

7th National
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Women Offenders Conference
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Welcome

Corrections Victoria



Better Pathways to Better Outcomes

Role of Offender Management Supervisors as Change Agents

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The Women's Prisons Region Formed October 2000



The Women's Prisons Region comprises two prisons;

Dame Phyllis Frost Centre

Maximum security

Reception Prison accommodating all prisoner categories & security ratings

Original capacity = 125

Current capacity = 260



Tarrengower Prison

Minimum security farm (opened in 1987)

Release preparation and community reintegration focus

Original Capacity = 26

Current Capacity = 54

(can be temporarily lowered as a result of the number of children residing in custody)



Introduction to the role of Offender Management Supervisors as Change Agents



- Offender Management practices, underpinned by ‘what works’ principles, create a gender responsive environment
- Education, training and mentoring is delivered to custodial staff by the Offender Management Supervisors, with a
- Focus on actively engaging female offenders in order to facilitate positive behaviour change and reduce re-offending
- Offender Management Supervisors act as ‘Change Agents’ and ensure consistent quality offender management across locations.



Profile of Female Offenders



- The number of women coming into custody has more than doubled in the past decade
- The Women’s Prisons Region implements evidence based practices that recognise that women respond differently to correctional intervention compared to male offenders.
- Female offenders are more likely to have histories of trauma and victimisation,
- Issues of substance abuse and mental illness, and
- Damaged self-esteem and confidence on their journey to prison.
- Over the last two days we have heard about specific programs that aim to address individual needs and recommendations from the Tier 1 assessment.
- The Tier 1 is an assessment tool that measures the risk of re-offending for women with a sentence of four months or more.



Better Pathways to Better Outcomes – Cultural Change



- Additionally, the female offenders perceptions of authoritarian figures are suspicious, to say the least
- There is no ‘program’ that addresses these issues specifically.
- So it is in this field that the contribution of custodial staff in preparing offenders for successful reintegration into the community is significant.
- Some of the actions taken by Offender Management Supervisors to bring about ‘cultural change’ will now be shared. I’d like to introduce my colleague, Barb Ryan, Offender Management Supervisor at Tarrengower Prison.



Instrumental to Cultural Change – the Offender Management Framework



- Offender Management Supervisors promote to staff an understanding of the aims of the Offender Management Framework.
- It describes the way we assess, treat, and manage higher risk offenders.
- We now know that imprisonment alone does not reduce re-offending.
- Evidence based programs are four times more effective.
- The aim of offender management practices is to motivate offenders to participate in programs and to live in a healthy prison environment.



Instrumental to Cultural Change – Respect for Women as Individuals



- Women respond well to being treated with respect, as individuals with regard for cultural differences, while promoting appropriate professional boundaries.
- Offender Management Supervisors promote an understanding of the essential role of the ‘person on the ground’ – spending the most time with the offender – in building self-esteem and self-worth
- There is room for staff to be sensitive to belief systems and character make-up, while still maintaining the fundamental need for security.
- This has been achieved through informal conversations, formal sessions and being a positive role model.
- Positive interactions between staff and offenders contribute to a healthy and supportive prison environment, where offenders are encouraged to address their offending behaviour while building self-esteem and developing skills



Instrumental to Cultural Change - Monitoring Processes for Quality Assurance



- Offender Management Supervisors have established new processes and systems across the Women's Prisons Region, that ensure a consistent approach, and are benchmarked and continually improved.
- Monthly reports of IMP File audits illustrate a significant increase in the quality of;
 - Offender management plans
 - File notes
 - Parole Board reports
 - Reviews etc.

Instrumental to Cultural Change - Quality Local Plans



Offender Management Supervisors educate and mentor staff in developing offender management plans, and monitor offender's local plans throughout the sentence.

Local plans are an opportunity for:

Offenders to personally measure and take responsibility for their achievements

Caseworkers to practice their best effective listening skills to 'hear' what the offender's most important goals are, and for

Caseworkers to assist the offender by 'framing' a Local Plan with **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic & Time-framed (SMART)** strategies.

Quality local plans are a vehicle for discussion between the caseworker and the offender.

Local Plans are a real measure of successes and progression, no matter how small.

Instrumental to Cultural Change – Making Philosophies and Organisational Strategies ‘Real’

- It has been necessary to demystify many of the theoretical principles on which the offender management framework stands so that they are more user friendly and ‘palatable’ e.g. using non-technical language.
- Offender Management Supervisors are conduits / interface between strategic policy and prison operations
- Staff may not often see that what they do every day is a direct link to these organisational strategies. We help them to see the links.
- The Women’s Prisons Region is a progressive component of the Victorian Prison system, and we are not afraid to trial different approaches to making the framework and strategies ‘real’
- It has not been possible to progress without the support and resources offered by Corrections Victoria management and other business units
- We continually invite suggestions and comments from staff regarding how we could continue to evolve, and have an interest in world-wide practices
- Gail will now conclude our presentation. Thank you.



The Role of the Offender Management Supervisor



- The role of the Offender Management Supervisor is seen as “I’m not sure what he/she does” and may be difficult to evaluate
- We see the role as ‘Change Agents’
- We support staff to expand their thinking, and
- Encourage staff to respond appropriately to the individual needs of their caseload, and challenge unacceptable behaviour
- We are seeing evidence that when a woman is required to appear in front of a review panel, for example, she presents in a more positive and articulate manner. She is able to communicate less defensively / aggressively and therefore achieve better outcomes.
- This reinforces our belief that the offender is better prepared for successful reintegration into the wider community.
- It is hoped that when the women have to negotiate with DHS, Centrelink, Pharmacists or other authoritarian agencies, that their experience in working closely with staff will enable them to do so more appropriately.



The Role of the Offender Management Supervisor



- A significant shift in offender responses can be partly attributed to their view of ‘authoritarian’ figures.
- It is quite funny when we receive a woman who has not been in for several years, their presentation is generally guarded and defensive. However, when they have been in the reception unit for a couple of days and have become familiar with how staff are now working, they are entirely different - more open, pleasant and willing to accept help to make their imprisonment more productive
- Negativity breeds negativity, and
- Passion is contagious – that is the fundamental shift in the way that officers are now working.
- None of this has happened overnight
- ‘Change’ is not normally welcomed and there is a natural reluctance to work differently
- Hundreds of hours working closely with staff to promote an understanding of what our mission and values translate to, and
- To realise just how valuable the contribution of staff is in reducing re-offending

Conclusion

In the Women's Prisons Region,
we view these Officers as one of our most important
assets, as we continue to seek 'Better Outcomes'

Thank you for your attention, and please feel free to
ask any questions.

Corrections Victoria

