enabling women exiting prison to successfully reintegrate into the community and avoid recidivism.

The evaluation of this project has provided an opportunity to build an evidence base to support the development of this long-term supported housing model which we believe has the potential for more expansive applicability for other homeless populations. Stable and affordable accommodation provides a foundation and opportunity to build a home and establish a future.

his evaluation was funded by the JT Reid Trust. Melbourne Citymission would like to thank the trust for their contribution throughout the entire project.

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The links between desistance from crime, recidivism and the nature of post-release experiences are becoming understood as key to circumventing the ‘revolving door’ syndrome that characterises imprisonment. Both scholarly research and lived experience support this notion. Also becoming clearer is the vital importance of stable, affordable and quality housing in establishing positive life experiences and skills in the period following release from prison. The connection between homelessness and re-offending extends to unstable accommodation, and research demonstrates that moving multiple times within a short period of time is connected to an increased likelihood of re-offending and re-incarceration. Transitional accommodation is disruptive and unreliable and can increase both individual and family vulnerability. The importance of stable housing is magnified for women seeking to reconnect with and care for children, secure and maintain stable employment and/or establish positive support networks.

Securing such housing is extremely difficult for many people released from prison. The stigma of imprisonment is in itself a significant hurdle to accessing the private rental market that is frequently compounded by a range of other disadvantages that prisoners face at rates that are disproportionate to male offenders and the general population. In Victoria imprisoned women are reported to have higher rates of mental illness, physical illness, educational disadvantage and social deprivation than their male counterparts. All of the factors can be strongly correlated to re-offending. It is also now clear that these disadvantages cannot be adequately addressed in the absence of stable housing, and ongoing support from service agencies.

In response to the growing body of knowledge around recidivism and its causes (and especially inadequate housing), governments nationally and internationally have begun to recognize the importance of supporting and funding a range of post-release support programs. Policy in Victoria has been identified as the most advanced state in Australia based on its comprehensive and holistic responses to post release issues. This is reflected in the Victorian government’s reinvigorated housing strategy Open Doors, which aims to provide area-based service coordination for timely and effective access to social housing services for people seeking assistance.

The Cairnlea Housing Support Model is a unique and far-sighted post-release program for Victorian women who have established lives outside prison for an extended period, whose needs are considered low to medium and who require stable accommodation in order to continue on their paths to recovery. This report details the implementation of this project and, on the whole, recommends the continuation and expansion of this unique program. While this evaluation is limited by the small numbers of individuals involved in the program, it is a timely reflection on areas of this program that work well and areas that require clarification and strengthening for the continued success of the existing program and for careful consideration when developing the program elsewhere.

1.1 Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the tenants of the Cairnlea homes who gave of their time and perspectives so generously and graciously welcomed the researchers into their homes. We also wish to thank current and former Melbourne Citymission staff, particularly Dr Shelley Mallett, Sonia Chudiak and Janelle Thompson for their assistance and contribution in undertaking this evaluation. Finally we thank Rachel Hale who provided early research assistance on the project and our colleagues in Criminology at Monash University for their ongoing support.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

"Houses are more than just shelter from the elements. They are located in places, in communities. Housing is the base from which we lead our everyday lives." (Hazel & Johnston 2005: 1).

The female prison population

In the last decade, Australian imprisonment rates have increased from just over 140 prisoners per 100,000 in 1998 to 169 prisoners per 100,000 adult population in 2008 (ABS 2008: 5). While in 2008 women comprise only seven per cent of the total prison population (ABS 2008: 7), the overall rate of women’s imprisonment over the past decade has increased nationally, from 16 prisoners per 100,000 adult females in 1998 to 24 prisoners per 100,000 adult female population (ABS 2008: 7). Across Australia, Victoria’s imprisonment rates are consistently the lowest (ABS 2008). However, the ten year-trend in the rate of incarcerated adult women has trended upwards in Victoria, despite a slight decrease in this rate between 2007 and 2008 (from 12.6 per 100,000 female adults at 30 June 2008 to 11.4 in 2007) (ABS 2008: 7). More recently it has been reported that between 2008 and 2009 the number of women incarcerated had increased by 25%; the highest level since 1892 (Fyfe 2009). Among those imprisoned, the majority are over the age of 25 (92 %) and almost half of those imprisoned in the 2007-2008 reporting period had previously been in prison ( Corrections Victoria 2009: 13).

Victorian women, especially indigenous women, are imprisoned at disproportionate rates to men and experience high rates of return once released from prison (Corrections Victoria 2009). In Victoria, at the time of conviction, women are likely to be unemployed with low levels of training and education; the majority are primary carers for their children and most are survivors of sexual abuse and violence (Community West/Brimbank Community Legal Centre 2008). The state of mental and physical health among imprisoned women has been characterised as a ‘community and medical emergency’ (West Community/Brimbank Community Legal Centre 2008). They suffer from poor physical health and experience high rates of mental disorders including substance abuse, clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorders and multiple disabilities. In the 12 months following release women are 27 times more likely to die from unnatural deaths than women in the general community (Graham 2003).

Homelessness, offending and recidivism

Homelessness has been recognised by Federal and State governments as a critical national issue and an issue highly relevant to our understanding offending and recidivism in Australia (FACSIA 2008; DHS 2002). People exiting prison are recognised as a group vulnerable to homelessness (DHS 2008), and homelessness both prior to and post-imprisonment has been identified as contributing to offending patterns and the propensity to re-offend (AIC, 2009). In Victoria alone, housing placement workers in Victoria’s prisons assist about 300 people who are at risk of homelessness to find suitable accommodation on release (DHS 2008: 33).

Exiting prisoners and offenders have been recognised as one of a number of key target groups within the homeless population (VDHS 2008). Among this group various cohorts of the imprisoned population (including young people leaving incarceration, women and Indigenous Australians) are recognised. In 2008, the VDH S identified that there is a need for the homelessness sector to be strengthened in order to meet the specialist requirements of this group, based on the recognition that those exiting prison tend to require more intensive and prolonged support (VDHS 2008: 13).

In 2003, the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) reported a direct association between lack of access to adequate accommodation and support, and recidivism. In particular, one of the highest predictive factors of the likelihood of re-offending was the number of times an offender moved (Baldry et al 2003). In 2008 the Victorian Department of Human Services argued, in its response to the Australian
Government’s White Paper on Homelessness, that access to appropriate housing and long-term support to maintain this will reduce costs to government, the community and individuals (DHS 2008: 21).

Homelessness is a lived reality for many women who enter and exit prison and significantly impacts upon women’s quality of life. Homelessness exacerbates mental and physical health issues, contributes to isolation, hampers family connections (particularly to children) and women’s ability to access support services and mainstream employment. When they are homeless women can become trapped within a revolving door of re-incarceration and institutionalisation (Baldry et al 2008). As noted, women are consistently more likely to experience heightened problems associated with accessing housing compared to men, including higher levels of homelessness and this is associated with and has a compounding effect upon other hardships including debt, poor physical and mental health, isolation and social exclusion compared to men (Baldry et al 2008: 70).

Post-release accommodation realities for women

In 2009 Melbourne Citymission reported that among those released clients entering the Women’s Integrated Service Program (WISP) on average 90 percent required support with accommodation (Melbourne Citymission 2009: 35). However, the existing housing pathways for women released from prison in Victoria are extremely limited. While transitional housing is the most preferred interim accommodation option for women post release, it is extremely limited and therefore difficult to access and tends to involve lengthy waiting periods. It is a preferred option for women and case workers as it provides a minimum of four months affordable housing, providing the opportunity for long term housing to be explored. In most cases transitional housing is public housing, community housing or private rental. WISP has transitional properties available but supports at least 90 women each year. While other community and government organisations also hold transitional properties that women may be able to access, this option is limited as these organisations tend to have an even higher client demand for these properties as they work with the homeless population generally, not just with people exiting prison. When transitional housing is unavailable alternative accommodation in rooming or boarding houses may be sought. However, there is a consensus among support agencies and advocates that these dwellings are unsecure and unsuitable for women, particularly for those who have experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse and those attempting to regain access to their children. This translates into a significant proportion of women moving from prison into unstable accommodation which has a flow on effect to the lack of long-term housing security. Of the WISP clients released from January to March 2009, 52 per cent exited custody directly into transitional housing, supported accommodation, public housing or private rental, while 26 per cent returned to unstable housing situations including crisis accommodation, rooming/boarding houses and emergency accommodation with friends and family (Melbourne Citymission 2009: 23). The fact that over a quarter of women coming through the WISP program are released into essentially precarious accommodation situations highlights the urgent and ongoing need for more stable and secure housing. In addition, the reality for those women who do access transitional housing who are hoping for long-term options is that their names will go on a centralised list for public housing that However, the waiting periods are lengthy and the reality is that once in transitional housing women will remain there for an indefinite period.

The Cairnlea Support & Housing Model

To address the limited long-term housing options for women who have exited prison Melbourne Citymission in partnership with the Victorian Women’s Housing Association and Women’s Housing Limited developed the Cairnlea Housing and Support model for women who had been in the community for 12 months or more

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1 Transitional Housing- affordable, medium term accommodation that is linked to a support service. Transitional Housing is provided while clients seek private rental or public housing. The accommodation is furnished and the rent is 25% of one’s income. Assistance is provided to address day to day needs and seek long term housing options Transitional housing leases are usually 3 monthly with the potential for extension at the time of review.
following a term of imprisonment. The pilot program involved six units at a housing estate in the outer western suburb of Cairnlea, Victoria. The first tenants moved into their homes in 2006. This is a contained project with a specific focus. It is not designed as a model that would be appropriate for all women exiting prison. Instead it is intended as one of a number of housing models appropriate for this population that can redress the connection between long term homelessness and repeat incarceration.

The Cairnlea model is based on the understanding that women who have been incarcerated have gender-specific needs and often face complex and multifaceted challenges upon release. It is premised on the idea that these women will benefit from safe, secure and long term accommodation, easy access to a range of support services and from living in a location where there is a support community in close range to address issues of isolation and vulnerability.

The evaluation & report overview

The pilot program has now been in operation for three years and the model has evolved over this period. This is an appropriate time to rearticulate the program design and the associated expectations, processes, eligibility criteria and aims in order to ensure the ongoing effective management of the Cairnlea model. This is the first step towards a long-term monitoring and evaluation of the benefits of this important and unique housing and support program. This report presents the findings of the first evaluation of this unique housing and support model. Central to this evaluation is an understanding about the position and special needs of women in the post-release period, particularly with regards the existing relationship between such needs, disadvantages and access to housing. The gendered nature of offending, imprisonment and post-release have recently been brought together with an emerging literature on the gendered nature of homelessness and women ex-prisoners’ vulnerabilities to exclusion from stable and secure housing (see Baldry 2005; Carnaby 1998). However, research in this area remains limited and this report seeks to bridge these two key fields in order to contribute an evidence base that documents and evaluates a specific women’s housing and support model.

The following literature review contextualises the development of this housing support approach by examining the research literature around women, incarceration and post-release. In this discussion we examine findings from Australia and abroad to make sense of some of the key issues and concerns related to the position of released women. In this discussion we highlight alternative models of support and findings related to successes and failures. Following this we then locate the Cairnlea Housing Model within the broader Australian and, more specifically, Victorian policy context in order to make sense of current directions in post-release services, the dominant frameworks within which these services work and they ways in which ‘effectiveness’ and ‘success’ are currently conceived within these contexts. Following the background discussion, we then turn to the evaluation itself, beginning with the methodological approach adopted for this evaluation followed by the presentation of research findings and the conclusions and recommendations generated through analysis.
3.0 BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

3.1 Conceptualising the Cairnlea Housing Model: Literature Overview

Research on the transition from prison to the community has recently gained momentum in Australia, led by Eileen Baldry’s work in NSW (Baldry et al 2003; Baldry 2005; Baldrey et al 2006; Baldry et al 2008). Identifying critical factors and influences on post-release experiences and outcomes is complex terrain. While single causal relationships between recidivism and women’s post-release issues have not been identified it is clear that stable housing has a major effect on women’s outcomes post-release. Without stable housing women experience increased disadvantage, vulnerability and harm, placing them at greater risk of re-incarceration. To understand post release experiences and outcomes for women we must first understand the profile of the female prison population, the impact of imprisonment and the effect of institutional and socio-economic factors on women following imprisonment. This analysis will pay particular attention to the impact of housing status on post-release experiences.2

3.1.1 Profile of Women in prison

More recently it has been reported that those imprisoned, the majority are over the age of 25 (92 %) and almost half of those imprisoned in the 2007-2008 reporting period had previously been in prison (CV 2009: 13).

On 20 June 2009 there were 4,350 imprisoned adults in Victoria of which 282 were women (Corrections Victoria 2009:16). While only a fraction (6.5%) of the total population, women’s rates of imprisonment in 2009 reflect a steadily rising trend in female incarceration- as noted in the Introduction, between 2008 and 2009 the number of women incarcerated had increased by 25% (Fyfe 2009). Of those imprisoned, we know that 30% are un-sentenced and that of sentenced women in Victoria prisons nearly half (42%) are serving less than 12 months and of this group the most serious offence for the majority (43%) was a property offence (CV 2009: 16).

Socio-economic status

In their Victorian-focused research, Davies and Cook identified (1998: 16) that “most women who enter prison do so from a background of extreme social and economic disadvantage”. Women prisoners are, on average, younger than their male counterparts and tend to come from backgrounds of extreme poverty (Davies & Cook 1998).

