



**Victorian
Association for
the Care and
Resettlement of
Offenders**



VACRO Women's Mentoring Program

“A mentoring Model to Assist Women to Successfully Re-integrate into the Community”

**Re-integration Puzzle
Conference**

31st August 2009

Violet Lotter

*Women's Support
Services*

Co-ordinator

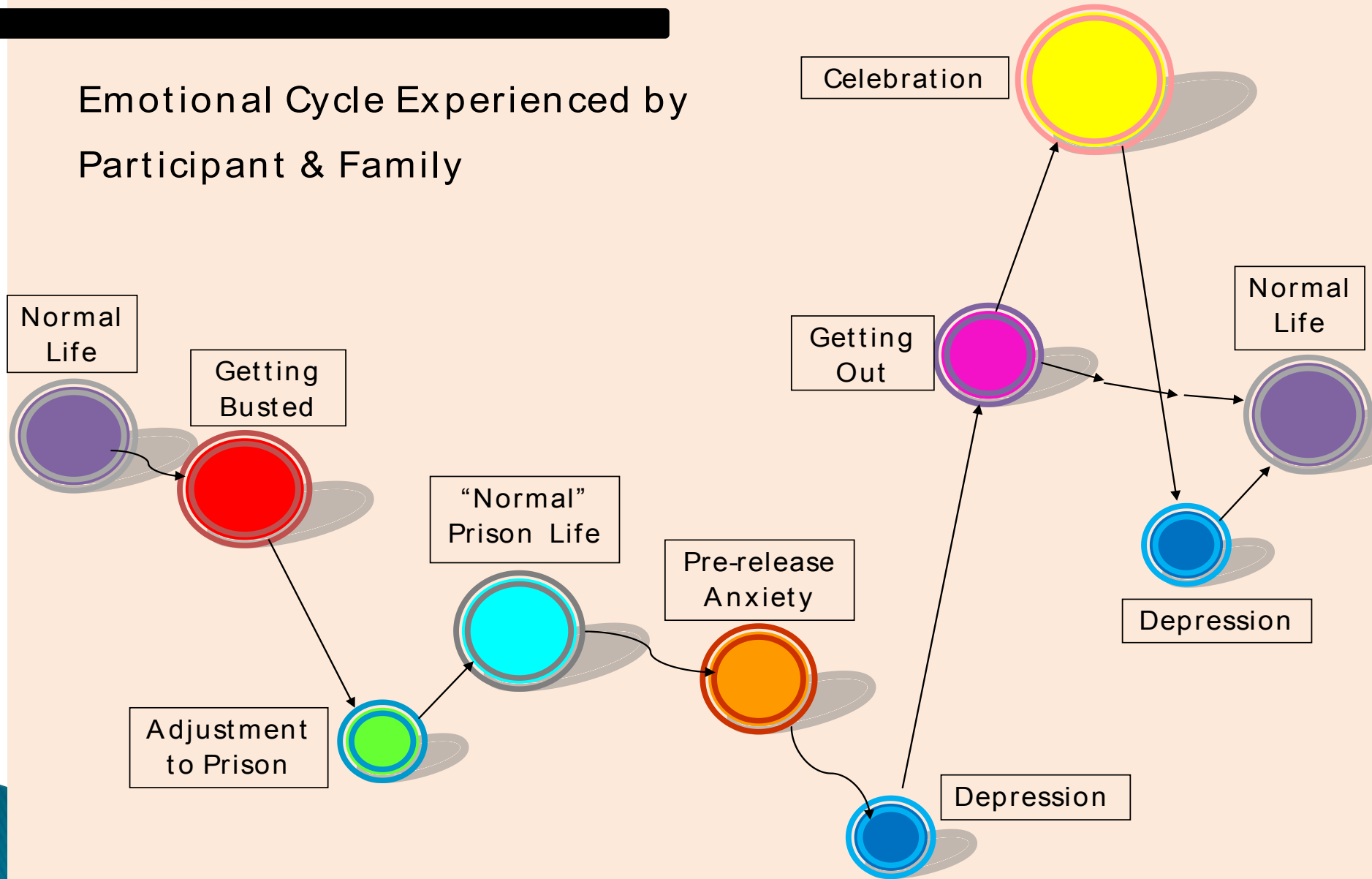
VACRO Background

- ▶ Began in 1872 as the Prisoners' Aid Society
- ▶ 130 years of working with offenders and their families
- ▶ First Victorian organisation to recognise and include offenders families as part of its primary mission
- ▶ Currently provides a suite of programs targeting ex-offenders, offenders, their families and their communities
- ▶ Prison and Community-based programs include:
 - Justice Team
 - Family Team
 - Research and Development

VACRO's Mission

- ▶ VACRO provides support and information for individuals charged with a criminal offence, offenders, prisoners and their families, as well as leadership, education, training and research on the Justice System for the community.

