

Corrective Services Administrators  
Council  
7<sup>th</sup> National Women Offenders  
Conference

# **NSW Department of Corrective Services**

## **Mothers and Children's Programs**

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# Mothers and Children's Programs

- Mothering at a Distance
- Mothers and Children's Program
  - Local Leave Permits Section 26
  - Occasional Residency Program
  - Full-time Residency Program
- Video Visits Program
- Dillwynia TV – in-cell TV channel

# Mothering at a Distance

This is a collaborative project between NSW  
Department of Corrective Services and Tresillian  
Family Care Centres

Funded by the National Community Crime  
Prevention Program



**An Australian Government Initiative**

The logo for the National Community Crime Prevention Programme, featuring a large, stylized fingerprint graphic in the background. The text 'NATIONAL COMMUNITY' is in a smaller font above 'CRIME PREVENTION', which is in a large, bold, blue font. Below that, 'PROGRAMME' is written in a smaller font.

**NATIONAL COMMUNITY  
CRIME PREVENTION  
PROGRAMME**

# Mothering at a Distance program structure

- **Orientation Program**
- **Supported Play Group**
- **Mothers Group**



# Program Objectives

- Build on maternal & infant strengths
- Enhance mother/infant relationship
- View world through the eyes of the child
- Increase reflection on own & infant's behaviour, thoughts and feelings

# Evaluation & monitoring

- Requirement of National Crime Prevention Program Grant
- Conducted by DCS Corporate Evaluation & Research Unit
- Multidisciplinary Steering Committee
- Psychosocial questionnaires, participants satisfaction questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, observation

# Emphasis on seeing from a child's perspective



# Mothers and Children's Program

- Local Leave Permits Section 26
- Occasional Residency Program
- Full-time Residency Program

# Local Leave Permits

## Section 26

### Background

- *Women in Prison Report*
- *Prisons Act 1952* amended in 1986
- *Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act*  
*Section 26 Local Leave Permits*

# Local Leave Permits

## Section 26

### Issues

- Eligibility criteria developed over time reflect security concerns & shift away from focus on best interests of the child
- Prevailing view that, to be considered under Section 26, a woman's circumstances must have changed significantly since she was sentenced

# Local Leave Permits

## Section 26

### Issues (cont'd)

- Babies born to women on methadone
- Sentences that expire just prior to or just after (1-2 weeks) confinement dates of pregnant women
- Emotive issue of mothers & children in custody can influence decision-making

# Occasional Residency Program

- Women who are pregnant & confinement date occurs while serving a custodial term
- Children up to & including the age of twelve
- Weekend & school holidays for children older than six years
- Mid-week, weekend & school holidays for infants and children younger than six years







# Full-time Residency Program

- Infants & children reside with mother/primary carer full-time
- Children may stay over night & weekends with fathers/other family members
- Children participate in community activities e.g. swimming, community play groups, library visits, picnics in parks. Older children participate in school holiday activities such as going to the cinema and nearby aquatic centre.





# Video Visits

## Video Visits

Keeping inmates and their families together.



### The Video Visits Program

Are you unable to have visits with your family or children? Are they too far away? Are they too sick to travel? Is it just too hard for them to get there?

Then you might be able to have a Video Visit.

### What is a Video Visit?

Video Visits allow inmates and their families and children to see each other on a television screen while talking. You can talk to as many as 4 adults, plus any number of your children, at the one Video Visit.