Many have a history of debt unstable housing, and precarious employment, persistent health problems, especially drug and alcohol issues and family breakdown is not uncommon

Imprisoned women comprise lower economic and social spectrum of the community prior to and post release. Corrections Victoria (2009) prison population census data indicates that almost three quarters (69 per cent) of women prisoners as at 30 June for 2008 were unemployed or not part of

2 NB We do not differentiate parolees from those who have completed their sentence, however it is worth noting that release into the community within the contemporary climate, both within Australia and elsewhere, is currently a process subject to high levels of control. As a consequence, many of those on conditional release will be returned to custody based on their failure to comply with the identified conditions (Garland 2001: 176). The experience of being released for only days or weeks and then returning to prison are understood to further exacerbate the issues we discuss below.
the paid labour force when they were in the community (CV 2009: 13.) Furthermore, research has indicated the difficulties released women experience in securing employment are indeed only compounded by a prison sentence (Peacock 2008; Naylor 2007).

**Re-offending & histories of imprisonment**

Of the 382 women in Victorian prisons on 20 June 2009 almost 40 percent had been imprisoned previously (CV 2009:16). As Peacock notes (2008) many factors contribute to offending, reoffending and reincarceration including lack of assistance in dealing with mental and physical illness, drug and alcohol issues, physical and sexual abuse, children and family responsibilities and lack of housing (Peacock 2008: 307). These issues are related to the time before an individual enters prison, but play a role in both desistance from crime post-release as well as contributing to the risk of being imprisoned in the first instance (Maruna 2001; Farrall & Calverley 2006; Laub & Sampson 2003, Carlen 2002; Singer et al 1995; Brooker 2007).

**Health & wellbeing**

Physical and mental health are also a significant issue within imprisoned populations in Victoria, Australia and internationally. Upon entering prison many men and women present with a history of medical conditions, at best some of these may be addressed, alleviated or reduced while incarcerated however in some cases they may be further exacerbated within the prison environment (including, but not limited to, the development of addictions to prescription drugs) (Tye & Mullen 2006; Davies & Cook 1999; Grimwade 1999; Graffam & Shinkfield 2006).

There is a considerable body of research documenting the heightened levels of mental illness amongst imprisoned populations compared to the general community across Australia (see Butler & Allnutt 2003; Tye & Mullen 2006; Graffam & Shinkfield 2006) and many other nations such as the UK (see Pratt et al 2006) and the US (Ditton 1999; Lamb & Weinberger 2001). In Victoria imprisoned women are reported to have higher rates of mental illness, physical illness, educational disadvantage and social deprivation than their male counterparts (Tye & Mullen 2006).

**3.1.2 The impact of imprisonment – the experience of imprisonment and its implications for post-release**

The experience of imprisonment affects the processes surrounding post-release adjustment and integration, especially for women (Goulding 2007). The barriers to ‘integration’ (as it is commonly termed) have not only increased but have become further entrenched (see for example, Maruna 2001; Petersilia 1999). There are several key reasons for this including the length of sentence and the availability of appropriate services.

Research in Australia and Victoria suggests that the length of prison sentences for women is a key concern. Of those women who received sentences in 2007-08, 52.3% received sentences of less than 6 months, and a further 30.4% received sentences of 6 months to less than 12 months (CV 2009: 13).

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3 Given the range of disadvantages and problems typically experienced by prisoners, Baldry and Borzycki (2003) believe the oft-used term ‘reintegration’ is inappropriate as it does not reflect practical post-release experiences and realities of not having been ‘integrated’ in the first place. While Baldry and Borzycki prefer the term ‘integration’, Maruna (2001) prefers ‘recovery’. He argues: ‘a person can be rehabilitated by a program or by a treatment professional, yet recovery is an individual, agentic and purposeful process. Like ‘going legit’, recovery is also distinctly subjective and frequently considered an ongoing process’ (Maruna 2001: 26-27).
As such there is a great deal of movement in and out of prison potentially impacting upon the capacity of pre-release services and programmes to effectively prepare women for release. This is further compounded by the status of most women imprisoned in Victoria as mothers. Imprisonment of any length of time entails separation from children. In these circumstances the welfare of children and uncertainty about future familial reconnection are sources of constant anxiety, particularly in relation to the losing access to children (see Davies & Cook 1998).

Identifying the connection between experiences and disadvantages pre-imprisonment and the additional issues and hardships that result from imprisonment is central to understanding the challenges faced post-release. Within the last decade research has begun to embrace the importance of recognising the complexity of individual experiences and journeys- rather than seeking to separate pre-, during and post-release as distinct, linear ‘stages’. This is reflected in recent discussions of the role of ‘through care’ which focuses on the provision of continuous treatment/support and education for prisoners from entry into prison to their post release environment (Baldry et al 2008).

3.1.2 Issues faced by women post-release

Clearly women’s experiences in prison contribute to and compound many of the challenges associated with release. Some of many barriers that women face include: the prospect of having a criminal record, little or no previous employment, low educational levels, little or no job skills, reporting requirements for parole, child care issues, lack of housing, physical and mental health and age (Peacock 2008: 309; Zaks 2003). While it is possible to identify multiple hardships and challenges that face all prisoners upon release, be it on parole or upon completion of the sentence, such separation of ‘issues’ belies the interconnectedness of these issues and the complex reality of people’s lives.

Research conducted in Australia and overseas has confirmed that both men and women face considerable hardships post-release. However, as discussed above, while women represent 6% of the overall prison population in Victoria (CV 2009: 13) the comparative level of disadvantage and vulnerability is acute (West Community/Brimbank Community Legal Centre 2008). The range of disadvantages, vulnerabilities and issues faced by women and specifically indigenous women exiting prison highlight the need for gender-specific support processes and services (see Davies & Cook 1998; Davies & Cook 2000; Community West/Brimbank Community Legal Centre 2008; Goulding 2007, 2004; Sheehan et al 2007). However, while it has been established that women’s needs and experiences are distinct from men’s and gender-specific services are critical (Davies & Cook 2000), there remains considerable challenges associated with gaining a platform for these issues to be heard (Walsh 2006). Research in Victoria (see for example Davies & Cook 1998, 2000; Graham 2003; Sheehan et al 2007) and across Australia (for example, Baldry et al 2003, 2008; Carnaby 1998; Davies & Cook 1998, 1999, 2000; Goulding 2004, 2007) has brought attention to the importance of attending to gender, not only in offending populations but with regards to imprisonment practices and, critical to this report, the identification of post-release experiences and provision of post-release services. It is no longer acceptable to consider offending, incarceration or post-release as gender-

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4 Another little addressed issue is the position of women held on remand who during their imprisonment, which can vary from a period of days to months to years, are not unlike other women prisoners who lose their housing, employment and also their children who are placed in care. However, irrespective of the period for which they are imprisoned, remandees are not eligible to engage in transitional programmes and services. If and when they are acquitted they are released from court with no support, resources or housing (see Carlton & Segrave 2009).
neutral processes and practices. This converges with the development of housing advocacy literature that identifies the specific needs of women in relation to housing, positions that have been formally acknowledged by the international community within the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* [CEDAW] (1979).

Women in prison also have diverse backgrounds, needs and experiences that require targeted and responsive service provision. A range of additional factors, including ethnicity/race and parental status, are critical to the experiences of individual women post-release. For example, Baldry et al’s (2003) research with women in NSW and Victoria reported that indigenous women experience the most difficulty in locating accommodation, followed closely by sole parents, the vast majority of whom are women. More recently, Baldry et al (2008) outlined how a range of factors influence post-release experiences for women in NSW, identifying that Aboriginal women have experienced the fastest rate of increase of all groups of prisoners in NSW, that they have the highest rates of return to prison, the highest numbers of dependent children and higher rates of social and physical disadvantage (Baldry et al 2008: 3). Moreover, an integrated support service model was identified as a possible way forward to deal with a range of mutually reinforcing pressures and issues associated with housing, substance abuse, trauma and familial/community/cultural connectedness (Baldry et al 2008).

### 3.1.3 Homelessness: the key post-release issue

The link between offending, incarceration, homelessness and unstable housing is not exclusive to Australia. Baldry et al’s research (2008) overview highlights how research in the UK and the US has produced similar findings. For example, Ford’s (1991) research identified homelessness as the most significant of the multiplicity of problems suffered by petty offenders within the UK. Paylor (1995) and Wilkinson (1998) also found in separate research projects that at the time of arrest at least half of women were homeless or without secure housing, and that this proportion remained high post-release.

Homelessness understood as rooflessness, insecure or poor quality housing is also connected to an increased likelihood of re-offending and re-incarceration. Transitional accommodation is disruptive and unreliable and can increase both individual and family vulnerability. This was highlighted in Baldry et al’s (2006: 24) report on NSW and Victorian prisoners, where 59 per cent of those who moved more than 2 times or more were returned to prison approximately 9 months after release.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between housing and successful integration and desistance from offending behaviour is well established. Moreover, awareness of the importance of appropriate, stable housing for women is also recognised. For example, Meehan’s research (2002: 7) found that ex-prisoners who are re-incarcerated identified unsuitable housing as a major factor in their unsuccessful transition to life outside. In Victoria, Carnaby’s (1998) study that included women ex-prisoners found that 80 per cent of the female participants identified secure and appropriate housing was a significant factor in precluding their re-offending (Carnaby 1998: 57). For women, in particular, housing is a primary concern because it is closely linked to their ability or otherwise to reconnect with their family and their children in particular.

Internationally, studies such as Wilkinson’s work in the UK (1988) have highlighted the link between lack of housing and re-incarceration. Willis (2004) has also reported on the links between
homelessness and offending with the experience of homelessness contributing to an increased likelihood of being imprisoned and/or re-imprisoned. Wright-Howie’s (2008) international review of responses homelessness demonstrates the commonality of the higher rates of homelessness among ex-prisoners around the world, particularly in nations similar to Australia such as the US but also in nations such as Finland.

Australian findings resonate with this. Eileen Baldry’s collaborative work, in particular, has dominated this under-researched field. Baldry et al (2003) confirm that those who are unable to obtain stable housing are more likely to be re-incarcerated (see also Baldry & Maplestone 2005). In 2003 Baldry and her colleagues reported that 49% of women were homeless on release and 30% of those who were homeless were re-incarcerated within months (Baldry et al 2003: 11). Her more recent research (Baldry et al 2008: 10) has again identified that attending to housing and welfare issues is critical, as there are strong links between homelessness and re-offending, while access to stable housing is strongly correlated with desistance from offending. In Victoria, research findings from the Bridging the Gap evaluation echoed Baldry et al’s conclusions, finding that 77 per cent of participants who had no access to stable accommodation were likely to re-offend (MCREU 2003: 99).

Housing is predominant within the national and international literature as the central catalyst for survival and ‘success’ post-release—where survival and ‘success’ can be understood to involve women remaining out of prison and maintaining their obligations and lives with or without the assistance of support agencies (Goswami & Schervish 2002). Housing is a consistent factor that directly influences the post release experience—financially, in terms of health and well being, in relation to employment and re-offending and in terms of the ability for women to access and maintain informal and formal support networks. Housing is consistently recognised as the critical factor towards women gaining independence post release (Baldry et al 2008). Thompson and Chudiak (2009) argue that secure and safe accommodation for many women is the primary and most essential need. More often than not securing accommodation post-release creates a platform of security that then enables other issues to be addressed such as a sense of community connection, and self esteem, family reunification, and employment and education’. The identification of the importance of secure accommodation is shared by women themselves, as demonstrated in the recent Bridging the Gap evaluation where 90 per cent of participants identified accommodation as a priority need and the primary post release goal (MCREU 2003: 43). Housing, however, is not simply a ‘bricks and mortar’ issue. There are a number of key aspects related to the type and the stability of the housing that are also critical.

Accessing housing

In a recent Victorian study one participant described the housing market for marginalised community members as a “housing race”, where service agencies are effectively competing to win the limited places that cannot accommodate the numbers in need. (Melbourne Criminology Research and Evaluation Unit, 2003: 67). As Graham & Shinkfield (2006) note, given the limited financial resources of former prisoners secure accommodation and private housing are beyond their means (in addition to being extremely difficult to secure independently post-release) and the majority are reliant upon service organisations to assist. However, accessing priority public housing is not always achievable and this can further exacerbate social disadvantage (Graffam & Shinkfield 2006). As Ogilvie’s Victorian research indicated, numerous difficulties exist in relation to obtaining public housing, including: prisoners are not identified as homeless in prison, despite periods of homelessness before imprisonment; prisoners are often taken off waiting lists for public housing while incarcerated; and,
prisoners are unable to apply for public housing in advance as precise release dates may be unknown (Ogilvie 2001; Meehan 2002).

While housing should be associated with independence, poor access to housing tends to extend women’s reliance on others. As Carnaby’s (1998) research in Victorian prisons identified, women articulated their feelings of powerlessness in organising housing for themselves whilst in prison and their reliance on community workers to do it for them. Similarly, Hinton’s research of ex-prisoner accommodation provision in Tasmania found that former prisoners are not given adequate opportunity to be actively involved, nor recognised as having the skills or desire to actively participate in service planning and delivery (Hinton 2004). However, accessing the rental market independently is close to impossible for women moving from prison to the community. As Randell and Brown (1999 in Atkinson et al 2007) noted, the ongoing (long-term) impacts of experience of physical or sexual abuse, alcohol or drug misuse, mental health problems, and contact with criminal justice system (in Atkinson et al 2007: 9) are issues that continue to plague ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and can result in women exhibiting behaviour which will reduce their likelihood of securing appropriate accommodation. Accessing housing in a timely way is also critical as the first few months of release are repeatedly identified as the most vulnerable time where an individuals’ likelihood to survive and to avoid re-incarceration is determined (Ward 2001).