Emotional Cycle Experienced by Participant & Family



VACRO Women's Mentoring Program (VWMP)

VWMP a Gender Specific Mentoring Program for Supporting:

- *Women exiting Prison and
- *Women on Community Orders



'...she gave me the confidence; she made me believe in me'

VWMP

- ▶ Award Winning Program
 - **Corrections Victoria Community Work Partnership Awards 2005** –
-Winner: In partnership with the Women’s Prison Region “Best Project Involving Special Category Offenders/Prisoners”
 - **Victorian Community Safety- Crime Prevention Awards 2005-**
Winner: ‘Best Established Project Award’
 - Featured in the Age Good Weekend ‘Two of US (August 2006)

VWMP

- **Woman to Woman founded in 2000**

Supporting women exiting from prison to integrate into community following release

- **VACRO Women's Mentoring Program 2003-2006**

Funded by William Buckland Foundation & R.E Trust.

- **VACRO Women's Mentoring Program 2007-2010**

Funded by Department of Justice. Program expanded to include women on Community based orders

VWMP

- ▶ **VWMP was established within the context of:**
- ▶ Increasing rates of female incarceration
- ▶ A prison system fundamentally designed for male offenders
- ▶ Significant numbers of women returning to prison
- ▶ Difficulties facing women returning to the community which contribute to both re-offending and entrenched disadvantage

VWMP



AIMS:

- ▶ Assist women exiting prison to reintegrate successfully into the community through the provision of support by voluntary female mentors
- ▶ To foster pro-social choices and behaviours and reduce the likelihood of reoffending through role-modelling
- ▶ To reduce the incidence of self-harm and accidental death among released women prisoners through the provision of social support and the addressing of various contributory factors ie drug use
- ▶ To provide transitional support to a range of 'special needs' groups identified as in need of additional support services

VWMP

VWMP PROGRAM MODEL

1. **Provision of Gender Specific Support**
 - *Relationships*
 - *Response to Community Supervision, incarceration and treatment*
 - *Dependent Care Responsibilities*
2. **Complementing Existing Services**
3. **Filling a Service Gap**
4. **Practical Assistance**
5. **Community Capacity Building**

