

Workshop 22:
**A pre-release career and pathways transition program for
low-security inmates in maximum security facilities
within Queensland corrections**

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Introduction

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 38% of released inmates in 1993 returned to corrective services within two years of release (Australia Now, 1997). Despite this high rate of recidivism, in Australia, few studies have clearly examined the factors that either contribute to or reduce recidivism when inmates are released into a community. Further, in Australia no studies have actually measured the extent to which post-prison support and care as a variable predicts reduced recidivism, and there is little or no research concerning the effectiveness or evaluation of prison programs, prison education programs, or pre-release programs (Fox, 1990). Among the various factors influencing recidivism, one prominent mechanism could be the lack of proper and adequate post-prison support and care (Auta, 2001).

The rise in imprisonment rates both at a national and at a state level, leads to higher economic, social and psychological costs in society (SCRC/SSP, 2003). The Department of Corrective Services in Queensland incurs similar costs to that of the National Office in that it incurs high economic costs in delivering its services for relatively few inmates. To provide some indication of the scope of prison population problem, consider the following statistics. The numbers of reported inmates in the various levels of custody in Queensland for 2001-02 are as follows: secure custody (4,106), open custody (564), community custody (259) and community supervision (13, 445), totaling 18, 374 (Department of Corrective Services, 2001-02). In line with the national figures, the figures reported by the Department of Corrective Services in Queensland indicate that there has been a 5.7 % rise in the daily average prison population, taking the population up to 4,982 for the year 2002 (SCRC/SSP, 2003). In 2002, the Department of Corrective Services in Queensland had four main annual expenses (expressed in terms of \$'000): secure custody correctional services (\$ 277,184), open custody (\$ 41, 907), community custody services (\$ 18, 916) and community supervision service (\$ 29, 902), (Department of Corrective Services, 2001-02). The Department of Corrective Services in Queensland for the year 2001-02 indicated that in real financial terms, the recurrent cost per inmate per day for open and secure prisons combined together was \$ 140.80, which is lower than the national figures (SCRC/SSP, 2003).

One way the Department of Corrective Services in Queensland reduces recidivism is by providing programs that address offending behaviors, educational programs, vocational educational training, industry and reparation in order to work toward the rehabilitation of the

inmates. (Kirshstein & Best (1997) define rehabilitation in terms of the likelihood of inmates in obtaining jobs once released and their likelihood of staying out of prison in comparison to those who do not participate in such programs). These programs address offending behavior and assist inmates in gaining new skills, with the aim of making their transition into the community effective (Department of Corrective Services, 2001-02). Assessing the effectiveness of such programs in terms of reduced recidivism provides insight in terms of the extent to which correctional programs “rehabilitate” those who participate (Kirshstein & Best, 1997). Other questions such as “do certain programs work better than others?”, are important to address as they provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of the programs (Kirshstein & Best, 1997). Further, there is no consolidation among the various programs delivered by the Department of Corrective Services, and consolidation among programs is necessary, as it will assist in the evaluation of their collective contribution toward an inmate’s rehabilitation.

While a number of programs have been delivered in the past, not enough is known about the effectiveness and impact of these programs both in prisons and outside of prisons (Kirshstein & Best, 1997). One possible way to reduce re-offending is through the provision of systematic pre and post-prison support, care and supervision by human service-based interventions by means of a formalized pre-release program which put in place mechanisms that will support post-prison living (Brown, 2000). The aim of such a pre-release program would be to address offending behaviors and to identify ways to make the transition back into the community effective; and provide post-prison support, care and supervision by relevant community agencies and professionals. The Department of Corrective Services in Queensland has recently started to address and develop such a pre-release program, but it has not yet implemented it (Department of Corrective Services, 2002). As the development of the pre-release program by the Department of Corrective Services is only at an preliminary stage, this current research hopes to extend the study undertaken by the Department of Corrective Service and to complement it by providing a wider empirical context and an appropriate theoretical framework for the development, implementation and evaluation of a pre-release program.

In terms of a career counseling and development theoretical framework, the current study will focus on assisting inmates to equip themselves with marketable skills. The Mississippi Department of Corrections (2002) and the Franklin County Adult Probation Department (2000) mainly assists in job placement as part of their pre-release program. Great Falls Pre-Release Services (2000) provides vocational training, apprenticeship program, social skills development, addresses offending behavior and life skills programs as part of their pre-release program. Similar to the Great Falls Pre-Release Services (2000) the J & K Ministries (2002) also addresses offending behavior is part of the pre-release program. Further, the Nebraska Department of Corrections (2002) also provides life skills programs similar to that of the Great Falls Pre-Release Services (2000) as part of a pre-release program. These skills will be established while inmates are incarcerated so that they are prepared to enter the work force and gain appropriate and suitable employment upon release (Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, 2002). The development of the current pre-release program will be founded on aspects of these several existing programs in its construction, implementation and evaluation within a career counseling and development framework.

