

BANDYUP WOMEN'S PRISON VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING PROJECT

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RATIONALE

The Bandyup Women's Prison Vocational Skills Training Project was a joint initiative of the Access and Participation Directorate of the Western Australian Department of Training and Ministry of Justice, and was developed to redress the inequity of access to training experienced by women offenders in the Western Australian prison system. The project focussed on clients within two of the Equity Development and Training Groups identified as priority areas - Women and vocational education and training in correctional facilities. In addition, most participants are representative of other target groups – Indigenous women, those with no post school qualifications and/or of low socio-economic status.

BACKGROUND

The project built on the success of an initial ANTA funded Equity and Change Project conducted in 1997, which had as its main objective the increase of vocational training opportunities in non-traditional areas for women at Bandyup Prison. As Bandyup did not have the required facilities or staff at the time, access was provided to training facilities at Wooroloo Prison Farm, a men's minimum-security prison 40 kilometres away. A select number of modules were made available in which a number of women expressed interest. The project was a major success in terms of participation and successful completion rates (close to 100%), comparing more than favorably with other prison education programs and with women's training programs in general.

A contributing factor to the success of this operation was the considerable organizational effort and cooperation between both Wooroloo and Bandyup to allow this unprecedented arrangement to occur. This set a precedent for continued cooperation in terms of the sharing of resources for training.

The project also paved the way for future training on a broader scale by prompting change in a number of areas:

- The appointment of a Vocational Skills Development Officer at Bandyup, whose specific task is the organization and delivery of skills training for women offenders. This appointment enables vocational training for women offenders to develop along the lines of what currently exists in male institutions.
- Administrators at Bandyup recognized the benefits inherent in the provision of training for women in non-traditional trade areas and thus supported an initiative to establish a vocational training centre within the prison. A Vocational Skills Training Centre has subsequently been built for this purpose.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

ANTA funding was received to implement the Bandyup Women's Prison Vocational Skills Training Project in 1998/1999 at Bandyup Women's Prison, the anticipated outcomes being:

- an increase in the number of women offenders accessing training;
- an increase in successful module completions, and
- the "fitting out" of the Skills Training Centre to allow the delivery of additional training.

Training provided in the project was in the trade areas of building construction and metal work, and was specifically related to the "fitting out" of the Skills Centre to enable the future provision of a broader range of trade training.

The recommissioning of another women's prison facility, Nyandi, in early 1999 saw the expansion of the program beyond Bandyup. Vocational training programs were subsequently delivered at Greenough and Roebourne Regional Prisons, predominantly male prisons, which house a small population of women offenders.

The project has been innovative in the following ways:

- Training in the non-traditional area of building and construction was not previously offered to women offenders in WA prisons.
- It is the first time participants had constructed a training environment for themselves and future vocational training participants.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The project was managed by Catherine Dunn from the Access and Participation Directorate of the WA Department of Training and coordinated by Ray Chavez from the Education & Vocational Training Unit of the Ministry of Justice. The principle organiser and instructor of courses at the prison level was the Vocational Skills Development Officer at Bandyup, Richard Hewitt. Together with the Teacher-in-Charge, Jenny Atherton, his role was the recruitment and assessment of participants and liaison with prison management and outside agencies. A project officer was appointed to liaise with project management, training providers and participants, to record qualitative and quantitative outcomes and to compile the interim and final reports. Meetings between the aforementioned people, who comprised the project management committee, were held on a regular basis in order to monitor progress of the project.

COLLABORATIONS

Public and private providers worked in partnership to deliver the training associated with the project. Modules were delivered by Midland TAFE (Scaffolding, Non-load Bearing Walls, Plasterboard Installation, Paint Applications), Road Transport and Training Council (Forklift Driving), the Red Cross and Marr Mooditj of the Aboriginal Medical Service (Senior First Aid). Occupational Safety and Health, Welding and Thermal Cutting, Fabrication Techniques, Hand and Power Tools and literacy and numeracy support were provided by Ministry of Justice education and training staff. Course enrolments and accreditation were provided under the auspices of both Midland and CY O'Connor Colleges of TAFE.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

Vocational training modules were generally delivered in an intensive format. Participants were involved in vocational training on a full time basis, in order to complete the recommended number of hours of a particular module. Additional time was allocated for individual support and honing of skills learned, with an emphasis placed on practical application of skills over the theoretical component. For example, a module with the recommended duration time of 36 hours was scheduled over two weeks of five hours per day, equating to 50 hours in total. Extra tuition and on-the-job training was generally available due to the nature of the project.