VWMP

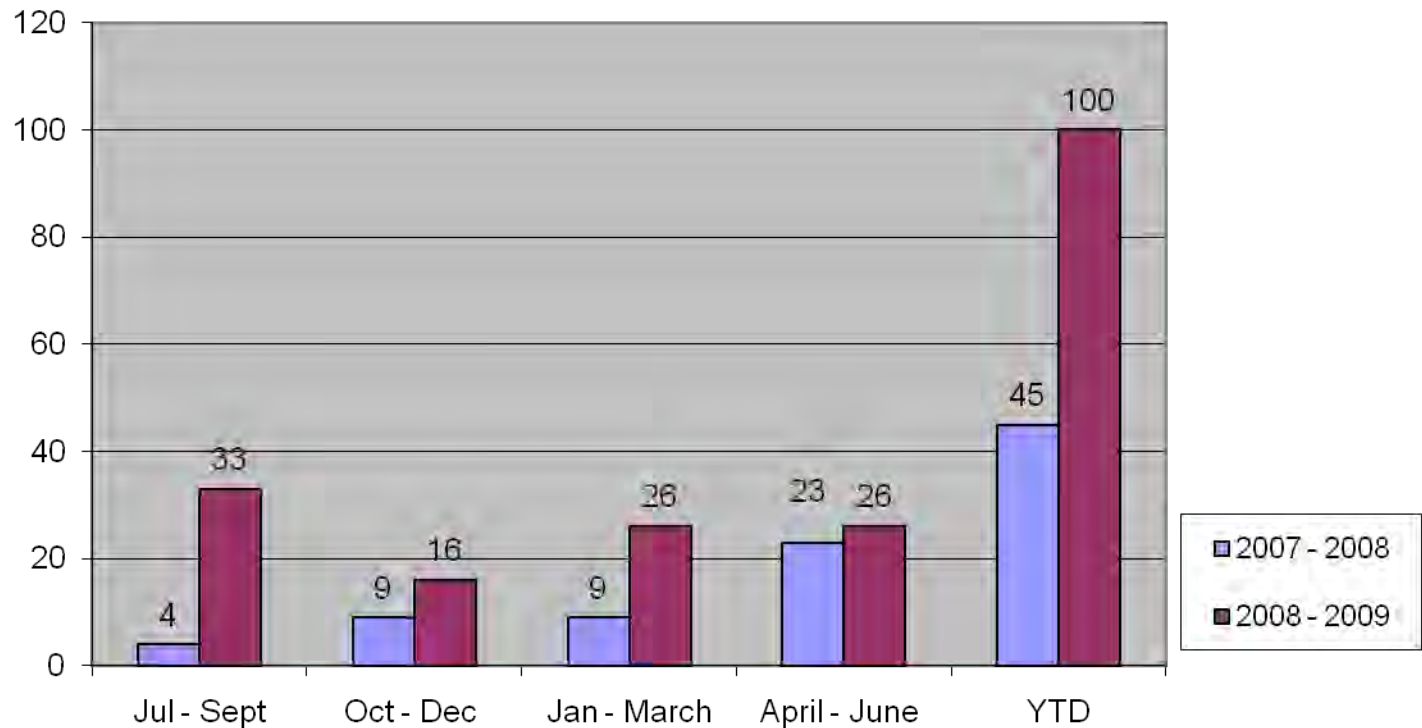
- ▶ Assist in the transition from prison to the community.
- ▶ Assist in reintegrating into the community.
- ▶ Connect women with their greater community.
- ▶ Provide ongoing support and positive influence
- ▶ Facilitate women's awareness of their strengths and competencies.

The Referral Process

- ▶ Referrals received from:
 - Prison – Dame Phyllis Frost & Tarrengower
 - Community Corrections Officers
 - Home Detention Office
 - Self-referrals
 - Complimentary Programs (WISP, Flatout, MCM etc)
- ▶ A VWMP Worker makes suitable arrangements to meet with the woman.
- ▶ At the initial meeting, the worker will assess for suitability and discuss the matching process.

VWMP

Comparative Total Referrals 2007/08 vs 2008/09



VWMP

▶ Referred Women:

Backgrounds characterised by experiences of

- Abuse: physical, sexual, mental...
- Domestic violence
- Self harm
- Drug use
- Poor education
- Poverty
- Relationship issues: family of origin / partners
- Children
- Abandonment

VWMP

- ▶ In order to create change in their lives incarcerated women need to experience relationships that do not repeat their histories of loss, neglect and abuse

Covington 2002

VWMP – Participant Profile



Prisoners and their problems do not fall from the sky. They come from families, they live in neighbourhoods and they belong to communities.

What is a MENTOR?

‘Mentors provide a spectrum of learning and supporting behaviours, from challenging and being a critical friend to being a role model, from helping to build networks and develop personal resourcefulness to simply being there to listen, from helping people find out what they want to achieve and why, to planning how they will bring about change.’

David Clutterbuck

Defining the VWMP Mentor's Role

“To provide support and to serve as a positive role model for the participant”

Mentors :

- Listen
- Are non-judgemental
- Help participants stay focussed on the big picture
- Assist in making choices
- Maintain regular contact



What are the Mentors' Responsibilities?

Manages the relationship

Encourage the participant

Nurtures the participant

Teaches the participant

Offers mutual respect

Responds to the needs of the participant

Who are VWMP Mentors?