Need for current study

There is an urgent need for the design, development, implementation and evaluation of a pre-release program in Queensland because at present there is no:

- pre-release program is available in Queensland
- existing career counseling and development framework for pre-release program
- pre-release program that addresses the psychological, social and legal implications of offending behavior
- systematic pre-release support, care or supervision
- risk assessment in pre-release programs
- empirical research in the area of pre-release programs

No available pre-release program in Queensland

The Department of Corrective Services in Queensland recently started to address the issue of there not being a pre-release program in Queensland, but has to yet implement the program (Department of Corrective Services, 2002). Consequently, inmates who are currently released from Queensland prisons do not undergo a systematic pre-release program and do not have a systematic exit plan. Further, there is no consolidation among the various programs such as core programs, and educational, vocational, industrial and reparation programs that are provided by the Department of Corrective Services (Department of Corrective Services, 2002). Consolidating programs through a structured pre-release program may be useful in developing a proper and systematic exit plan for inmates who are eligible for release.

No existing theoretical framework for pre-release programs

One way to address a post-prison criminal career is through operationalising a career counseling and developmental theoretical framework as currency for inmates to re-enter society, as it is envisioned that they will allow for a greater possibility of job placement and attending training programs. Career counseling and developmental theories mainly assist in developing marketable skills such as job-placement and employment, which are recognized to be an essential factor in inmate re-integration into the community (Coffey & Knoll, 1998). Thus, career counseling and development theories are viewed as playing an important role in formulating and addressing transitional issues from prison into the community. In developing a pre-release program, the challenge for career counseling and development is not only to extend positive career choices, positive life pathways (Coffey & Knoll, 1998) and crime free living, but also to address offending behavior in relation to criminal career choices. Thus, it is imperative to employ appropriate career counseling and development theories to assist and explain how marketable skills can be enhanced, along with inmate transition from a correctional facility to the community.

A number of theories of career development and counseling assist in developing a formalized pre-release program; but Super's theory of career development is most applicable, as it allows the individual to define their sense of self-concept over and above their offending behavior (Super, 1957a; 1957b; Peterson, 1996; Zunker, 2002). Super's theory of career development is a life long developmental theory. It is used to assist in the development of

support for post-prison inmate employment and training (Super, 1957a; 1957b; Peterson, 1996; Zunker, 2002). Super's theory of career development is also useful, as it enables a positive opportunity for inmates upon release to gain through employment, training and apprenticeship programs (Super, 1957a; 1957b; Peterson, 1996; Zunker, 2002). Super's theory of career development is defined in terms of the matching of the individual's vocational strengths and vocational skills with the requirements of specific occupations, subsequently solving both career-search and inmate-career problems (Super, 1957a; 1957b; Peterson, 1996; Zunker, 2002). One of the main reasons for using this particular theory of career development is that it provides a holistic understanding of working across the life span of an individual, irrespective of one's background, age, ethnicity, or education (Super, 1957a; 1957b; Peterson, 1996; Zunker, 2002).

Systematic pre-release support and care or supervision to help reduce community isolation

Community isolation is one of the biggest problems faced by inmates when they are incarcerated (Auta, 2001; Blassingame, 2001). Community can be simply defined as a place "where people of common interests live or an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location" (Carey, 1997, p3). Inmates experience community isolation at various levels of community and to various extents, and how this is reduced both prior to release and upon release is one of the most important ways to reduced recidivism (Auta, 2001). Inmates are very isolated when they are ready to be released into the community and they need support so that they can begin to get a sense of what it is like to get out in the world again, and further to assist and make connections to help them adjust, find friends and work opportunities (Auta, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model provides a useful framework for addressing this as it can be used to set up systematic support and care at the various levels of inmate transition into the community. This model provides a simple view of development and has the capacity to target all aspects of pre and post-release care within a pre-release program (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study argues that by systematically reducing community isolation at the four levels of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem inmates would be assisted in integrating successfully into the community.

The first system of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology model is the microsystem, which mainly considers the immediate situations that directly affect the inmate — the objects or social agents to which one responds or has direct face-to-face interaction, for example: family, peers, school and neighborhood. The second system of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology model is the mesosystem which is the wider community/culture experience. This mainly considers the relationships among the various microsystems. The third system of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology model the "exosystem", explores the experiences of a wider social setting in which an inmate does not have an active role but which nevertheless is influenced by experience. For example, a particular perception of who is entitled to live in a neighbourhood or a media perception of an inmate's values. The exosystem consists of linkages between subsystems that indirectly influence the individual, such as one's neighborhood or the media (Cook, Heppner & O'Brien, 2002). The final system of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology model is the macrosystem, which include the wider attitudes/ideologies of the culture. For example, an attitude or ideology of the wider culture

could be that inmates can never be rehabilitated and that some minority groups could be more disposed toward criminal activities relative to others.