TRAINING IN THE PRISON CONTEXT

It must be recognised that organising and conducting programs in the prison environment can be difficult. The past year was a particularly arduous period in which to implement the project given that the offender population of Bandyup reached approximately 150, well above the recommended capacity of 85. Pressures created by this increased occupancy inevitably impacted on the project. An example, was the adjustment of the timetable for the delivery of modules due to the unexpected transfer of offenders to Nyandi Prison. These transfers necessitated that a few of the modules be delivered at the new prison in order that these women continue their training. Other institutional factors disrupted the delivery of training at times but did not impede progress or the overall success of the project to any substantial degree.

PROJECT TIME FRAME

The project proceeded as follows:

◆ Appointment of Project Officer	March 1998
◆ Initial Development Meetings	April / May 1998
◆ Selection of Participants & Orientation	Prior to each module
◆ Occupational Safety & Health Senior First Aid	August 1998
◆ Scaffolding	August / September 1998
◆ Non-load Bearing Walls	October / November 1998
◆ Plasterboard Installation	November / October 1998
◆ Welding & Thermal Cutting	January 1999
◆ Fabrication Techniques	January 1999
◆ Senior First Aid	February 1999
◆ Basic Fork Lift Driving	February 1999
◆ Welding & Thermal Cutting	April 1999
◆ Senior First Aid (Nyandi)	April 1999
◆ Fabrication Techniques	May 1999
◆ Paint Application	May 1999
◆ Basic Fork Lift Driving (Nyandi)	May 1999
◆ Hand & Power Tools	June 1999
◆ Occupational Safety & Health	June 1999

ACCESS

§ Recruitment Process

The opportunity to apply for a place in vocational training was available to all women offenders at Bandyup, with the exception of those offenders on heavy medication (OHS regulations). Training modules were advertised by way of notices and posters around the prison prior to the commencement of each module. In addition, the Teacher-in-Charge and the Vocational Skills Officer informed offenders of available courses on an informal basis. Perhaps the most effective means of advertisement and subsequent recruitment, however, was by word of mouth from participants who relayed their positive experiences to other women. Most participants stated that they had learnt of the project in this manner and that the enthusiasm of the women who had taken part was a major incentive to join. Additionally, an effective advertising strategy were photographs of participants engaged in training which the women concerned displayed in their cells. These photo's inevitably engaged the interest of other women.

- **Selection of Participants**

The Vocational Skills Development Officer and the Teacher-in-Charge selected project participants. The criterion was simply a suitable level of interest and a willingness to commit to the requirements of the project. Low level literacy/numeracy skills were not obstacles to participation as individual support was provided in these areas as required.

It is Ministry of Justice policy that all offenders are literacy screened as soon as is practicable on entering prison.

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

Due to the sometimes disruptive nature of the prison system, correctional education necessarily utilises flexible delivery in its efforts to offer quality education programs to offenders. This project was therefore as flexible as possible in order to cater to individual needs and to minimise inevitable disruptions to scheduled training. This was demonstrated in a number of ways:

- The intensive program structure
- Timetable flexibility
- Customised training manuals and workbooks
- The production of instructional videos
- Extension of project to other prison facilities

§ **Intensive Program Structure**

As all modules were delivered in an intensive format, ie. on a full time basis rather than one or two days a weeks as is normally the case in other educational institutions, offenders who were serving short prison sentences were able to access training and complete a module/modules prior to their release.

§ **Timetable Flexibility**

There were instances where classes were rescheduled in order to accommodate temporary changes in prison regime, or to meet individual participants' needs at a given time. An example was the case where an offender's weakness in mathematics was identified and arrangements were made for her to attend classes at the prison's Education Centre. The only available math class conflicted with the training schedule so the Vocational Skills Development Officer adjusted the schedule to ensure that the offender was not forced to miss any practical sessions of her training.