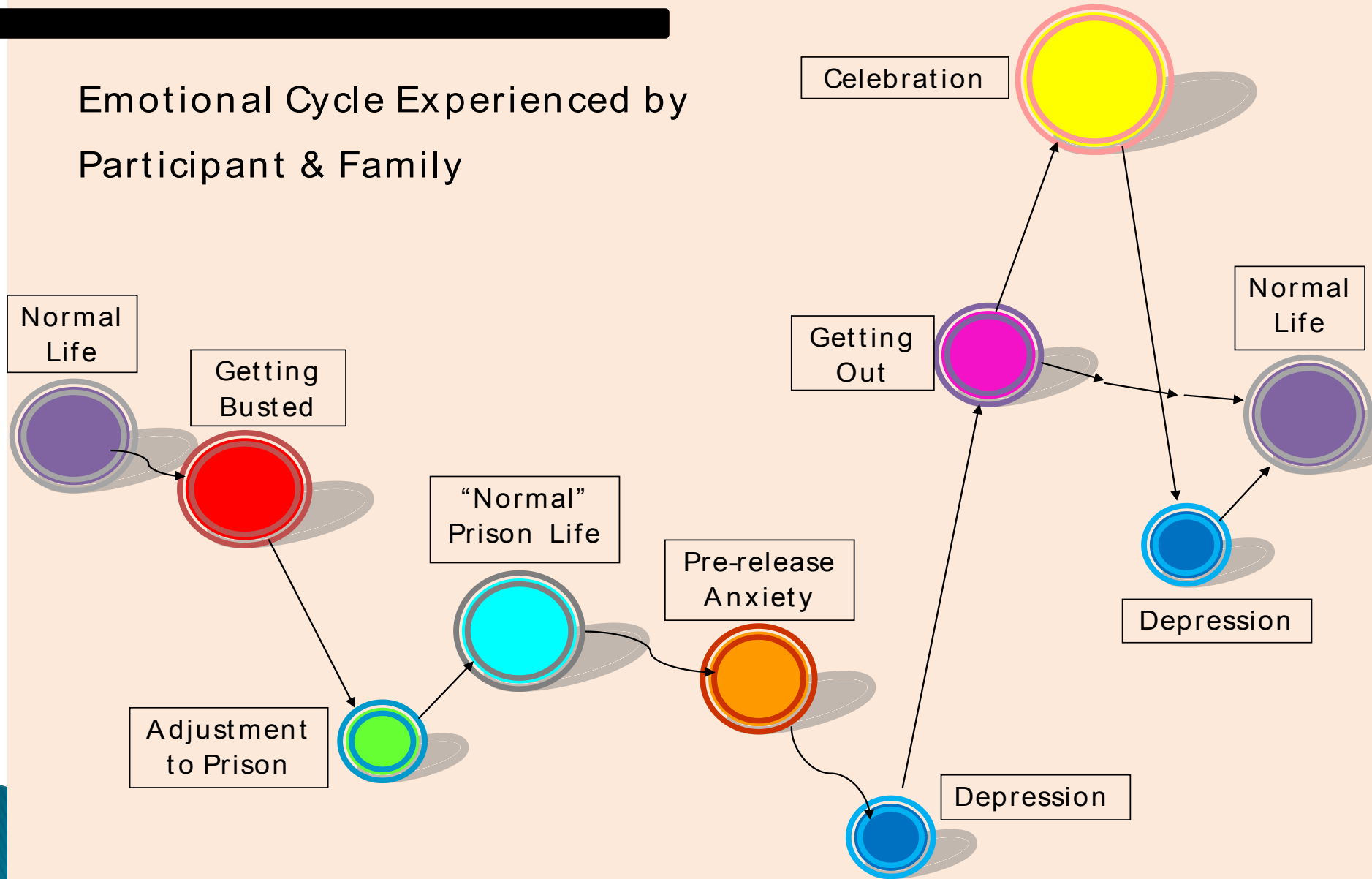
- ▶ Mentors come from a broad range of backgrounds
- ▶ Complete ten Training Modules
- ▶ Mentors commit to at least one year
- ▶ When selecting mentors VWMP looks for the following attributes:
 - Communication skills
 - Self awareness
 - Resilience
 - Life stage
 - Interests
 - Diversity
 - Ethics
 - Outlook
 - Confidentiality

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The Matching Process

- ▶ Matches based on:
 - Interests
 - Special requests by the woman
 - Location
 - Mentor skills and attributes
 - Mentor availability

Emotional Cycle Experienced by Participant & Family



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“If I have a problem, I’m the only one who can solve it—the only one who knows all the feelings and, background involved. You can help me get in touch with those feelings, and help me put them in proper perspective. I don’t know of any way for you to do this except to listen. You’re not a magician. You can’t simply imagine how I’m feeling; you must help me tell you.”