Secure tenancy

Stable and supportive housing has been repeatedly identified as being positively associated with remaining out of prison and increased social integration (see Baldry et al 2003). However, it remains out of reach for many. The impact of unstable and transitory housing is repeatedly demonstrated within the research (Meehan 2002; Hinton 2004). Baldry et al’s (2006) research in Victoria and NSW found that ‘moving often’ is significantly associated with the deterioration in participants’ circumstances, in particular returning to prison. It is clear that securing mid- to long-term accommodation is the ideal however there are significant barriers to ex-prisoners accessing long term housing.

Finding secure, stable accommodation is one of the most significant challenges facing former prisoners. In Carlisle’s (1996) British study it was found that although many prisoners had been inadequately housed before going to prison, the great majority wanted to retain their original homes. On release, however, less than half were able to return to their previous home (Carlisle 1996: 1). Similarly, in Victoria recent research found that for the duration of the study only 30 per cent of participants were able to retain the same housing (MCREU 2003: 77). This same research identified that transitional housing was a common experience for prisoners and that in many ways imprisonment is simply a break in (or, perhaps an extension of) the cycle of transitory accommodation (MCREU 2003). Researchers from Melbourne University noted that in the year prior to imprisonment, participants had changed their accommodation an average of 2.3 times, that one in ten had changed their accommodation five or more times and that this story continued post-release, with all participants moving twice on average in the first six months, and one in eight moving five times or more (MCREU 2003: 77).

Baldry & Maplestone’s (2005) work has highlighted the high levels of transitoriness amongst women prisoners and ex-prisoners and noted that the contributing factors that sustain the specific nature of these patterns are particular to sub groups within the population, for example the experiences and
influences on Indigenous women’s precarious housing are unique and require specialised intervention efforts.

Quality of housing

In addition to securing consistent housing, the type of housing is also critical. Many researchers have noted that given the challenges in finding accommodation detailed above, there is a lack of variety in the housing options for ex-prisoners who are limited in their ability to access the mainstream or private rental market and as a consequence post-release housing, particularly early transitional housing immediately upon release, is often hostel-type accommodation (Meehan 2002). This situation is not unique to Victoria or Australia, research in the UK reported similar problems in rehousing prisoners including the reliance on hostels when prisoners are released (Carlisle 1998). Hostels, crisis accommodation and transient hotels are repeatedly identified as undesirable, for released prisoners who may be exposed to substance abuse and other criminal activity, with the immediate social network being those with a similar background (Graffam & Shinkfield 2006; Rowe 2002). Further, sending ex-prisoners to hostels, while well intentioned, may in fact contribute towards continuing a labelling process associated with institutionalisation and state-dependency (Baldry et al 2003).

Recognising the importance of the type of housing is driven not only by research findings focused on the quantitative connection between housing type and recidivism post release, it also comes directly from women in the few research projects that asked women to articulate their needs. Carnaby’s (1998) research found that women receiving referrals to refuges, which were experienced as “similar to jail” and this was reported as a key deterrent for women who took pains to avoid their transfer and refused to cooperate with staff when they were transitioned there. Her research found that 80% of women identified appropriate accommodation as vitally important to them (Carnaby 1998: 57) and that women consistently reported their desire to live independently (77%) and to be relocated “away from the temptation of drugs and alcohol upon release” (1998: 60). Similarly Carlise’s UK research found that few ex-prisoners want to live in a hostel and this was often due to women’s recognition that many ex-offenders move to hostels and that are “full of other ex-offenders, whom they wish to avoid…this was expressed in terms of ‘keeping out of trouble’ and included a wish to refrain from using drugs” (Carlisle 1996: 3). Another major driver for women to have secure, independent housing was the imperative to be reunited with children and women recognised the need for specific accommodation needs because of this (Carnaby 1998). Recent recommendations from Baldry et al (2008) have emphasised the importance of accommodation for women in the process of regaining custody of their children and those living with their children.

Maintaining tenancy

As noted above mid- to long-term tenancy options are the ideal. However, difficulties maintaining tenancy is a critical issue that has arisen within the literature. For those who do access public housing or other forms of transitional housing there remain a number of challenges to remaining in the accommodation. In the UK, Carlisle (1996) identified three factors as instrumental in determining whether ex-prisoners succeeded in retaining their homes: the quality of family relationships, the availability of a housing benefit, and financial status. Thus there are social, emotional and material impacts on the maintenance of tenancy.
Within the broader housing literature, Hazel & Johnston (2005) have identified that access to stable housing can have positive flow on effects on rates of offending, education, employment, health, family functioning, and community-connectedness. Such findings reaffirm the importance of housing within the process of post-release support and integration. As Baldry et al (2008) have argued, there is a need to recognise that housing should be part of an holistic approach to support, where the focus should not merely be on the provision of accommodation but to address “the wide range of difficulties faced by prisoners” (Baldry et al 2008: 72). They concluded that the most effective service model should involve a lead agency where there is a house manager and a case management service for the client group, who work collaboratively with 4-5 other key agencies, linking with other specific services as appropriate. Baldry et al (2008) refer to this model as a “wrap-around” support service. Thompson and Chudiak (2008: 4) characterise “wrap-around” support in the context of Melbourne Citymission’s suite of Victoria’s support programs and services as “a holistic and culturally sensitive plan for each individual that draws on a coordinated continuum of services located within a community”. While there is currently limited research and evaluation of service models operating in this way in Australia, Baldry et al’s (2008) recent research suggests that currently in Victoria and NSW there is a need to improve agency co-ordination in addressing the multiple issues faced by women release into the community (Baldry et al 2008: 70).

3.1.4 Other barriers to stable housing

As discussed above, the research maintains the centrality of housing to the success of women’s re-entry to the community yet there are a myriad of difficulties associated with securing stable living arrangements in the period following release. Below, we list further challenges and risks associated with the release period that further compound social disadvantage and compromise access to housing.

Financial Instability

Following incarceration women and men returning to the community face significant financial challenges. In Victoria, released prisoners can access a Crisis payment comprising half the amount of a normal Newstart or Disability Support payment (or around $226) immediately on release. They will receive the other half a week later. Many are known to supplement formal with informal systems of support (from hand outs from NGOs to ‘loans’ from friends and family to committing crimes to make money) (see Graffam & Shinkfield 2006). As Olgivie (2001: 2) explains, there are many immediate financial burdens to be met upon release including but not limited to setting up housing from “the cost of four weeks bond, [plus] one months rent up front… [and the costs associated with] connecting the electricity and the phone”.

Health Issues

Hartwell has (2001) identified that health problems, particularly mental health problems, further contribute to the existing barriers to secure housing. Finding secure housing is a challenge for anyone experiencing mental illness, including former prisoners, and the inability to access a stable living environment has further negative impacts on women’s physical and mental well being. Hammet et al (2001) identified this in their research, finding that unstable and unsafe housing is more disruptive to medication adherence and continuation of care for those with physical and mental health problems.
Being unwell—whether it involves physical or mental instability and/or addiction—presents significant difficulties for obtaining and sustaining housing once released into the community (Tye & Mullen 2006). In the Victorian Women Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation report, produced by the Department of Human Services in Victoria (2001), it was noted that addressing women’s physical and mental health “was not possible without attention being paid to broader needs” particularly in relation to stable accommodation (DHS 2001: 2). This is evidenced by research in the past decade in Victoria. For example Graffam & Shinkfield (2006: 11) report that only half of 173 participants in the Bridging the Gap program with alcohol or drug related problems had a stable housing situation six months after their release and a third had moved three or more times over the same time period. Davies and Cook’s (1998) research into women’s post release mortality found that of the 90 per cent who died shortly after release, the majority died from drug overdoses and had no fixed address at the time of death.

Employment

Employment is also an integral component of integration, as studies in Australian and internationally have emphasised (see Peacock 2008; Hamlyn & Lewis 2000; Home Office 2002; McPherson 2007). As Peacock has argued, “employment is recognised as a way to enhance and facilitate resettlement by offering a way in which a person can gain, for example, self respect, confidence, and skills, allowing them in theory to become full participating citizens” (Peacock 2008: 308). As she acknowledges, however, the flip side of this—unemployment—can ensure that women seeking to reintegrate remain effectively ‘outside’ the community as non-tax payers, dependent on welfare and/or the illegal cash economy (Peacock 2008). The lack of stable or appropriate housing presents a significant barrier to the prospect of gaining and maintaining employment.

Access to Positive Support Networks

Social isolation is frequently reported as a significant hardship for ex-prisoners (Meehan 2002; Baldry et al 2006, 2008). Indeed, it has been noted that although many ex-prisoners report living with family upon release, social isolation is a common core experience of many ex inmates accentuated by homelessness, unstable or unsuitable housing (Baldry et al 2003, Graffam & Shinkfield 2006). Support networks can be formal and informal and range from family and friends, to support groups, to NGO and state-run organisations that provide specific types of care. There are two key groups to consider here, the family and formalised funded support programs.

Family

Family plays a complex role in the lives of women who are released from prison. Many researchers have noted that the family has the potential to be the most reliable source of support, however, this is not always the case and, indeed, in some cases family connections can impact negatively on the post-release process and outcome. Supportive family and friends have been identified as playing a central role in successful integration, particularly regarding accommodation assistance. Many former prisoners live with family (Nelson et al 1999; Visher et al 2004).

It is important to note that incarceration can be both a product and a cause of family breakdown, particularly when women are imprisoned when they are sole parents and/or the sole carer for the family and their absence results in family dislocation. Women in Victoria most frequently cite living with their family as their first post release option (40%) despite the widely known reality that that
family relationships have often broken down considerably due to incarceration (MCREU 2003). It is difficult, however, to generalise given that many factors impact here including the length of incarceration, where family is located and the strength of the family network prior to imprisonment. Indeed, Tudball et al’s (2000) found that 73 per cent of prisoners sentenced to two years or less expected to return home to live with their children and families or have contact with their children but not live with them.

Women’s ability to reconnect with children post-release has critical impacts on post-release experiences. For example, Carnaby (1998) has argued that it is essential that women are reunited immediately following release with their children. For many women re-establishing their role as carers for their children is a priority upon release (Graffam & Shinkfield 2006) and accessing stable accommodation is vital to this process (Ogilvie, 2001). Australian and Victorian research has found that lack of accommodation is a major barrier to extricating children from care (Graffam & Shinkfield 2006; Woodward 2003). Appropriate accommodation is essential to successfully regain custody (Baldry et al 2008) and it has been noted that it is during this process of trying to arrange the return of children in the first few months post-release that women are at risk of homelessness and re-offending (Baldry et al 2008). Moreover it is the inability to secure custody or access to children that can exacerbate high risk behaviours related to drug and alcohol abuse that can lead to harm and premature death (Davies & Cook 1999). Clearly for women there is a vital relationship between the processes of securing accommodation and reconnecting with family. Successes and failures in either of these areas can have profound impacts on women’s prospects for integration, recovery and survival in the immediate post-release period.

Formalised support: models

It has been identified by researchers in Australia (Baldry & Borzycki 2005; Cameron 2003; Ogilvie 2001; Ward 2001, 2002; Davies & Cook 1999) and internationally (see British Social Exclusion Unit 2002; Carlisle 1996) that the provision of information and assistance pre-release is critical to the experience post-release. In the past, research in Victorian women’s prisons has highlighted incarcerated women’s lack of awareness of available services (see Carnaby 1998: 49). However over the past decade there have been government and non-government sector efforts to meet this need.

In 2004 the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders produced Getting Out and How to Survive It designed to prepare prisoners for release. However, while designed as a comprehensive information source it cannot deal in any specific detail with women’s unique needs and issues and remains accessible only to those with requisite literacy skills. Organisations that provide one-on-one support seek to recognise and meet the needs of individuals. Currently a range of organisations exist in the Victorian community for instance, groups such as Flat Out, Prison Ministries Network and Melbourne Citymission. All of these groups work within Victorian prisons in order to build relationships with women and to assist in the release and post-release period. However these groups operate differently in terms of the type and extent of support provided5, the approach to support and resettlement (see Raynor 2004) and all are limited by funding and resource constraints which results in these services being accessible to only a small percentage of the female prison population. While the provision of support in terms of design and implementation has long been the subject of debate and discussion (Ward 2001; Carnaby 1998), the key issue to note here is

5 This includes limits on eligibility to access the service- for example few agencies provide support specifically to women who are released from remand or to those who have served short sentences.
that generally women require support and assistance to find stable accommodation. Reports from Howie (2004) and Baldry & Maplestone (2005) have emphasised the ongoing lack of support - either informal (e.g., family support) or formal - for women exiting prison and seeking suitable accommodation as a significant factor contributing to ongoing instability and re-imprisonment.

### 3.1.5 Summary

Overwhelming the literature across Victoria, Australia and internationally indicates that safe, secure and stable housing is an important factor contributing to women’s imprisonment and to women’s further imprisonment post-release. Significantly, the research also indicates that concentrating exclusively on one ‘issue’ or ‘factor’ belies the complex interrelationship between the range of hardships that women may have (and continue to) experienced and how these need to be addressed simultaneously, often beginning with the critical need for appropriate housing. In the following section we move from the research literature to map key policy developments and approaches over the past decade relevant to this area to gain some insight into the general approaches and understandings adopted within the policy context.