§ **Customised Training Manuals and Workbooks**

The above example also highlights the emphasis that was placed on supporting participants with low levels of literacy and/or numeracy. Ministry of Justice statistics show that approximately 70% of inmates are in need of some form of literacy assistance. Recognising this high proportion, and the fact that participants have had little or no experience in the subject matter, measures were taken to simplify student workbooks for ease of comprehension. The training manuals for the Welding and Metal Fabrication modules, for example, were made more ‘user friendly’ by simplifying terminology, adding extra illustrations and changing font size and text spacing.

§ **Production of Instructional Video**

It is usual in the prison context for offenders to have commitments (meetings with lawyers, medical appointments, court appearances etc) which may conflict with the training schedule. In addition to rescheduling training timetables to alleviate the problem of missed sessions, for example, video tapes of the theory components of Welding and Thermal Cutting were produced to enable participants to view any lessons they may not have been able to attend.

§ **Expansion of Project to Other Correctional Facilities**

Flexibility was necessary in terms of location of project delivery in response to the unforeseen transfer of some participants to Nyandi, Greenough and Roebourne Prisons. Provision was made for these women to continue training at these institutions. Consequently, “training pathways” were created for women offenders within the prison system. This creation of pathways for training was a direct result of women offenders requesting access to vocational training opportunities that they experienced at Bandyup.

SUPPORT STRATEGIES

§ **Extra Tuition**

Already mentioned was the support given to those with literacy/numeracy needs. The Ministry of Justice, being a registered provider of the Certificate of General Education for Adults, has traditionally considered Adult Basic Education as a priority of this educational service delivery. Provision was made for those requiring assistance to receive extra tuition. Additionally, smaller class sizes (usually no more than 8 students) allowed for an increase in individual tuition and support for offenders who participated in the project.

§ **Peer Tutors**

Two offenders that were ongoing participants of the project were assigned peer-tutoring roles. They were given the tasks of orientating new participants to the project and offering assistance when required. The Skills Officer commented that this help was invaluable at times especially when he was engaged in individual instruction.

§ **Certificates**

On completion of their training, women were issued with a Statement of Attainment from TAFE. An effort, however, was made to issue certificates soon after the end of each module. This was considered important as the women received immediate recognition for their efforts and were given added incentive and encouragement to further their training. Certificates were shown to family and inevitably to other inmates, thus promoting the project.

§ **General Support**

The prison offered support to women who experienced personal difficulties affecting their ability to focus on training. The participants also commented that the Vocational Skills Development Officer had shown sensitivity and concern for individual women's situations and made every effort to minimise the impact of problems on training by liaising with prison management on their behalf, and giving emotional support when necessary.

LINKS TO FURTHER TRAINING

- Training modules were subjects within the nationally recognised Engineering Production Certificate I and the accredited Certificate II of Pre-Apprentice Studies Building and Construction. Participants, upon release, were eligible to continue training at TAFE colleges and with other registered organisations offering relevant qualifications and vocational training.
- As a number of lecturers were from Midland TAFE, women developed contact with the institution that they would otherwise not encountered. These contacts were extremely valuable for women who aspired to continue training, or perhaps involve themselves in some other area of study, once released. The first steps towards getting one's life 'on track' after a prison sentence are often the most difficult. Having pre-established links eased this path and thus increased the possibility of stability in life on the 'outside'.

Some participants expressed an eagerness to take up further training once released, commenting that they felt confident in their ability to do so having had the opportunity to undertake and successfully complete training whilst in prison.

LINKS TO EMPLOYMENT

- It is a policy of the Ministry of Justice to offer training that meets the State Training Profile in order that skills learned are in areas where employment opportunities have been identified. Additionally, in the construction and metal engineering trades, which were the focus of this project, a prison record was not considered as much of an issue as it might have been in other areas when seeking employment. Studies in recidivism have shown that the likelihood of a person re-offending is dramatically decreased if they are able to find gainful employment within six months of leaving prison.
- At the completion of the metal modules in June, the Executive Officer of the Metals Manufacturing and Services Industry Training Council visited Bandyup and delivered a presentation about employment opportunities in the areas of welding and metal fabrication.
- Prison advocacy groups, Kindred and Outcare, work closely with the Bandyup education and training program and assist in trying to place offenders in training and/or employment when they are nearing release.