Relational Factors (Spencer 2006)

▶ Authenticity

- Allowing relational partner to have access to thoughts feelings and intentions;
- Offering engaging responses to another's thoughts, feelings and intentions;

▶ Empathy

- understanding and appreciating another person's values, preferences, ideals;

▶ Mutuality and collaboration

- emotional development through the on-going interactions with others

▶ Companionship

- shared pleasurable experiences and meanings, being meaningful to someone important

What is the impact of Mentoring?

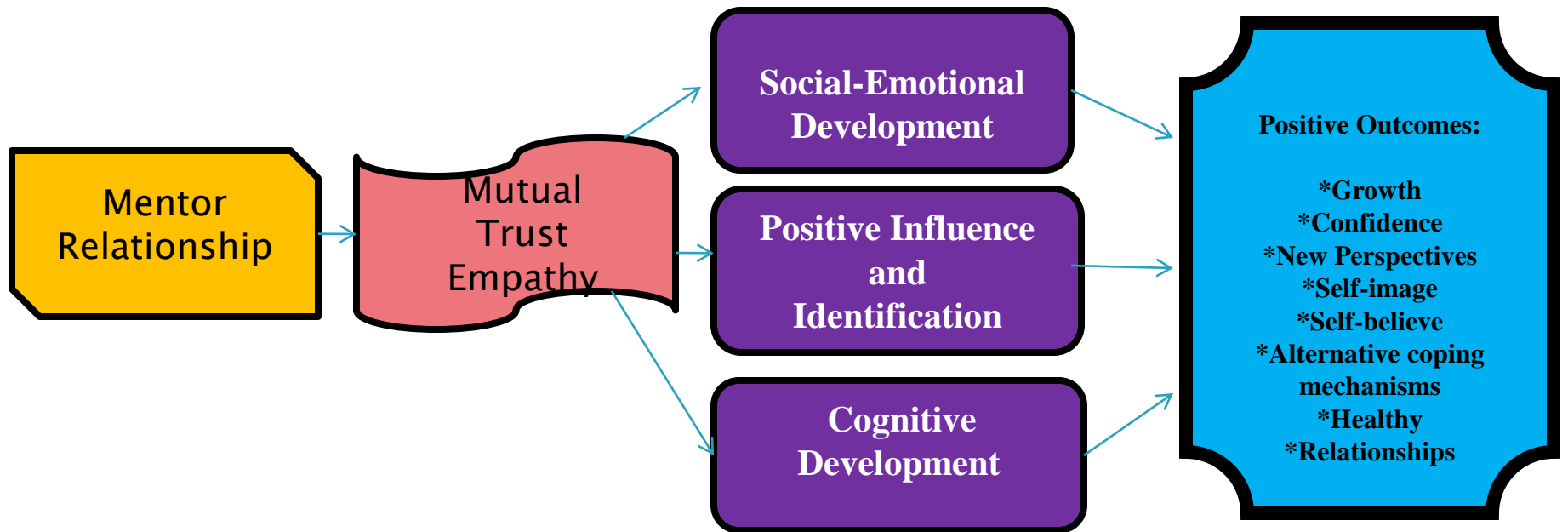
We have seen that mentoring can:

- reduce isolation
- increase self esteem
- increase confidence
- improve community and family connectedness
- encourages hope
- foster active engagement in pro-social activities

These changes can:

- reduce offending behaviour
- reduce reliance on illicit substances
- increase vocational, recreational and educational opportunities