### 3.2 The policy context

The post-release policy landscape in Australia and beyond is relatively new and less well developed compared to the attention paid to crime prevention and corrections policy over the proceeding few decades. Primarily recidivism has been the central focus fitting into the broader law and order agenda that has dominated corrections policy. The emergence and influence of frameworks from beyond the criminal justice area - primarily health and welfare models - has been a relatively recent development that has had some influence on policy agendas, though the focus on offending and reoffending has remained a constant and inescapable aspect of post-release policy development. Around the 1990s the harm reduction model had some impact upon drug treatment within prisons and post-release, while it is more recently that policy models relating to homelessness and other welfare concerns have begun to broaden, placing former prisoners on the agenda as a significant and highly vulnerable population in the community.

Post release initiatives across both Australian and international jurisdictions are constantly in transition (Borzycki 2005) and over the past few years we have witnessed a reinvigorated commitment to efficiency in correctional approaches that includes programming evaluations into the development of initiatives. Both internationally and nationally, interest in the provision of transitional support services burgeoned in the early sixties and continued through until the end of the 1970s. This era was characterised by a commitment to and belief in prisoner reform and rehabilitation. However, throughout the 1980s transitional support services suffered from the suspicion directed at rehabilitation efforts as the ‘nothing works’ ethos led to more narrowly defined justice responses and

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6 It should be noted that a range of terminology is used and that there are inconsistencies in usage of different terms. This report does not aim to canvass concerns regard terminology but we do wish to highlight that the terminology drawn upon to describe the post-release period and post release interventions varies and has been the subject of debate (for example Ward 2001). In the US community re-entry dominated program documentation in the past decade while resettlement and/or integration has been common in the UK (Ward 2001). More recently in the UK the terminology of through care and after care has emerged. This reflects the influence of a medicalised model, however despite the name through care programs and approaches remain firmly located within the criminal justice measures and surveillance practices (Ward 2001). In Australia, particularly in Victoria, transitional support is most commonly utilised in some case to refer specifically to the period after a sentence is complete, in some cases more broadly to all prison interventions particularly those aimed at reducing re-offending (Ward 2001: 3).
away from holistic consideration of prisoner needs (Ward 2001: 3). The 1990s saw yet another shift, particularly in nations such as the US, Britain and Australia, as imprisonment rates increased and more targeted research began to highlight the rates of re-offending and re-incarceration. Below we map key developments internationally before turning to focus on the national approach and the current policy frameworks operating within Victoria.

3.2.1 United States

Across the US the rising numbers of people incarcerated as well as rising rates of prisoners released to the community has led to a greater emphasis on post-release practices (Ward 2001). Where transitional support has traditionally operated within an individualised ‘needs-based’ framework, there has been a shift towards ‘whole of community responses’ (Travis 2000). There is no single policy that exists nationally for the US, these issues are state-based and vary between jurisdictions. There is limited evaluative material on any residential assistance programs or facilities. However, the National Institute of Justice has identified the problem of prisoner re-entry as one of the priority issues for US corrections policy (Travis, 2000).

Broadly speaking there have been two connected models that have emerged in the US: re-entry courts and re-entry partnerships (Travis, 1999). The re-entry courts effectively involve courts as case managers, who oversee and reward/punish the re-entry process (Ward 2001: 6). Linked to this is the connection, ‘partnerships’ with services within the community to meet individual and group needs. Within the community programs are funded by grants to address service provision and support for the short- to medium-term (Ward 2001).

The framework operating within the US has been identified as being firmly located within a criminal justice model, where the major focus is upon monitoring former prisoners (Petersilia 1999). With regards to support, the emphasis has been focused on employment services and vocational training (Ward 2001). The services, predominantly, are highly targeted according to carefully specified criminal justice risk criteria, whereby high-risk (i.e. those most likely to re-offend) individuals are the subject of most attention.

3.2.2 United Kingdom

Since the early 1990s the policy framework in within UK correctional services has undergone a significant overhaul. As part of this, offender resettlement and after care services have shifted to the core business of correctional authorities, as have sentence management and the delivery of custodial rehabilitation programs. The UK model of pre-release and/or resettlement facilities has focused on enabling prisoners to exit custody in a location close to their community of return, a process that actively encourages ‘community partnerships’ to engage local services and businesses to be involved in prisoner transition. (Ward 2001: 7). However these developments have not been without limitations. The UK framework remains within the corrections arm, rather than within the housing or welfare areas and thus the emphasis is focused on offending and recidivism. In addition, the commitment to transitional support services has been somewhat undermined by conflicting policies relating to broader prison management processes which do not always translate into a welfare-focused process of exiting prison (for example, limited notice regarding release dates, prisoner dislocation from their home locality). In 2008 it was reported that 78,000 prisoners over the past four years had been released without a permanent address (Sky News 2008).
More recently Lord Bradley’s report on people with mental health problems or learning disabilities in the Criminal Justice System has provoked a national response that is bringing together mental health and welfare frameworks together with the criminal justice priorities. Housing and homelessness are not at the fore of this discussion or agenda (see Ministry of Justice 2009).

Thus to date the UK approach has thus relied on prisoner self-referral and/or needs-based assessment by the allocated case manager to establish secure housing in the short term upon release (Ward 2001).

3.2.3 Australia

The two broad policy domains relevant to discussion of post-release policy are housing/homelessness approaches and the criminal justice agenda. In the past there has been limited overlap between these two, but more recently in Victoria there has been increasing recognition of the need for intersection between these policy domains.

Partly this has resulted from the departmental separation of responsibility for specific areas of criminal justice (policing, courts, corrections) and welfare provision (health, welfare, employment). Both within departments and across departments the sharing of information and the coordinated development of shared policy goals has been largely absent in Australia.

In their review of Australian policy in 2003, Baldry et al (2003) noted that while correctional services are a state responsibility, matters pertaining to ex-prisoner re-entry to the community involve many government departments and programs, at both the state and federal level. Thus while in NSW only 0.3% of the budget is targeted directly to community based post-release programs, this does not reflect the true resources directed towards related programs as many additional programs and funding initiatives feed into this area (Baldry et al 2008).

With regards to housing in Australia the bulk of housing services are provided by SAAP: the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. This is a nationally co-ordinated program which aims to assist those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through a range of support and transitional supported accommodation services including, but not exclusive to or focused upon, former prisoners (Hinton 2004; AIHW 2006). Different departments and agencies hold responsibility for the coordination of SAAP within different states and territories, reflecting the various portfolio compositions that operate across Australian jurisdictions. In Tasmania, for example, SAAP is based in the Child and Family Services Division which is located within the Department of Health and Human Services (Hinton 2004). The aims of this service include the provision of a mix of crisis and emergency accommodation, medium term accommodation, transitional support, information and referral services for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Thus the ambit of this program can include former prisoners, but it is not exclusively focused on this group.

It is also worth noting that the Federal Government has made commitments since 2007 to the reduction of homelessness and developing a new approach to the problem. In discussions of factors causing homelessness and vulnerable groups, leaving prison is identified as one of a number of important “life transitions” that can heighten an individual’s vulnerability to homelessness (FACSIA 2008: 24). There is potential within this federal climate for renewed and re-visioned approaches to post-release support and the role of housing for the immediate and long-term.
With regards to policy directions from Corrections and Justice-focused departments in the past decade, many Australian jurisdictions have shifted towards residential programs to provide community-based supervision of sentenced prisoners in the pre-parole phase. Many have also moved towards intensive community-based supervision aimed towards accelerating the movement of prisoners into the community, the success of this approach in integrating prisoners and/or reducing recidivism and re-imprisonment remains questionable (Ward 2001, Baldry et al 2008). There is no evidence, however, of a systematic, planned approach to transitional support. Rather there exist specific initiatives developed in the absence of a broader conceptual framework (Ward 2001). As a consequence integration programs tend to be funded haphazardly across Australia; primarily via short term project based approaches that vary considerably in their scope, aim, impact and intention (Peacock, 2008: 308). Primarily, however, these approaches are funded within the broader emphasis on reducing re-offending and while they may be couched in the language of the provision of welfare or health-oriented services, offending and imprisonment rates remain central to outcome-driven evaluations. It is clear that governments still have no reliable data on ex-prisoners housing experiences or the relationship between housing and recidivism (Baldry et al 2008). The focus, however, remains predominantly on the connection between transitional support and reduced recidivism.

The diagram below (Figure 1) is indicative of the dominant policy focus, where there is some overlap where ex-prisoners housing needs are addressed. Critically, what is absent from this diagram is the even small margin of attention directed towards sub-groups within the ex-prisoner population.

There have been a number of comprehensive reports that detail the development of post release services and integration programs and policies across Australia (see Baldry et al 2008; MCREU 2003).

In Western Australia a state homelessness strategy was developed in 2001 and one of primary issues was assisting people exiting the justice system. There were significant funds for general and additional public housing for those leaving prison including-$5.5 million allocated for 65...
accommodation to be used for units for prisoners on release and people with mental health problems.

In South Australia, a social inclusion unit within the Department of Premier and cabinet was established in 2002 and this Unit made a commitment to work towards halving the number of homeless people during the lifetime of the government, a unique (and ambitious) goal. This pre-dated the federal government’s homeless reduction commitments that began in 2007.

In New South Wales there is no comprehensive policy response to housing for ex-prisoners. However, Housing NSW (2009) has identified that prisoners, forensic detainees, ex-prisoners and people on remand have rights with regards to public housing including being able to retain tenancy if they are imprisoned for less than three months and to remain on the wait-list for housing during their period of imprisonment (on the proviso that they identify their status as an ex-prisoner).

Victoria has been identified as the most advanced state in Australia based on its comprehensive and holistic responses to post release issues (Hinton 2004). We examine the key developments in more detail below.

2.2.4 Victoria

The policy model history in Victoria in relation to post release support has been dominated by criminal justice models focused primarily on the reduction of reoffending with other frameworks such as medicalised treatment models (for example, drug addiction treatment) weaved into the framework at different points in time. There has not been a single consistent model over the past decade, rather post release support is primarily funded by short-term funding models (often with pilot schemes) that tend not to aim to meet the needs of the prison population as a whole, but small numbers of targeted sections of the population.

Until the early 1990s there was little overt recognition of specific objectives and/or desired outcomes related to transitional support services in Victoria. At best, the commitment to housing and post-release care was one of many detailed issues that required attention. For example, as Ward (2001) explains, the Correctional Policy and Management Standards (1995) specified a multitude of outcome statements that inform the delivery of Victorian prison services, which detailed requirements for the provision of transitional support which were almost identical for all prisons and did not reflect in any meaningful way the diverse needs of a disparate prisoner population. At this time commitments were heavily focused on preparing prisoners for release (Ward 2001: 26).

Bridging the Gap

In 2000 the Department of Justice announce the Bridging the Gap initiative, which was designed to deliver intensive transitional support and drug treatment services to people exiting custody. This was a framework that bridged a criminal justice-recidivism approach with a health-focused addiction treatment model. Consistent with the short-term funding models adopted historically and to the present day, this was established through a non-recurrent funding injection of $3.5 million over two years to pilot a range of related service models and to reach approximately 14 per cent of all sentenced discharges from Victorian prisons. The five services funded through this initiative had a
specific and targeted client base\(^7\). While the policy focused on enhancing the support to people exiting prison in order to reduce offending (2000) it also sought to work towards a more integrated, cross-departmental approach to offender rehabilitation and integration. A key outcome measure was the measurement of reoffending. A major finding of the program evaluation was the importance of the provision of long term support (MCREU 2003: 110).

A 2001 review by Corrections Victoria (2001) identified several “compelling arguments in favour of an enhanced commitment to transitional support services in Victoria” and these focused on the need to ease prisoners’ return to community, to reduce the risks of the transitional phase and to reduce re-offending (Ward 2001: 36).

**Better Pathways**

A significant development in Victoria was the introduction of the Better Pathways initiative in 2005, to run from June 2005 until June 2009. This strategy was developed specifically to address the increased rates of women’s imprisonment (DoJ 2005). The focus was on developing an integrated response to women’s offending and reoffending.

This initiative involved a range of programs and services being funded all within the broader umbrella of working towards a reduction in women’s offending, imprisonment, re-offending and victimisation. Thus it was not exclusively addressing post release processes and included a significant redevelopment of the women’s correctional facilities in Victoria.

The underlying approach of the **Better Pathways** strategy was clear in the articulation of the key concern which was the increase in women’s imprisonment in Victoria and the key indicators of success, i.e. reducing the number of women who enter prison custody and the number of women who re-offend.

The formal evaluation of the strategy due in late 2009 will focus on the impact of the 25 initiatives that are included in the *Reducing Women’s Imprisonment Action Plan* and will address whether the action plan has had an impact on female prisoner numbers, the identification of effectiveness in working with women offenders. This initiative outlined 28 project deliverables only one of which specifically identified housing as an issue, though this involved the provision of transitional housing for women on the CREDIT/Bail Support program (DoJ 2005: 36).

There has also been a shift within Correctional Services in Victoria. According to CV there is a Pre-Release Planning Process which begins six to eight weeks prior to the discharge date and involves the prisoner sitting down with a nominated officer to address: identification; accommodation; financial/Centrelink issues; employment; legal matters; drug and alcohol issues; medical issues; Community Correctional Services (CCS); and, transport (CV 2009). However, the process of delivering these commitments and the substance of the delivery remains largely unknown.