Case Study

An offender who had completed metals training and had subsequently been released from prison, wrote to the Vocational Skills Development Officer informing him that as a result of the training she had received in prison, she had felt confident enough to apply for a welding job. She did not secure the position on that occasion due to a lack of experience with TIG welding (she was released before that module had been offered) but has recently been contacted by the same employer and offered employment.

One offender applied for employment in the building and construction trade and secured a position painting, partitioning and installing suspended ceilings. She stated that though she had not expected to get a job when she applied, she was very pleased with her job and hoped to continue working in the trade now that she had “real work” experience.

While an emphasis was placed on increasing employment opportunities, the project management was realistic enough to ascertain that due to family responsibilities many of the women who completed modules were not going to be able to avail themselves of further training or employment in the near future. Nonetheless, the training provided was considered a success, as participants expressed great satisfaction in the knowing that they had become more self-reliant on a practical level. They stated that they felt more confident in their ability to carry out basic maintenance and repairs on their homes.

INPUT / SUPPORT FROM PRISON ADMINISTRATION

- The Ministry of Justice contributed to the program by way of the purchase and erection of the purpose built workshop which is now the Skills Centre. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice purchased a substantial amount of the training equipment necessary for the delivery of specific modules.
- The appointment of a full-time Vocational Skills Development Officer whose duties are specifically the coordination of vocational programs and the training of women offenders in vocational education was a major contribution.
- An annual budget for the delivery of vocational skills training was allocated as a result of the project.
- Provision was made for other relevant prison staff to assist with the construction of the Skills Centre when required.
- Prison management was prepared to modify normal prison procedures so as not to disrupt training. Usual disciplinary measures, for instance, were at times adjusted so as not to interfere with an individual's training.

• OUTCOMES

√ Increase in the number of women accessing training

Owing to a greater number of modules in a wider range of training areas, the increase in the number of women accessing training was substantial. The project involved 50 individual participants. Also, as women are now able to access training in a number of other prisons, this number will increase. To date, 12 women at Roebourne Prison and 9 at Greenough have participated in training modules since the inception of the project.

√ Increase in successful module completions

The popularity of the project led to a higher number of module completions than was anticipated. A total of 100 certificates for successfully completed modules were issued. (Arrangements were made with the local TAFE College to issue certificates on completion of modules and Statements of Attainment at the end of the semester.) Worth noting is that most women, having completed their first module, were motivated to continue training and thus complete multiple modules. Two women participated in the entire project and completed all modules offered. Those offenders that completed only one or two modules were generally women who were serving short prison sentences, or had only recently been sentenced and thus were new to the project.

The completion rate of 86% is significantly higher than other courses offered elsewhere in the prison. It must be noted that retaining students in any program within a prison setting is fraught with difficulty due to the variable nature of offenders' release, transfer due to security issues, and other unforeseeable circumstances. Non-completions of modules were mainly attributable to such factors.

The high number of women who were involved in the project, and completed modules can be viewed as a significant achievement given the weight of external institutional factors that continually impact on the women and necessarily effect the project.

∇ **Outfitting of Skills Training Centre for future training delivery**

Most of the training delivered in the modules was directly related to the building of the necessary physical infrastructure for the Skills Centre. In particular, this involved the construction of partition walls to create an office, a classroom in which to conduct theory components of modules, the installations of ceilings for these two rooms, workbenches and welding bays for welding and metal fabrication, and a tool shadow board with a security frame. By the end of June the workshop was equipped to accommodate a wide range of training modules on an on-going basis.

STATISTICS

MODULE	ENROLMENTS	COMPLETIONS
Occupational Safety and Health	11	8
First Aid	28	27
Scaffolding	8	7
Non-load Bearing Walls	6	5
Plasterboard Installation	6	4
Welding and Thermal Cutting	12	10
Fabrication Techniques 1	9	7
Basic Fork Lift Driving	6	6
Hand and Power Tools	6	6
Paint Applications 1	8	5
Occupational Safety and Health	8	8
Basic Fork Lift Driving	8	7
TOTAL	116	100