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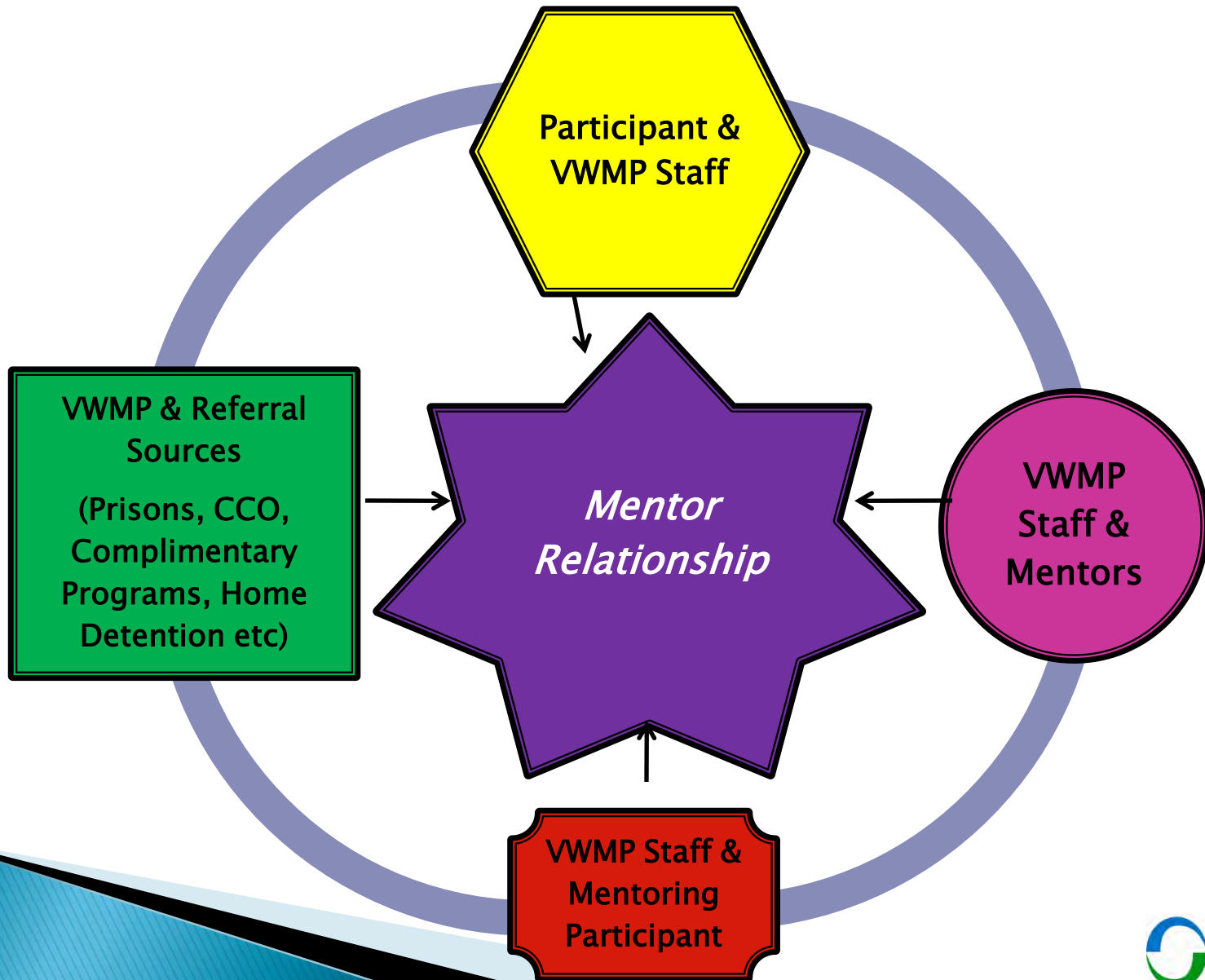
VWMP

VWMP relationships is so much more than just the mentoring pair:

- ▶ VWMP staff develop close working partnerships with referral sources
- ▶ VWMP staff develop close working relationships with auxiliary support services
- ▶ When services like WISP, FlatOut etc cease involvement... VWMP staff and Mentors continue to be involved and provide ongoing consistent support

“Working together to assist the women in achieving their potential”