No pre-release program addresses the psychological, social and legal implications of offending behavior

Psychological, social and legal implications should first be examined within the framework of what theories best explain offending behavior, so that knowledge about personal, situational and social variables regarding criminal behavior are addressed in the pre-release program (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). Further, Andrews and Bonta (1994) note that important variables such as personal, situational and social variables appear to be highly correlated with offending behavior, and these need to be addressed before releasing an inmate into the community. Thus, in a pre-release program, psychological, social and legal implications are important to address as they provide insight into what kind of potential risk an inmate would pose when released into the community. Such a process will provide helpful insight into what factors are likely to increase or decrease a successful transition into the community. Furthermore, it will importantly provide a detailed insight into some of the predisposing risk factors an inmate would be potentially carrying when released into the community, whether they are psychological, social or legal boundaries that pre-dispose an inmate to re-offend.

No risk assessment in pre-release programs

One way to assess the nature of psychological and social implications is through assessing and identifying specific risk factors and needs of inmates, particular groups of inmates and further it will provide the many changing characteristics identified among the corrective service population (SCRC/SSP, 2003). This study will use the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide (VRAG) for risk analysis assessment (Quinsey, Harris, Rice, & Cormier, 2001) on inmates within Queensland corrections. Risk assessment (VRAG) will be used to assess the likelihood of risk for the development of intervention strategies. VRAG provides insight into inmate classification (high or low risk) and the potential risk they pose to themselves and to the community at large. Substantial risk analysis assessment identifies both risk and protective factors that are operating and are evident in the inmate. Based on this information, more individually designed intervention strategies can be developed to assist inmate transition from incarceration into the community.

No empirical research in the area of pre-release programs

Generally, programs have an empirical base in their development, implementation or evaluation. The pre-release programs reviewed have the simple global aim of assisting inmates to successfully re-integrate into society through employment or job opportunity, as a framework to reduce “community isolation” (Auta, 2001), but no programs use an empirical theory to provide a rationale for services. It also appears that the additions or the deletions of the many services within a pre-release program are ad-hoc, without proper criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of services. But, in Australia, there is a lack of research on pre-release programs, in part due to certain prevailing assumptions and myths about the role and purpose of prisons (Fox, 1990). In addition, research within corrections’ programs in Australia is complicated by studies that show little evidence of reduced recidivism through treatment programs.

Rationale, process of the study and hypothesis

Inmates, who are identified to be at low risk measured through the VRAG (Quinsey et al., 2001), will be assisted in their transition into the community. Career counseling and development issues will be assessed on identified low risk inmates to gain more specific information into their vocational skills, education and job preparation requirements. It is possible that these low-risk inmates will respond best to career developmental assistance through employment, education and apprenticeship programs. Inmates who are identified to be at a high-risk are beyond the scope of the current study because of the complicated nature for their criminogenic needs and thus the study has been restricted only to low-risk inmates. However, the results from this study have the potential to support similar programs in the future, which can be extended to assist medium and high-risk inmates upon their return to the community. In effect, contributing toward inmate community engagement and a better quality of life for both the inmate and the community, this is one of the priorities for Queensland State Government.

The aim of this research is to determine whether providing pre and post-release career development and systematic assistance *and* support for low-risk inmates through a formalized pre-release program will result in reduced recidivism. Program participants will be compared to those who do not participate in a similar program (the control group) and the overall measure of recidivism will be re-incarceration over a period of twelve months. Secondly, it is hypothesized that by systematically reducing community isolation at the four levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, for inmates who participate in the pre-release program will be better informed of the transitional issues, skills they possess and how to live, operate and conduct themselves in the community as responsible citizens. These will be measured in terms of program evaluation using pre-and-post — tests on content of the program; program participation through attendance and level participation in the program; and through post-prison support and care with regular consultation through various qualitative measures such as interviews, counseling sessions and telephone conversations on a regular basis. These qualitative measures will indicate both the value of the program and how the program has assisted and is continuing to assist them in their post-prison living.

Finally, it is also hypothesized that by attending to inmates' psychological, social and legal implications of offending behavior in the pre-release program, they are less likely to re-offend compared to those who do not participate in a similar program (control group) and program participation will result in reduced recidivism. The measure of recidivism is specific to the reason of incarceration (breach of parole, conditional orders or being convicted of a new offence) of incarceration over a period of twelve months (Howard & Kershaw, 2000).

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