**Housing**

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\(^7\) The five groups were: ASCO: Older males with few family or social supports and older males with mental health issues (n=100); Brosnan Centre Younger males, aged 17-25 years (n=100); Melbourne Citymission Females (n=70); VACRO Older males with dependent children (n=160); Westernport Drug and Alcohol Service: Indo-Chinese and other prisoners returning to the Dandenong/Frankston area (n=70).
Over the past two decades the Department of Human Services (Wright-Howie 2004) has also come to play a role within the Victorian Homelessness Strategy in attending to issues faced by former prisoners based on the recognition that many of those who leave prison are without family or community support and have limited access to both housing and post release support services. Housing former prisoners comprises a targeted area within the Department of Human Services strategy (Wright-Howie 2004). The discrimination experienced by ex-prisoners is noted as a major barrier to accessing both housing and employment, and in order to attend to this and prevent the identified consequences, early intervention and efficient planning and service co-ordination is recognized as critical when assisting people exiting prison.

**Other Transitional Support Services**

In addition to, and in collaboration with, the government-led services a range of other organisations provide transitional support to prisoners. Unlike the current policy framework, many of these work within the emergency and transitional housing sector and thus approach the issue with different goals and emphases, most often from a welfare perspective. As outlined in Figure 1 (p23) these services include ex-prisoners within their cohort due to the fact that the majority of current and former prisoners are already marginalised, vulnerable and/or homeless people. Some, such as the Melbourne Citymission’s Supporting Women Exiting Prison (SWEP) program, are funded from charitable trusts and other private sources. Other services include more generic health, legal and family support services that have chosen to adopt a particular focus on prisoners and/or their families (see Ward 2001). As a consequence the full range of services that exist to meet exiting prisoner’s support remains difficult to map.

The table below highlights selected key policy developments over time to illustrate the ongoing reliance on the prevention of recidivism as a major framework for delivering post-release support programmes and services.

**Table 1: Key dates in Victoria post-release developments**

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<th>1960’S/1970’S:</th>
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<td>Transitional support emerges</td>
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<th>1980’S:</th>
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<td>‘Nothing works’ ethos takes hold and support is rejected. This was based heavily on the assumption that criminals cannot be rehabilitated and therefore services and policy responses become limited. Corrections Act 1986 &amp; Corrections Regulations 1988 do not mention transitional support.</td>
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<th>1990’S</th>
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<tr>
<td>Major restructuring of the Transitional housing sector in Victoria. Specific services begin to emerge: eg Melbourne Citymission transitional accommodation program. This included private trust fund supporting the establishment of SWEP for an initial period of three years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Human Services launches ‘Victorian Homelessness Strategy.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renewed focus on ‘support’ due to overcrowding in prisons and increased recidivism, substance abuse issues and high unemployment (but no mention of transitional support with the Department of Justice Annual Report).</td>
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<td>Bridging the Gap two-year initiative is announced. At the time it is the largest and longest running formal post</td>
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Office of Correctional Services Commissioner publishes a framework for reducing re-offending based on differentiated case management.

2001

Corrections Victoria published a report acknowledging that "the current Victorian transitional support service framework is extremely underdeveloped" and that the correctional system has an obligation to provide transitional support (Ward 2001: 1)

Post-release appears within the homelessness-prevention framework, with the Victorian Homelessness Strategy Ministerial Advisory Committee identifying that no data was being collected regarding prisoners and their housing status or risk of homelessness upon release.

2002

HOUSING PATHWAYS PROGRAM: Additional housing is made available in Victoria for released prisoners with 61 dedicated transitional housing properties being established. This program is directed at former prisoners who do not have access to or are supported by a prisoner support service or agency.

2005

Better Pathways is launched.

2006

The Department of Human Services Victoria recognizes that a coordinated service response is required at a central and regional level.

2008

The Victorian government launches its reinvigorated housing strategy Open Doors, which aims to provide area-based service coordination for timely and effective access to social housing services for people seeking assistance. Open Doors will replace the Better Pathways program that is phased out in 2009
3.3 The Cairnlea Housing & Support Model

During 2001-02, planning for the Cairnlea Housing and Support Model was initiated. It was conceived at a time where policy makers and government departments, including Corrections Victoria, were concentrating on the development of transitional support frameworks. At this time the connection between the provision of post-release support, the prevention of homelessness and the reduction of recidivism was also formally recognised within the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, which included funding for a number of transitional programs for men and women being released from Victorian Prisons (including Link Up for men and the Women’s Integrated Support Program for Women) (see DHS 2002).

The model was developed by Melbourne Citymission in collaboration with the Victorian Women’s Housing Association and the YWCA. At the time post-release transitional support for women was generally based on models that provided housing and support for up twelve months. There were a number of concerns with the existing programs in place which included:

- Intergenerational disadvantage and homelessness are experienced at significant rates within the population of women who have been incarcerated in Victoria. A long-term commitment, beyond twelve months, is required for women to successfully develop appropriate living and social skills to function independently.
- The lack of long term, safe, secure and affordable housing options in appropriate locations with accessibility to support presented a key concern. It was recognised that Public Housing is not always conducive to positive outcomes within this population in that it tended to pose challenges for women seeking to desist from crime.

The model that was developed to meet these concerns is described below.

**Aims & Philosophy**

The aim of the program was to provide safe, stable, and affordable long term housing with access to support, as needed, for women who have exited prison. The project aimed to:

1. Improve transitional experience
2. Facilitate integration and social inclusion
3. Address issues of social stigma
4. Reduce risk of long term homelessness
5. Enhance independent living skills
6. Prevent/delay the return of women to custody
7. Provide a pathway for women out of the homelessness service system
8. Offer a sense of community for the women

**Governance and partnerships**

The project was designed primarily as an alliance between Melbourne Citymission with the Victorian Women’s Housing Association. The roles were clearly divided, where Melbourne Citymission (exclusively) was responsible for tenant selection and support, while VWHA were responsible for
overseeing the capital works. It should be noted that YWCA was responsible for tenancy management from 2006-2008, at which point tenancy management was taken on by Women’s Housing Limited. In 2009 the management of tenancy has returned to VWHA.

It was intended that agreements would be drawn up between the partners; in particular protocols between Melbourne Citymission and YWCA outlining respective roles and responsibilities and policies and processes around tenancy management and support issues.

**Funding**

The Office of Housing (OoH) provided funding ($1.1 million) via the Social Housing Innovations Project (SHIP) to construct 6 units in the Estate in Deer Park. A further $300,000 was provided via Melbourne Citymission’s John Singleton Trust and JT Reid to assist with the capital works and to fund the support component of the program. Following the building of the houses, the annual costs to enable the support component of the program ran at a cost of approximately $10,000 per annum.

**Design of the Model**

The Cairnlea model comprised of six housing properties for women who have experienced incarceration and who have demonstrated the ability to maintain tenancy post-release.

- **Location**

  The properties were located in a mixed housing estate in the outer Western suburbs of Melbourne. This is an area where high density public housing did not (and does not) exist and where public transport and amenities were accessible though limited at the time the project was established. In the years since the project was first implemented public transport and local amenities have begun to increase, reflecting the burgeoning population and housing growth in the area.

- **Housing & support standards**

  The housing and support offered by this model was designed to be consistent with the National Community Housing Standards (2003) (NCHF 2003).

  Under this model, residents pay rent at a maximum of 25 per cent of their income. This is collected and administered by the Victorian Women’s Housing. These funds enable ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the properties.

- **Support workers**

  The program was designed to offer long term support (as needed) for residents of the houses. Support workers were not located on site. Rather, the role

  This role was variously described within and across a range of documents as ‘incidental’, ‘lower level’, ‘ongoing’ with little qualification of the terminology. However, the most recent description broadly identified that support workers assist residents in times of crisis, support their reintegration into the community and refer women to appropriate agencies as required.

  The project commenced with 1EFT support worker in place, but this was reduced to .1EFT by Melbourne Citymission based on their assessment of the needs of the residents.
• Eligibility & selection

The original documentation of the Cairnlea Model outlined a long-term housing and support model for women who have been out of prison for six to twelve months (NB different post-release time criteria were articulated in the documents produced).

The model was based on a set of criteria for potential residents. This criteria required women to be identified as having sufficient living skills to be able to manage a tenancy, such that only lower level and intermittent support would be necessary

*Implementation*

The Units were completed August 2006 and the first group of tenants moved in immediately. This is the first report and assessment of the implementation of the model.
4.0 METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the Cairnlea Model was designed to document the process of implementation from the perspective of support workers, residents and members of the residents’ informal support network. As a pilot project involving six houses and seven residents over three years, the conclusions from this evaluation seek to identify issues and findings and are not designed as conclusive determinations of the program as a success or otherwise. Rather the aim of the evaluation, this report and the research design was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the translation of the model from design to implementation and to determine, based on the findings, the benefits, challenges, limits of the Cairnlea Model- findings to be taken into consideration for the future expansion and implementation of this approach to long term post-release housing and support processes both in Victoria and beyond.

Research Design

Given the small numbers involved and the focus of the evaluation, the research was designed as a qualitative study. It drew upon the rich history of qualitative research involving semi-structured interviews (see May 2001; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for a more detailed and in-depth picture of processes and practices than any other technique of data collection could offer (such as survey data). An interview schedule was developed to guide the major areas to address during the interview, whilst also allowing for flexibility during the interview to seek clarification or elaboration on responses (May 2001; Noaks & Wincup 2004; Fontana & Frey 2000).

The sample consisted of five of the current residents (Group 1), one nominated member of each women’s identified circle of support (Group 2) and three Melbourne Citymission support workers (Group 3). The inclusion of Group Two, which comprised of a social or familial support person nominated by each resident was engaged as a way to enrich the analysis of the impact and experience of the Cairnlea Model beyond the purview of the direct participants- i.e. the perspective of residents and support workers (see Galaskiewicz & Wasserman 1994 for a discussion of social network approaches to research). The interview questions were designed to ascertain the resident’s housing and non-housing outcomes since accessing the housing and support model, from the perspectives of residents, their support network and from the perspective of support workers. The interview questions also sought to document the process and experience of implementation of the Cairnlea Model from the perspective of all participants. Melbourne Citymission functioned as ‘gatekeepers’ through coordinating the communication of the research and the scheduling of interviews with residents at Cairnlea. However, Melbourne Citymission support workers were not present at the time interviews were conducted.

Ethics

The research strategy was subject to the approval of the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (Ref: CF09/0967-2009000463). The Melbourne Citymission Ethics Board provided secondary ethics clearance for the research. The key ethical concerns in the design and implementation of this research related to ensuring the interviews were conducted with informed consent and with an undertaking to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants. This is reflected in the use of pseudonyms for all participants in the reporting of the data.

The research

In total 12 semi-structured interviews took place and all averaged a duration of one hour. Of the twelve, 5 were residents (Group 1), four were nominated members of women’s support network (Group 2) and three were Melbourne Citymission support workers (Group 3). It should be noted that one support worker was nominated as a support person by a resident. She was interviewed both in relation to her experience as a support worker and in her capacity as an important acquaintance of one resident. On average the interviews were an hour in length and were undertaken at the participants’ home, workplace or an agreed public
location. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The analysis of the interview material involved thematic coding of the transcripts using NVivo computer software.
5.0 FINDINGS

The findings of this report are organised in two parts:

1. Critical examination of the design and implementation of the Cairnlea Model.

2. Experience, outcomes and impact of the ‘Cairnlea Model’

The recommendations arising from these findings are detailed in the subsequent section.

5.1 Design & implementation of the Cairnlea Model

Six women were selected to be part of the Cairnlea Model housing and support initiative and became tenants of houses finished only days or weeks before they moved in, located in the newly developed outer Melbourne suburb of Cairnlea. All moved in to their two storey three-bedroom town houses over August and October in 2006. The women chosen ranged in age from 21 and 50. Their living arrangements varied- only two of the seven women who have lived in the Cairnlea houses moved in alone. One tenant moved in with her partner, another with her brother, and three women moved in with children (and in one case, a grandchild). Three of the six were employed at the time they moved in and all six were in transitional housing or rental accommodation before they moved in. All those interviewed identified that at the time they were selected to be tenants of these houses their circumstances were tenuous and/or unsustainable. The needs of each of the women differed substantially reflecting varying health and well being issues (including drug dependence and mental health issues) and different histories of contact with the criminal justice system.

However while there was much diversity amongst the group five of the six tenants were from an Anglo-Celtic, English-speaking background, the sixth was a Maori woman with New Zealand citizenship.

By mid-2009, when the research was conducted, all of the women residing in the Cairnlea homes were maintaining their lifestyles, were working towards self-sufficiency and were leading relatively stable lives- no longer characterised by precarious housing, instability or the chaos associated with drug use and/or offending. While all six had moved into these brand new homes with no possessions or very few, the houses were all well equipped and well maintained (this is a general observation as guests in the homes- we must note that as researchers we did not conduct any formal review of maintenance of the homes). Of the six women currently residing in the Cairnlea homes, two are working full time. While another participant spoke of potentially completing a computing course and looking to find work in the future, it is clear that her options for employment and for ongoing development are limited by ongoing challenges related to drug use and health concerns. The five women interviewed all expressed a desire to continue on their current path, acknowledging that while the temptations and pressures of the past have not disappeared (for example, the desire to contact past acquaintances or to use drugs) but continue to be managed day by day.

More details regarding the group come to the fore in the findings below. However, at the outset this introduction is an important reminder that while these findings are focused on the implementation of a housing and support model, it is women’s lives and the potential opportunities and stability created in part through access to this service that is central to this discussion and it is women’s stories and their concerns and opinions that are critical to assessing the outcomes and impact of this innovative housing and support model.