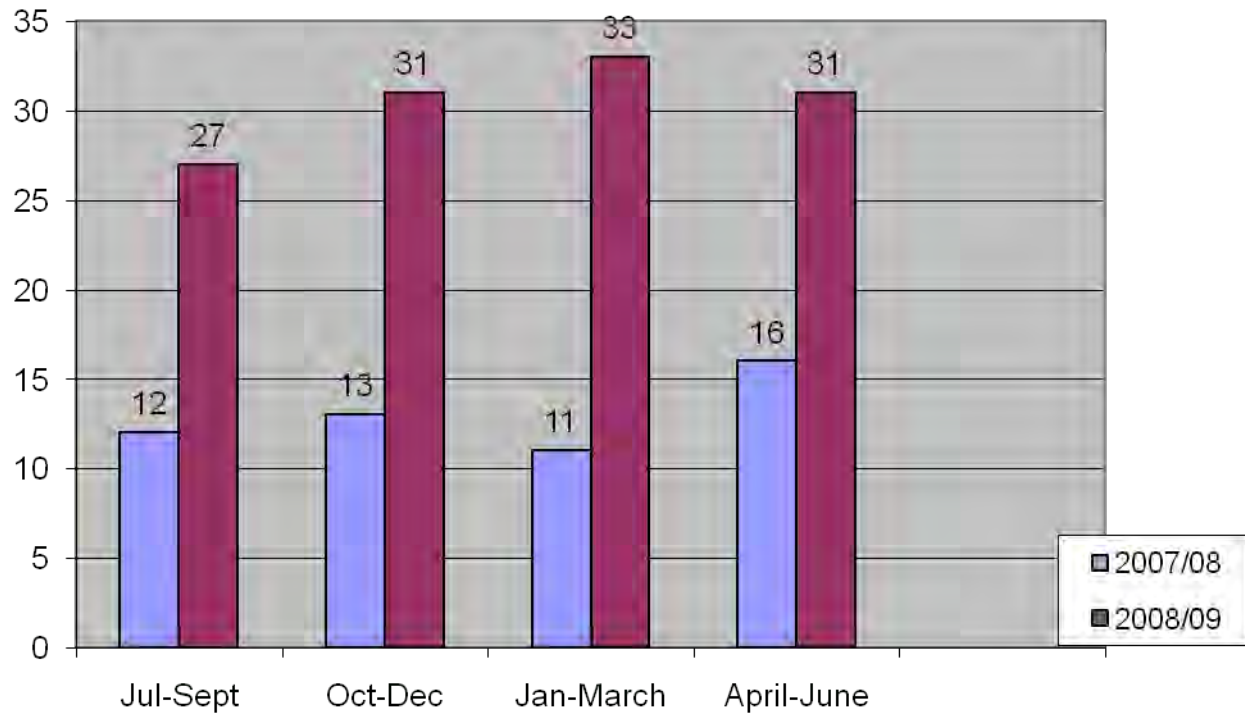
The Relationship is the key



VWMP

- ▶ Mentor and Participant Engagement
 - 31 Current Mentoring Pairs
 - Approximately 30% of mentoring pairs have been together for over 12 months, with several exceeding 2-3 years
 - Increased knowledge of issues and support needed for transitioning/reintegrating --- both mentors and women participants

Active mentor Pairs 2007/08 vs 2008/09



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- ▶ **The question.....**

Is VWMP achieving it's goals/aims?

Does it Work?

VWMP

The aims:

- ▶ Assist women to reintegrate successfully?
- ▶ Foster pro-social choices and behaviours
- ▶ Reducing recidivism?
- ▶ Reducing the incidence of self-harm and accidental death?
- ▶ Provide transitional support to a range of 'special needs' groups?

VWMP

The ways VWMP intervenes:

- ▶ Impacts on areas of personal change (human capital) and accessing work opportunities, study and volunteering etc (social change)
- ▶ Unrealistic expectation on voluntary mentors to:
 - Reduce recidivism
 - Reduce self-harm and accidental death

Women with such high needs are best served by a range of intensive professional services

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Emphasis on measures other than recidivism within the program to consider the success of a mentoring relationship

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▶ Building Social Capital

Mentoring Provides:

- Empathy
- Authenticity
- Trust
- Mutuality
- Companionship
- Practical Support

Relational Factors (Spencer 2006)

VWMP

- ▶ Building Social Capital

Mentoring Outcomes:

- Improved Self-Image
- Improved Confidence
- Self-believe
- Alternative coping strategies

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▶ Key Programs Outcomes

- 27 Women have accessed work, volunteering or education
- 18 Women provided with support at court by mentors
- 5 Women provided with other forms of legal support
- 14 Women provided information/assistance with Life-Skills Programs
- 13 Women provided with medical, dental or methadone support, as well as support with mental health concerns (including suicidal ideation)