QUALITATIVE OUTCOMES

- A valuable outcome was the participants' development of a work regime. Many had never been employed for any substantial length of time, if at all, and had not had the opportunity to learn how to structure their time and to develop a working routine. In addition, participants developed skills in workplace communication and teamwork. A healthy work ethic was demonstrated by individuals' level of responsibility, commitment, and a positive attitude to participation in the project. The women developed a sense of ownership of the project and a feeling of pride in their accomplishments. The skills and attitudes that were demonstrated are essential components for successful employment in today's rapidly changing workforce.
- A major contributing factor to the success of the program was the view by the participants that the training was worthwhile on a practical level and also in terms of a pathway to further training and potential employment opportunities. Some participants had considered the training so valuable that, in conjunction with their Case Managers, they planned their prison sentences in order to complete an optimum number of modules.
- A number of participants felt that their involvement in training had been valuable on a personal level. Being successful at training had given them a great deal of satisfaction and motivation, and provided a meaningful focus. In terms of prison life, by attending the Skills Centre full time much of the day is consumed, which helped in the passing of their sentences. The fact that no participant had to be removed from the project on disciplinary grounds (not an unusual occurrence in the prison context) is a measure of their level of commitment to training.
- Prison staff expressed surprise at what was achieved particularly as the participants had not always been 'model' prisoners elsewhere in the system. Staff also commented that with the construction of the Skills Centre, and the pride that was exhibited by the participants in their accomplishments, the tone of the prison had generally been lifted. The Skills Centre is now used as a showpiece when officials and guests of the prison are taken 'on tour'.
- Positive recognition of the participants' high standard of workmanship and the considerable achievements they had accomplished given the size of the project, was forthcoming from various tradespeople and prison staff visiting the Skills Centre.
- Some women had the opportunity to apply skills they acquired in training elsewhere in the prison. One offender who had completed a training module, for example, was called upon to move pallets of concrete slabs at Nyandi as she was the only one (including staff) licensed to drive a forklift.

CONCLUSION

The overall success of the Bandyup Women's Prison Vocational Skills Training Project can be attributed to the fact that the client group and the particular context in which the training took place was given consideration at every stage of planning and delivery. In particular, the following points can be highlighted as recommendations for successful training programs not only in the prison context but also for training programs in general:

- Flexibility of training delivery
- Emphasis on practical training
- Opportunity to practise skills and to apply skills to real tasks
- Small class sizes
- Supportive environment
- The building of a relationship of mutual trust and respect between instructor and participants
- Involvement of participants in decision-making whenever possible
- Immediate recognition for achievements by TAFE college or other registered training organisation
- Involvement of institutions/agencies providing important links to the 'outside'
- Recognition from others outside of the project – prison staff, guests and officials
- Provision of training that leads directly to employment opportunities
- Recognition of the vocational instructor as the key to a successful training program

Due to the success of the project, the Ministry of Justice has come to recognise the value of training on various levels; vocational training is now offered at all prisons that house women in Western Australia. The precedent has been established to ensure that training will become a permanent option for all prison-based women offenders.

LESSONS LEARNED

Despite the meticulous planning, the time frame for the delivery of the modules did not adequately factor-in the effects of institutional disruptions to the project. Though a large proportion of the problems encountered were due to the rapid and unexpected increase in offender population, it is quite clear that a greater degree of coordination is required between court-mandated program areas, other prison sections and vocational training. The disruptions affected not only the delivery of training but in some instances, they forced offenders into an "either/or" situation that should not have occurred. In future better avenues of communication will be established and more time will be allocated between delivery of training modules to allow for these factors.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Should funding allocations be realised, Bandyup vocational training is planning the construction of a metal trailer to store and transport equipment for metals training such as welders, safety gear, tools etc., between correctional institutions – a mobile vocational skills training unit. This would facilitate a wider range of training opportunities for women at the two new institutions in the Perth area, which do not possess the necessary equipment. The project would also ensure that more offenders at other prisons around the state have access to vocational training.
- It is envisaged that training at Bandyup will continue to expand now that most of the necessary infrastructure is in place. In the immediate future the emphasis will be on the building of training infrastructure – workbenches, welding bays, etc. – for these new women’s prisons.
- The Vocational Skills Development Officer anticipates that in the future training participants will have the opportunity to produce items that they will be able to take with them on release from prison – metal candlestick holders, CD racks, toolbox’s and wind chimes. He envisages vocational training that will incorporate an artistic dimension to further attract participants.