"Look... it was just really, really nice. Like we didn’t have anything [just]... old table and chairs. [It was ] finished on the 16th we got the keys on... the 17th in the morning and we were moving in straight after we got those keys. Putting up a little bit of lace curtain, I said “Can’t have just blinds!” “People can’t see in.” Yeah, it was just nice. I don’t know. Just safe." Fiona
5.1.1 Design

Aims & philosophy

Analysis of the available Cairnlea documents, including the original funding agreements, indicated that the overall aim of the program was to provide safe, stable, and affordable long term housing with access to support, as needed, for women who have exited prison. The program was therefore devised to fulfil the following key objectives:

1. Improve transitional experience
2. Facilitate integration and social inclusion
3. Address issues of social stigma
4. Reduce risk of long term homelessness
5. Enhance independent living skills
6. Prevent/delay the return of women to custody
7. Provide a pathway for women out of the homelessness service system
8. Offer a sense of community for the women

The Melbourne Citymission support workers interviewed articulated a shared understanding of the general focus and intention of the Cairnlea Model. However neither the documentation surrounding the inception of Cairnlea nor the interview data provided clear or specific articulation of the relationship between aims and objectives nor was it clearly stated how processes and practices might facilitate specific outcomes for the residents over time.

Predominantly those involved in the initiation of the Cairnlea model and the initial selection of residents are not those currently involved in the provision of support. The research found that there has been an assumed knowledge and understanding of partnership agency roles, the underpinning philosophy and aims of the program and the way in which the program is to operate. It is important to note that the interviews indicated that these objectives essentially reflect the design-phase of the model and are best read as a collective statement of broad intention.

There are evident consequences for the lack of clarity about the aims and outcomes of this model including:

1. the level of support required may change over time but why/how is unclear
2. the absence of agreed measures/markers of desired outcomes for residents and for service providers

There are further issues related to the articulation of the aims of the project and the extent to which the primary and secondary goals are measurable outcomes- there are raised below and are addressed specifically in the recommendations.

Below the outcomes and impact of the Cairnlea Model are reported according to the stated aims, however it is important to note that the findings suggest that the specified aims are somewhat limited and lacking in clarity and in some instances, not directly reflective of the intention of the Model as articulated. For example, participants involved with the implementation of the Model indicated that it was designed not to encourage a community of former prisoners. These concerns are addressed in the section 5.0 Recommendations.

Rights & responsibilities

Two key questions arose in relation to the design of the support model that pertained to rights and responsibilities of tenants and of service providers.

The interviews highlighted a lack of clarity about whether there exists an implicit lifestyle and behaviour contract regarding the provision of the Cairnlea houses- a contract above and beyond traditional Housing Commission agreements. Three of the five women expressed an understanding that their tenancy in the house was secure.
and long term, for example Fiona stated that: “well the house is mine until I don’t want it anymore... or unless I damaged it”. However, Emma articulated an unwillingness to seek assistance with practical housing issues (minor damage that require maintenance) for fear that asking for assistance and having accidentally damaged a door may potentially impact on her tenancy. For Grace there was a significant period of concern that she might lose the house when she was imprisoned for three months.

On this issue of the limits of tenancy there were mixed messages among support workers. While on the one hand the promotion of the program is premised on secure housing without any limits (as per the original documentation around the model) it was identified in the interviews as having limits:

If she goes to prison for an extended period of time, then yeah, she would lose it. We don’t have any guidelines on what that time frame is. I would probably imagine anything for more than six months she would probably lose it.

Jenny.

A related issue was the management of leases in terms of partners, children and other family members sharing the houses. While this appeared to be a clear process from support workers perspectives there were concerns raised by tenants about who is/is not on the lease and additional issues raised by the presence of Grace’s then partner in her house while she was in prison. The need for clear guidelines on the parameters of the model and the clarification of partner/family member roles and expectations is critical to avoid confusion and potential conflict from arising and is addressed in the recommendations.

5.1.2 Implementation

A number of issues arose regarding the process of implementing the support model relating to the disjuncture at times between the original vision of the program and the reality. In some regards this reflects the nature of such an initiative- while it is possible to attempt to anticipate what will be required, the target population have broad ranging and often unpredictable needs. These are detailed further in the reporting of the outcomes and impact of the program. In focusing on the model itself, however, it is important to reflect first not on women’s experiences but on the interpretation and implementation of the design, particularly given the importance of clearly documenting the process and the model to understand its impact and to inform replication and/or extensions of the program in the future.

Eligibility & selection processes

Workers who were interviewed indicated that to be eligible for these properties women also had to be “reasonably stable”. However while ‘stability’ was identified as an important prerequisite the criteria for eligibility, stability was not clearly defined. It was described in different ways by a range of participants, ranging from “twelve months, but they do need to be fairly stable and independent enough” (Kate) to “there was no sort of strict criteria, it was basically women that had been living in the community for some time” (Jenny) while a third worker defined stability directly in relation to housing, as “being a demonstrated ability to maintain a tenancy”. This was indicative of the different interpretations of key concepts and highlights the need for clear and shared definitions to be articulated for the benefit of the future implementation and expansion of the housing and support model. Details regarding the planned design for selection were limited to the criteria for eligibility and there was no documentation detailing the actual process of selection and the decisions made regarding potential tenants. The tenants who were interviewed regarding selection criteria and selection processes articulated a broad understanding of the Cairnlea Model being designed for women who’ve been out of prison for some time and who are relatively stable. However none reported being aware of or actively involved in the selection process. While two participants recalled having a meeting with Melbourne Citymission representatives, the interviews reflected limited knowledge and involvement from tenant’s regarding the selection process.
While there was limited awareness of the process, Amy’s identification (above) of the importance of the Cairnlea housing and support model being a separate, long-term housing and support option that is distinct from the provision of support during the post-release transition was shared by all participants. All those we interviewed emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Cairnlea houses are geographically and operationally distinct from the transitional housing programs that women access immediately post-release. The importance of having criteria for potential tenants to meet was seen by all as desirable and necessary.

The selection outcomes revealed the importance of attending to this process closely.

The selection process: Eligibility & selection of residents

The original documentation outlined a broad process of selection with specified criteria. The description of the process from the three participants who had some knowledge or involvement in the process, however, revealed a flexible application and broad interpretation of the criteria.

It was reported by participants that many factors were taken into consideration in the final choices of tenants and these factors extended beyond the documented criteria. The period of time since release and the potential tenant’s status as a former prisoner— the core foundations of the original program design—were in some cases disregarded based on other subjective criteria, such as judgements of need and of stability.

The decisions made in the process of selection indicated a careful consideration of the needs of each individual and an assessment of their suitability for the house. An example of this relates to the decision to offer one of the properties to Clare, a young woman who had not been to prison, as a preventative measure as this worker described:

\[ Clare hasn’t] been to prison... Her mum... had been in and out for many, many years and [Clare had] taken on the responsibility for caring for her younger brother in an office of housing estate... [it was a] terrible, terrible environment [and]... she was very, very young. So that’s another part of it being... flexible.... That was I think seen as “okay well, it was supposed to be for women exiting prison, however” that was a probably a very good exception in terms of early intervention and preventing her from going down the same cycle as her mother and she’s done exactly the opposite. Jenny.

In addition to individual factors, which the project design and selection criteria was focused upon, the group dynamic was also identified as an important factor in the selection process. According to one participant eligibility decisions included some consideration of whether certain women had been acquaintances (as friends or adversaries) inside prison and/or whether certain personalities were likely to ‘get along’. These factors were not consistently reported in the interviews nor documented anywhere— it is unclear whether some potential participants were not eligible due to their past relationships with other tenants. This requires clarification. It is also important to note that the group dynamic would not be an issue if the houses were not in close proximity to each other.

It is important to highlight the non-systematic approach to selection, as a knowledge deficit that needs to be addressed. It is clear, however, that these are complex decisions and while articulation and justification of the decisions would be beneficial these findings do not suggest that the criteria should be fixed or inflexible. As discussed later, part of the success of the Cairnlea Housing and Support Model to date reflects the choices made with regard to tenancy. Indeed, the flexibility of the eligibility criteria has enabled a broad selection of residents contributing to a stable and, on the whole, positively received housing and support model.

The selection outcome

While all seven women who have resided at a Cairnlea property have a connection to imprisonment, as noted above not all have been sentenced prisoners in Victoria (one had been in remand but the charges were dropped, the other was the daughter of a former prisoner). Of those who had been to prison one had been sentenced only
once when she was a middle aged woman compared to three women who had a more extensive history of serving short- to medium-term sentences.

### 5.1.3 Conclusion

This first section of the findings has sought to reveal the complexity of the design and implementation of the Cairnlea Housing and Support Model. These findings highlight areas for program development and improvement that are addressed in the recommendations. These findings also contextualise the background to the findings presented in the following section that pertain to the outcomes and impact of the program.

### 5.2 Outcomes & impact

In 2009 five of the six original tenants remain in their houses- only one has left and another has taken her place. We would note that the tenant who has left was not interviewed however it was reported that she voluntarily chose to leave. Significant lessons have been learned over this period of time that should directly inform the continuation, expansion and possible replication of this unique housing and support model. This section of the report focuses on the outcomes and impact of the program to date, for the participants and their families directly and the indirect impacts for the broader community. The findings are organised to address the articulated aims of the program.

#### 5.2.1. Improve transitional experience

We focus here on the outcomes related to the access to this housing and support model- in terms of health and well being and support.

*Health and well being impacts*

The women selected to take up tenancy in the Cairnlea houses all came from precarious living arrangements which were having and would have continued to have consequences for their health and well being, for example after Phoebe was released from prison she living in a Office of Housing Commission estate in inner city Melbourne with two very small children and was “fighting down there ridiculously”, her sister-in-law “was getting a phone call to come down or grab the kids” and she was both part of the drug scene and living with people dealing drugs in the doorways and parkways around them. The move to Cairnlea enabled all of the women residing in these new properties to develop lifestyles that have substantially increased their physical and mental health. These ranged from a reduction or cessation of drug use through to being able to prepare nutritious meals due to having an appropriate cooking area and the time and space to prepare meals. The geographical location of the houses has meant that all of the women are removed from the daily chaos of living in close proximity to strangers and acquaintances involved in drug use, offending and risky or dangerous behaviours that had both direct and indirect impacts on their own lifestyles in the past.

Importantly tenancy at a Cairnlea house has not resulted in the elimination of the risk of access to drugs or re-offending. However, in the context of Cairnlea the *level* of risk has been managed by the women themselves. Grace explained that while “sometimes I’ll get an urge... and then I might have a binge... it’s “not very often” and it’s “different now” because of her awareness of wanting to keep the house and not let things spiral out of control. All of the tenants interviewed identified that having a secure home had resulted in health and safety benefits they would have experienced had they remained in their former homes. The access to ongoing housing has presented an empowering incentive to remain positive and to protect their long-term interests.

The move to Cairnlea enabled all of the women residing in these new properties to develop lifestyles that have substantially improved their physical and mental health (for example, through a reduction or cessation of drug use, through to being able to prepare nutritious meals). The geographical location of the houses means that all
of the women are removed from the daily chaos of living in close proximity to strangers and acquaintances involved in drug use, offending and risky or dangerous behaviours that had both directly and indirectly impacted on their own lifestyles.

These findings were consistent with existing research that the majority of women who have been imprisoned are survivors of violence, suffer from substance addiction, trauma and related mental health issues and many are primary carers for their children or seeking to regain access to their children (West Community/Brimbank Community Legal Centre 2008: 10). The lack of suitable, affordable long-term housing post-release that is located away from negative and destabilising influences is a well-documented hindrance to integration for women (Baldry et al 2006). The Cairnlea Model, on a very small scale, sought to facilitate a safe, healthy home environment and while it has not (and indeed could not) eliminate the ongoing impact of past trauma and/or the ongoing struggle with mental and physical health issues, including drug addiction, it was clear that for all those interviewed who had been imprisoned multiple times that while living at Cairnlea they had a positive, long-term transitional experience unlike anything else they had previously experienced.

Support in transition

The Cairnlea Model was described most often as the ‘holistic’ provision of housing and support as part of a long term transition from prison to the community. The evaluation sought to identify what women need and to determine what (and how) support has been provided over the period of implementation to date. The needs of the residents continue to vary widely in terms of the form and timing of support requirements. The implementation of support raised key issues in relation to the needs of women and to the management of the provision of support.

The parameters of support

While the tenants of Cairnlea houses shared backgrounds characterised by some common experiences- such as social disadvantage, histories of abuse (physical, emotional, financial), drug and alcohol problems- each had very distinct and individual backgrounds. This has impacted considerably on women’s support needs and their diverse journeys since moving into Cairnlea.

Women’s needs and the support provided over the period the Cairnlea Model has been in operation have ranged from the material to the emotional to the provision of information. Support workers emphasised that the model of support remains unstructured and individually-tailored to need and as such there was no ‘list’ of the parameters of support. Reports ranged from financial support (assisting with bills, replacing appliances, providing food vouchers) to assistance with managing finances (assisting with access to loans, using bank accounts, developing savings accounts) to legal advocacy and support to promoting and providing information about Melbourne Citymission and community events and, finally, emotional support.

A key finding from the interviews was that the emotional support and the connection between support workers and residents plays an important role in women’s lives, as Fiona explained:

[T]hey just go “Oh, Hi Fiona... Right and how’s Sharon, how’s Ruth”, you know, “what’s going on?”; you know “How’s your grand-sons?”.... You’re not just a number... they care about ya, you know. And it’s nice. And it’s not; they don’t care because they want something back. ‘Cause I don’t do the trust thing very well. Fiona.

This ongoing connection between the individual workers and the residents were appreciated and important to all the women we spoke to.
There was, however, a distinction between material aid and emotional support. While two of the residents interviewed indicated that it was important to try to be independent of the support agency in terms of material aid this was not true of all residents. It was clear that Melbourne Citymission tend to be seen as being able to provide material aid from time to time indefinitely, and this is indicated by Adele’s quote on the right.