VWMP

▶ Key Programs Outcomes

- 12 Women assisted with housing
- 4 Referrals to domestic violence services (and provision of domestic violence training to mentors)
- 16 Women provided with material aid
- 5 Women provided with letters of support
- 10 Women assisted with family support

Three processes for dealing with issues of transition/reintegration:

1. Direct intervention where the co-ordinator has access to resources through VACRO
2. Support and information provision to the mentors and participants.
3. The development of referrals from DPFC, Tarrengower, CCS and complimentary programs (ie WISP, Flatout, MCM)

VWMP Outcomes of Mentoring and Processes of Desistance

Mentoring Activities

- Consistently spending time reflecting on imprisonment, future plans, goals
- Positive reinforcement of non-offending routines and thoughts
- Challenging anti-social thoughts & patterns
- Assistance with justice system eg. court support

- Non-judgemental, trustworthy consistent, authentic friendship and support
- Encouraging links with resources such as family and services
- Assisting with links to work/study/volunteering

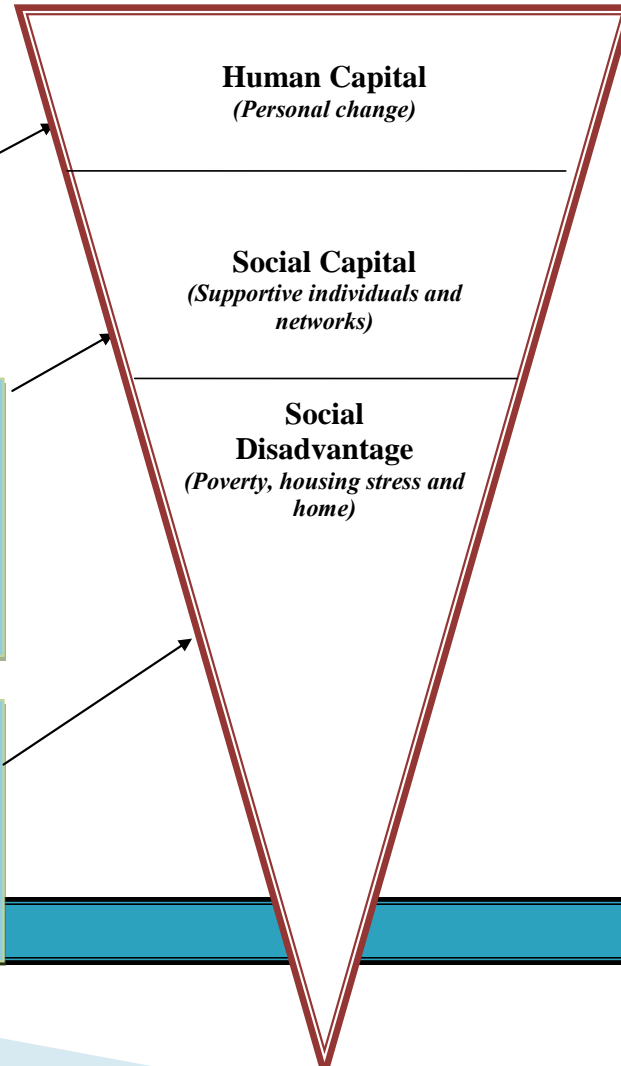
- Advocacy with Centrelink
- Identification of housing crises & referral to VACRO or other service
- Housing reference
- Employment reference

Outcomes of Mentoring

- Ability to evaluate offending & prison
- Interest in non-offending lifestyle & commitment to putting routines and behaviours in place for support
- Improved self esteem and self worth

- Capacity for better relationships with support services, families and other networks
- Sense of support & connection, reduced isolation
- Increased opportunities for work/study/volunteering
- Sense of community 'safety net'

- Stronger capacity to advocate with services
- Increased likelihood of issues being identified & addressed by services
- Increased resources to access employment/study



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Susie's Story



QUESTIONS?

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Acknowledgements:

Post release Support for Women Prisoners:

Processes of Psychological and Social Transition

Final report on the VACRO Women's

Mentoring Program :Stuart Ross, Mark Brown, Jenny Malone, Nicola Henry

VWMP Mentors and Participants

Andrea Lott

Jenny Malone

Violeta Kostovski

Anastasia Barker