Both emotional support and material aid require a resource investment. The findings indicated that use and limits of resources is currently ill-defined. It is clear that all the women interviewed require and will continue to benefit from their interaction with support agencies. To cease providing support for managerial reasons (such as a three-year minimum, a defined number of visits) would undermine the strength of the current provisions. However the support provided within the Cairnlea Model needs to be sustainable. Based on the findings, two important factors need to be taken into account: the needs of the client group and the effective management of support provision.

Support needs

Across the group support provisions have varied. In terms of material aid- financial assistance, food vouchers and the like all the residents have received and continue to receive some material aid. The level of material aid has been based on resident needs, so that while one resident was identified as having received “a fair bit of material aid in terms of food vouchers and met-tickets” others had received less over the three years. The research found that ‘need’ with regards to material aid is relative and requires careful consideration for the long-term sustainability of the program. As Jenny, a support worker explained, there are considerations regarding how to define need and the ways in which perceived and actual need present dilemmas for agencies:

However, a major thing that I’ve seen too is that... these properties have lifted them out... [and] off that poverty line, which a lot of people don’t have the opportunity to get over. I mean each of them have cars, each of them [with one exception], they’re doing okay, but they struggle at different times with different [things]... they might get themselves into trouble with a phone bill or something like that but they have actually moved beyond the poverty line.... I think maybe they feel. they can get a little bit spoilt too and know that we’re here. Jenny

This raises issues related to dependence or reliance on support and the management of the provision of support, which we examine below. In addition, the proximity of the houses and women’s interaction was reported to have translated into a general awareness amongst members of the group as to who was receiving what material aid. In some cases women had requested material aid for themselves based on their knowledge that another tenant had received something. Determining what is a ‘need’ and the limits/parameters of the provision of support is critical to the determining the boundaries of support.

There were three key findings in relation to the provision of support these related to changing needs, the needs of dependents and the management of support.

Changing needs

A key finding from this research is that long-term quality housing appeared to positively impact on the lives of the women interviewed. It was also found that the women’s needs do not simply decrease over time. The program has been designed based on an awareness of the group of women having ongoing needs. While the stability offered by the Cairnlea housing was found to have decreased the chaos of all of the participant’s day-to-day lives this does has not meant they are no longer in need of support.

However being in a more stable position has given rise to significant emotional and psychological challenges. All six women in the Cairnlea
houses have had assistance dealing with past experiences of trauma, addiction and grief. In addition, four of the six have required support to deal with the frustrations and fears associated with the challenges of trying to live differently (i.e. without offending, without using, without associating with the same people). Critically, this vulnerability cannot be mapped as a linear ascent towards stability; it is variable and often unpredictable as Amy and Kate explained:

"But they might... they might need it every day for four weeks at some stages, and then... you don’t see them for... you don’t hear from them for six ... I mean, like I say, for these girls to have a support person for the rest of their life is ideal, but whether it’s realistic and practical, Amy.

"So like I said before, although they have the housing, they’ve still got issues that need to be dealt with, so that still can be a challenge, and it’s about assisting them to work through those, and that this is life – this is daily life, and it’s about helping them develop those life skills, Kate.

Flexibility needs to reflect women’s circumstances, which can be a challenge for most service providers. This includes, as Amy noted, not presuming that women who have ‘successes’ such as gaining and maintaining employment are not excluded from support:

"[W]hen you get a job you’re not all okay either, you know? Or people go “oh you’ve got a job now, she’s up and running, she’s got a job”. Well yes she has... but the last 30 years are a mess and she’s not okay just ‘cause she’s, you know, she’s working... A lot of them have never worked before and they work and it’s like hell, every day is a battle for me, Amy.

Recognising that achievements ranging from accessing and maintaining employment to being drug free to ceasing offending do not translate into women requiring less support, this is an important finding for the future of this program and for the practices of long-term support models generally.

**Family & other relationships**

The majority of women in Victorian prisons are mothers (Davies & Cook 1998). Women, as outlined in the opening chapter of this report, are primary carers for children, grandchildren, siblings, parents and partners. The women selected for the Cairnlea Model were no exception to this. While three are currently living alone without de facto partners, two have had partners or family members residing with them at different stages. Of the three women who are mothers, Phoebe has three children and is due to have her fourth by September, Fiona lives with her daughter and grandchild and Grace has adult children and young grandchildren.

Women exiting prison generally and women involved in programs such as the Cairnlea Model need to be recognised not just as individuals in need of support, but as carers with responsibilities to support others. Women who have been in prison and/or who may have long histories of marginalisation, drug and alcohol use, mental and other health problems, histories of unemployment and re-offending have also had lives characterised by significant responsibilities in caring for others.

When Cairnlea residents discussed their own needs and the kind of support they sought it was clear that for those with children and dependents their ‘needs’ included the needs of their family. For example, both Grace and her daughter have been unemployed for some time and this has meant at times they’ve struggled financially to support each other and to raise Grace’s granddaughter. The management of co-dependents should be built into the model. In some cases co-dependents felt they were unsupported and/or needed support. In other cases it was evident that the management of the needs of co-dependents was very different between houses and potentially inequitable.

These findings are indicative of the issues arising from managing the care and support of one person in a household where others may also face considerable challenges including long-term unemployment, past histories of drug use and offending. While from an agency perspective this is an individual program, the
management of support has to be inclusive of individual circumstances and this effectively incorporates support for women’s roles as primary carers.

For a program that is based on achieving stability in women’s lives, the importance of the circumstances of their co-dependents is central. In the course of the interviews it was noted that the complex and inescapable connections with family and with friends are important in women’s lives, just as they are to the broader community, and while these relationships may not always be positive they are deeply entrenched and important bonds. Support workers were well aware of this and had been involved in informal efforts to manage some particularly problematic relationships. Such considerations should be clarified with reference to the design and management of support provisions.

**Managing support**

The provision of support was most commonly articulated as being holistic and explained as being relative to individual needs. As Brooke, a support worker explained “it’s not structured, it is based on what they need”. While there were some reassurances that the residents are “pretty good at dealing with things on their own as much as they can, and they usually will contact us when they really need it” the management of this in terms of clear guidelines would be highly beneficial.

It cannot be assumed the women understand the agency perspective on the limits of support. The acknowledged inconsistency with regards to decisions about support raises concerns regarding the reduction of support and assistance as a mutually understood aim from the agency and resident perspective. As Jenny (support worker) explained a key challenge is “knowing when to say no”. Drawing these boundaries is important for women’s welfare but also to ensure that the Cairnlea Model remains financially sustainable.

**Issues for support workers**

It is critical, in the assessment of a program such as this, to identify the challenges that support workers face and the importance of support workers having clearly defined roles, expectations and support in their work.

An issue for this pioneering program is the historical, long-term relationship between some of the women and their support workers and the support workers case load largely comprising intensive case support.

This meant, as one support worker explained that working towards reducing the reliance on support workers and/or encouraging women to respond to issues that arise independently was a challenge because of this long term relationship that had begun with intensive support, and the management of women’s expectations that support workers will always be able to assist:

> It is a different level of support and... I did intensive case management when I first came and sometimes to make that transition to then go and work with women who don’t need that level of support sometimes it is really hard not to step in and go “I’ll do that.” Or, "Would you like a hand or do you want me to drive you here?" It is really stepping back and empowering people that have got the skills to then live more independently. Jenny

As discussed in the recommendation, this process requires management to ensure the Cairnlea residents understand and experience this as a positive change that is part of the transitional experience.

**5.2.2. Facilitate integration and social inclusion**

To address this aim, we focus on geographic location- as this was found to be linked to issues of social inclusion. We addressed social inclusion more comprehensively in relation to the final aim which is focused on achieving a ‘sense of community’. Two significant findings related to the location of the houses; the issue being the outer suburban location; the second the proximity of the houses.
**Geographic location**

The suburban location of Cairnlea was experienced by the tenants interviewed as an isolated location (though it is worth noting that three years on, the outer suburbs of Melbourne are becoming increasingly populated and services including public transport are increasing) and this was at once a positive aspect of the Model and a source of frustration in terms of accessing transport, social services and connecting with people. It was clear that all five women interviewed used this isolation and the privacy of the location to their advantage. They actively control the provision of their address to others and, on the whole, are selective about who visits. This was clear in Fiona’s story (see sidebar), where she is at once still connected with her ‘old community’ but has benefited greatly from living in Cairnlea. From this perspective the houses have enabled an important social exclusion from previous communities which facilitated negative patterns in women’s lives.

**Proximity of houses**

Being housed in close proximity to each other, however, was a point of contention with all participants. Both residents and workers expressed initial apprehensions about this. The findings indicated that this was neither a completely negative or positive situation.

One of the key concerns was that while the Cairnlea model seeks to facilitate social reintegration and to move beyond the association with imprisonment, the close proximity of the houses and the sense of the tenants being part of a ‘program’ reduced this as an achievable goal, as these participants explained:

> I think it could also work really well if they were housed not so close…. I guess then, that identity of being housed with other women who have exited prison, it’s about their identity shift, that you’re just in the community with anyone else, anywhere. Kate

> I mean, it’s hard enough, they carry that with them [imprisonment and the status of offender], anyway, I think, so to break away from that and to not have criminal written across their forehead, like a lot of them feel they have, I think housing them together can really hinder that moving away from that, themselves. Kate

Not all of the women knew each other before moving into Cairnlea, however it was clear that with one exception (notably the young woman who is not a former prisoner) the proximity of the houses has facilitated a social bond between the women who are part of the program.

The messages about this proximity were mixed, one support worker suggested that it was originally thought that being close to each could assist in building support networks but the implementation of the program has demonstrated this is not always the case. Proximity can promote a lifestyle and an engagement with others that has the potential to undo the aims of the program as a whole, although this has not happened at Cairnlea there have been some negative aspects and tensions between different households and, at times, this has led to individual’s reporting back to Melbourne Citymission and effectively “dobbing each other in” (Jenny).

There are some important advantages to this arrangement. There are women who do support each other in a positive, affirming way. For some of the participants we spoke to there has been a positive development of trusting relationships, where they have a neighbour nearby who they can talk to who may be able to understand where they are coming from. However, the contact with each other and the awareness of the ‘happenings’ of other tenants of the Cairnlea houses was also suggested to promote monitoring of each other and in some cases reporting this back to Melbourne Citymission. In some instances participants reported that this is helpful for the organisation, particularly as the support is no longer intensive and things may happen that the support workers
remain unaware of. This needs to be considered in relation to the promotion of transition away from support dependence.

It must also be noted that a consistent finding was that proximity was often raised as a concern in relation to drug use and offending behaviour. All of the tenants raised their disquiet at having their ‘safe’ place and stability disrupted and compromised by other former prisoners being in the area. In some cases there were specific examples of these things occurring, in other cases tenants talked about drug use and offending as a possibility and as a potential threat to their ability to ‘stay straight’.

5.2.3. Address issues of social stigma

Social stigma and community interaction are difficult issues to measure in relation to success. We would note from the findings that all of the women reported that they still feel their experience in prison and their criminal record is something that they feel self conscious about. However, two of the women did report being actively involved in speaking to community groups as examples of the successes of various post-release initiatives. This is important to identify women ‘giving back’ and investing energy in community exchange. In particular Emma reported attending a function where she felt very intimated being surrounded by and speaking to a crowd of benefactors but the experience on the whole had been quite positive for her. The women who had been involved in these activities were both clearly still in need of long-term support, but it is recognition of the changes made and changes that have been sustained that they have been able to begin to do things they had never imagined. We’d note also that social stigma and feeling self-conscious about one’s past can be both an issue of perception but also has direct relation to one’s physical appearance. For Emma, her job allowed her to eventually pay for false teeth (where she had been missing many of her front teeth for some time) and for her it was an extremely significant difference to be part of the work force, to be independent and to be able to talk and smile without wanting to cover up her mouth. It is both personal changes and positive response from family and the broader community that appear to assist in breaking down social stigma.

5.2.4. Reduce risk of long term homelessness

As noted earlier, five of the six original tenants remain in the houses. When questioned support workers identified women’s maintenance of their accommodation as a significant achievement of the model and an individual achievement for each of the residents. As one support worker noted, five of the six women who became tenants in 2006 maintained their accommodation despite experiencing challenges in relation to employment, drug use and offending. All the tenants had lives previously characterised by unstable housing, chaotic lifestyles and for some, re-offending and incarceration. For example Lily’s accommodation prior to being held in remand was a deserted car parked under a bridge which was no longer there when she was released. Such instabilities have been drastically reduced for those remaining at Cairnlea and the women interviewed identified that they felt the safe and affordable accommodation as central to their current well being. All of the women interviewed reported feeling safe and secure in their tenancy and did not believe they would cycle back into a situation of unstable or precarious living arrangements in the short or long term. None of the current tenants are currently living below the poverty line and all would be statistically less likely to the ‘at risk’ of homelessness compared to their status prior to moving to Cairnlea.

5.2.5. Enhance independent living skills

A major benefit of the Cairnlea Model is the provision of high quality housing that would be otherwise inaccessible to any of the current tenants. From the perspective of all participants, the quality and security of the housing is a unique and important contribution to the post-release service effort:

[A] lot of the women, they are not in a position to get private rental, who’s going to choose them?... I mean... the
Housing stability has had benefits for all of the residents. Critically, the model enables all women to have control over the tenancy. This means the space is theirs to decorate, furnish and maintain. It also means they have the power to make decisions regarding who visits and when, or if partners and/or extended family members may move in permanently.

Independence was defined and understood here in relation to having direct control of their housing and their lives. The analysis found that this experience of independence has had many positive impacts for the participants, including maintaining long term employment to family reconnection to a discontinuation of contact with, what one participant described as, “bad influences”. All of the women we interviewed noted that they had come with limited furnishings and that in addition to being provided with donations they had also been able to access loans (for example from organisations such as Sisters of the Good Shepherd) in order to make purchases for their homes. Phoebe’s sister-in-law noted that living at Cairnlea had a clear impact on Phoebe’s lifestyle both in terms of her being ‘house proud’ and her the positive changes this had brought about more generally in terms of her ability to make decisions to implement significant changes in her life which she remained committed to. These findings were indicative of the influence stable housing had on the tenant’s lives in general, including their confidence and ability to maintain and to be proud of their homes. However there are some important issues that were raised regarding practical aspect of the houses.

**The lease & the house design**

An additional issue raised in the findings that pertained to independence was the management of the lease and the houses more generally.

The management and oversight of tenancy issues appears to be the primary division in terms of partner roles in the implementation of the Cairnlea Model. While it was emphasised that effectively the Cairnlea tenancies mirror Housing Commission tenancies across Victoria in terms of the financial and leasing arrangements, it was clear that the tenancy management (which has changed over the life of the Model) was not necessarily aware of the individual needs and issues of Cairnlea residents. It must be noted, however, that tenancy management was undergoing a process of transition at the time the research was being conducted. The tenants we spoke to identified uncertainties regarding who to contact if there were disputes or concerns regards lease issues and reluctance in some cases to report the need for maintenance. Melbourne Citymission was identified as the agency to contact for assistance in relation to these issues, which suggests that the extent to which independence has been achieved, whereby women manage their tenancy completely independently, remains something to work towards. We’d note, also, that the majority of the women interviewed had limited experience with managing these issues in the past and that this will inevitably be a learning process- they key finding here is the concern related to how clearly the management is maintained and communicated.

The Cairnlea residents also raised significant considerations regarding to home maintenance, budgeting and the design of the houses. These concerns related to heating costs, the double storey living arrangements and the lease arrangements. The cost of heating concerned four of the five women interviewed. Therefore consideration of appropriate and low-cost heating options and housing design would benefit future building projects.

**5.2.6. Prevent/delay the return of women to custody**

Success is not a specific outcome that can be gauged through the Cairnlea model alone. Rather success is defined in terms of the significant gains and steps that would not have been possible for the women involved had they not being a part of this program. We draw on an extended quote from Jenny, a support worker, who was reflecting on Grace’s progress in the past three years to demonstrate this:
Grace’s story demonstrates the complexity of women’s lives and the ways in which success can be redefined beyond the traditional criminogenic framework to be able to identify success relative to women’s lives. While Grace has re-offended and has had periods of drug relapse, she has maintained her home and the stability of this tenancy has enabled her to avoid further regression into her previous lifestyle characterised by heavy drug use and offending.

The reunification with family— including gaining custody of children post-release and rebuilding family relationships that had been broken was a significant issue that all of the women we spoke to identified as playing an important role in the way in which they currently live their lives. While not always resulting in the formation of strong relationships it was clear that for some women, such as Emma (see sidebar), the fact that her family contacted her now, that they kept in touch and talked about seeing each other in the future was a positive development and one that was identified by both the tenants and their support workers and support people as a partly a result of living in secure and stable housing.

5.2.7. Provide a pathway for women out of the homelessness service system

What is clear from the Cairnlea Model evaluation is that the varied circumstances of the women involved in the program impact upon the aims, achievements and future possibilities each of them see for themselves. The future expectations of the women interviewed varied with regard to housing. The two older participants saw their long-term future at Cairnlea, with one stating “I’ll stay here till I die. I love it here.” (Michelle). For the other residents staying at Cairnlea was less certain for a range of reasons including hopes of travel, moving to a bigger home and the reality of an aging and geographically distant parent who will require full time care in the future. None sought to leave because of dissatisfaction with the level of support provided and, as noted above, none saw themselves with futures that would involve high-risk housing or homelessness again.

5.2.8. Offer a sense of community for the women

A primary goal of the evaluation of the Cairnlea Model is to examine connection to the local community. However measuring or demonstrating connection presents considerable methodological challenges. It is firstly worth noting that community connection is not necessarily sought by participants, nor should it be presumed to be a measure of success. Indeed, in some cases the ability for women to have removed themselves from communities they had been intimately connected to for a lifetime was the primary goal. Community connection implies an assumption of positive community connections- if this is to remain a goal of this program it requires more careful and considered attention and articulation. We examine below neighbourhood connections and the interaction and participation in the broader community.

The Cairnlea Model was designed with the intention that residents would be anonymous in the community, that women would not be stigmatised through being identifiable as part of a post-release ‘program’. Participants presented conflicting stories regarding the extent to which others in the area knew about the program- two of the residents thought no one knew. Two others explained that people in the neighbourhood had been told and this, for one participant, made her feel “labelled”, for the partner of another resident this was a significant disappointment and frustration. However, we’d note first that maintaining that anonymity is important, that having women housed in close proximity may impact on maintaining this anonymity and that there appeared to
be no significant issues in terms of community interaction or raising problems with neighbours. Only two of the residents indicated that they knew any of their neighbours and/or had interacted with them, but these differences could be attributed to lifestyle and personality differences.

There were efforts by support workers to make residents aware of local community events and all three support workers identified this as something they actively did and something they could do more of, but community engagement should not be identified as a ‘yard stick’ for the success of the program.

It was also important to note that community engagement was not necessarily the most immediate geographical ‘community’ and indeed many women and their families remained in contact with areas where they had spent much or all of their lives, most often where they had moved from. One support worker reflected on this tendency for women to return to these areas as a way of managing the isolating and relatively quiet experience of their new locale.

It was also clear that some women were not sure how to access local supports and events and/or while they were given the information they lacked the confidence to become involved. This highlighted a concern with the Melbourne Citymission-run social program for Cairnlea residents and extended families to get together to do activities. It was recognised that while this program aims to bridge isolation, it also impacts on the Cairnlea residents’ willingness/efforts to access other similar opportunities more independently.

This also connects with the issues raised above regarding the reliance on support workers to make these connections happen. While all of the support workers identified they’d provided women with information about local services and activities, they were reluctant to take this any further as Jenny stated (see also Emma in side bar),

*I’m not going to go and hold their hands to do it either. I mean if we had the resources maybe we would do that, but then in doing that too, you’re creating that dependence on you again.*

Again, goals need to be more specifically articulated and relevant to women’s circumstances. For example, women with children, with family living with them are different to those on their own and their ability, willingness and opportunities to engage with the community vary. For example while Emma works long hours six days a week, Fiona is at home with her daughter and granddaughter and through the granddaughter opportunities to be involved in pre-school and school-related activities will present themselves.

5.2. Conclusion

These findings point to many positive outcomes from the Cairnlea Housing and Support Model and areas for improvement for the ongoing success and future implementation of the model. The recommendations arising from the findings are presented in the following section.
6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are drawn from the issues highlighted in the previous section regarding the design, implementations and outcomes of the Cairnlea Housing Model.

CLARIFICATION REGARDING AIMS/INTENTIONS OF THE CAIRNLEA MODEL

Articulating more clearly the aims of the program will enable the documentation around the processes of implementation to be formalised more clearly and will also result in a more targeted assessment of outcomes in future assessments.

DOCUMENTATION OF THE MODEL

In order for the Cairnlea Model to be expanded and implemented elsewhere in the future this gap in knowledge and documentation needs to be articulated. This extends to a range of areas from the process of selection and the eligibility criteria, to the responsibilities for both tenants and support agencies. This also extends to clarifying the role of partners- these issues are addressed below.

RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

The relationship between the tenancy agreement and women’s responsibilities as selected members of the Cairnlea Model should be documented and known to all parties. The research found that for some women there was a lack of clarity about whether there exists an implicit lifestyle and behaviour contract regarding the provision of the Cairnlea houses- a contract above and beyond traditional Housing Commission agreements.

Tenants

Women’s responsibilities and rights need to be specified to avoid uncertainty and confusion. It is important not only for women who may find themselves in a precarious position, but also for the understanding of others. This was highlighted when two participants spoke of their surprise that Grace had remained in her house despite a period of imprisonment; both expressed a concern that this was not part of the tenancy agreement.

It is critical in the design and management of the housing arrangements both for women currently in the Cairnlea houses and for future residents, that there are clear processes and arrangements made to effectively manage tenancy issues. A concern for the researchers was that residents expressed different understandings than the explanations offered by support workers, which point to some breakdown in communication regarding the arrangements.

Partners

All partners need to understand their role and communication between partner agencies must be open and effective to avoid misunderstandings and tensions arising that may impact on residents. It is also important in terms of managing the role of Melbourne Citymission support workers.
THE PARAMETERS OF SUPPORT

Women’s needs and the support provided over the period the Cairnlea Model has been in operation have ranged from the material to the emotional to the provision of information. The emphasis in the interviews with support workers was that the model of support remains unstructured and individually-tailored to need. Reports ranged from financial support (assisting with bills, replacing appliances, providing food vouchers) to assistance with managing finances (assisting with access to loans, using bank accounts, establishing savings accounts) to legal advocacy and support to promoting and providing information about Melbourne CityMission and community events.

Limits

As all the support workers noted, there are and need to be limits of support. As yet there is no clear management of working towards reducing or shifting the process of providing different types of support. This is critical in terms of the limited practicality and indeed sustainability of the continuation and/or expansion of a model that operates with unspecified limits on support.

Reducing support over the long term

The intention of the support and the extent to which there is evidence of managing the role of worker involvement and resident dependency on other agencies also requires attention. At times support workers spoke about working towards self-reliance but it was not clear in practice how this is encouraged, worked towards or achieved. This needs to be considered carefully in light of the findings that the women who currently make up the Cairnlea Model residents all require forms of ongoing support. This issue is also connected to the importance of recognising issues and challenges for support workers.

Partners

For Melbourne CityMission there are other issues to be considered in addition to the broader support model that is in operation within the agency. In comparison, agencies such as the Prison Network Ministries who provide primary support to two of the residents and who are in touch with one of the other residents operate according to a support philosophy and model that differs significantly. This again points to the need for a planned and coordinated approach to facilitating an evolving support relationship over time, based on the experiences and learning of staff to date.

SELECTION PROCESSES

Flexibility

There are important issues that need to be addressed, however, in relation to developing a clear process and model for the selection of residents that incorporates this flexibility. This is important organisationally for Melbourne CityMission and partner organisations both in terms of documenting the program and in seeking to continue and/or implement it elsewhere.

Women’s involvement

It is also important to consider the extent to which women are involved as part of the selection process. The reports from support workers about this process were inconsistent and lead to the conclusion that
there is a need to recognise and articulate that the decision making process occurs at two levels: the individual and the group.

It also highlights the role of women in the decision making process, in either a direct or indirect way. These processes require further consideration and clarification. Residents of the Cairnlea houses had varying levels of awareness of the model and their selection- something that requires attention from the partnership. When asking women and their nominated support people about the issue of eligibility and how they came to be selected, the explanations varied from “ex-prisoner, out of jail for a year or more, haven’t re-offended” to “not using drugs and committing crime’ to “they never told me what’s the criteria of getting one of these”. Clear decisions need to be made here as a number of concerns are raised. The role of women in the selection process and their awareness of the program is also connected to the effective communication of the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the implementation of the Cairnlea Model.

Managing selection processes

First, issues related to confidentiality and the potential for conflict need to be addressed in relation to applicants who are successful (or unsuccessful) and the subsequent communication between residents about the nature of the selection process and information provided to support workers or other organisational representatives in this process.

While this evaluation did not include interviews with partner organisations, it would be beneficial for partner roles and responsibilities to be clearly articulated.

HOUSING LOCATION

The findings indicate that while proximity may have some benefits it is less than ideal and not useful to achieving the goals of the Cairnlea Model and should be avoided for future expansion of the program. There are many reasons why this may be beyond the control of the agency, but for future implementation proximity is a key consideration.

HOUSES

All six homes are built to the same specifications as two storey, three bedroom, with a large open plan living, dining and kitchen area. Each has a small backyard and a driveway with an enclosed lockable garage. These homes have been built and designed for a small family and the housing needs, however the housing needs for the women differed substantially based on family relationships. The possibility of having a range of housing types would enable more appropriate accommodation to match varying requirements. It would also enable disabled access were it required.
7.0 CONCLUSION

While the program has significant benefits and these outcomes should be acknowledged, the program’s implementation raises critical challenges that are detailed below. It is important to continue to review and reshape the project to reflect the challenges and limitations that have arisen. The findings above and below are, of course, indicative of a very unique, small project that has involved a diverse group of women. As such caution must be taken as the Cairnlea model in its current form should not be used as the basis for the development or indeed expansion of the present program to be suitable or successful in other circumstances or with other groups.

In recognising women’s family responsibilities and their connections it’s also clear that positive outcomes are not simply about the personal benefits for Cairnlea residents. What this research has revealed is that women achieving stability and having access to this form of housing impacts positively on the immediate and extended family who also benefit from secure, stable housing and the relative stability of the women’s lives. This includes extended family and the re-building of family connections. These are, in fact, also community benefits- we know the consequences of positive, functional families have myriad benefits to communities. Broadly speaking, the Cairnlea model highlights the impact stable housing can have in achieving stability & functionality in relationships that were previously chaotic, marked by tensions and disconnection.
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