### Who runs the Video Visits Program?

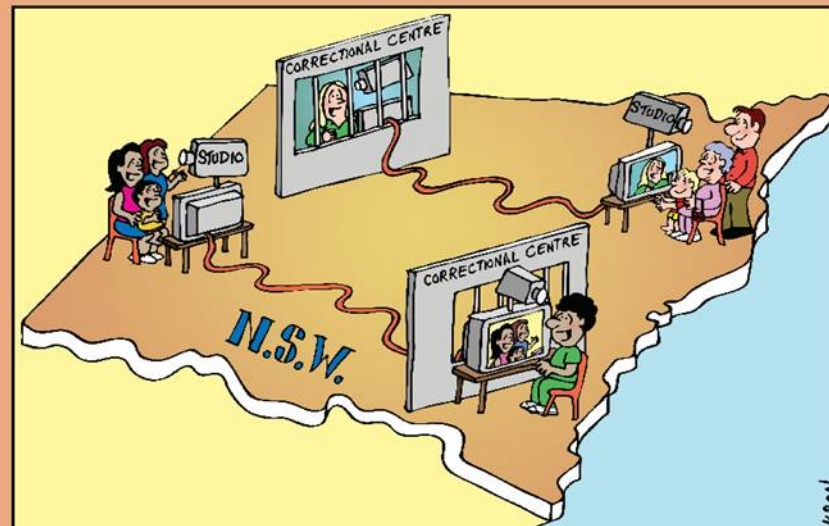
The program is run by the Department of Corrective Services, in conjunction with SHINE for Kids and other agencies.

### How can I book a Video Visit?

Fill in the application form and return it to the Video Conferencing Officer.

### What happens to my application?

Your application will be assessed, and if approved, you will be contacted with details of your visit. This may take up to 15 working days. If you haven't heard anything after that, see your Video Conferencing Officer.



essential family

# A mother's tough assignment

Video links help women in prison keep in touch with their children and even lend a hand with homework.

Words Ella Mudge

LIKE a lot of teenage kids, 15-year-old Adam Brown turns to his mother when he needs a hand with his homework. She knows which subjects he's struggling with and will often sit down with him to tackle some of the tougher questions. This could be a scene from any lounge room or study in Australia except, unlike most kids, Adam's not at home. Instead he's sitting in a videoconferencing studio in a doctor's surgery near his house. And when he looks up from his books, he sees his mother watching him over video link from the Sydney prison where she's serving her jail sentence.

When Samantha Brown\* was arrested and charged for her part in a serious crime in 2003, she could easily have given up on the idea of having a good relationship with her four children. Her youngest daughter was a newborn when she was arrested and the prison where she serves time is a six-hour drive from her children's home in regional NSW. The prospects for their future relationship looked bleak. But just because she'd forfeited her freedom to pay for her crime, Brown wasn't prepared to forgo her role as a mother.

Less than a year into her sentence she became aware of a pilot program being launched by the volunteer prisoner advocacy support group SHINE for Kids, trialling the use of court videoconferencing to facilitate family visits for inmates. Brown jumped at the chance to take part and after approaching staff and filling in the forms she was granted consent and began the first in a series of family video visits.

"Over a month I would have a family visit with everyone and we did that for several months," she says. "My eldest son, Adam, needed some help with his homework and I thought it would be a great opportunity for me to be a part of his schoolwork and just trial different methods of parenting at a distance." SHINE For Kids contacted Adam's school

and it sent an entire term's curriculum to Samantha in prison. She has now progressed to weekly video visits and doing homework with all her four children. It has become crucial to keeping their relationships intact. It is also a way of alleviating the children's anxieties over having a mother in prison.

"We started on the foundation of doing the homework together and it gave my son and me an opportunity to form a bond between each other where he could let me know the things he was doing, the things he appreciated in life, and who his friends were in real time. He could see me and he could see I was OK. I think for children whose mothers are in custody, when they get to see their mum face to face and see that mum is OK, it settles them to a level that they can be OK and they can get on with their own lives."

As the number of women in the Australian prison population continues to grow, Brown's children aren't the only ones facing a future without their mother. The Australian prison population remains predominantly male - only 2 per cent are female - but the 2006 National Prisoner Census found the number of female prisoners has increased by 90 per cent over the past 10 years. The 2005 Children of Prisoners Project revealed between 60 and 85 per cent of prisoners are parents. Mothers in jail are likely to be the primary caregivers and the most significant person in the lives of their children at the time of arrest.

For the most part, the children of Australian prisoners remain a silent minority quietly suffering the

pain of separation from their parents. The geographical isolation of most prisons makes frequent visits costly and difficult and unless there is a sympathetic adult or family member willing to facilitate the visits, relationships between inmates and their children can be severed. To counter this, NSW prisons introduced the video visits program in 2003 following a suggestion by SHINE for Kids that the court technology also be used for families. But there have been obstacles to its successful implementation, says the co-ordinator of videoconferencing, Peter Sharp.

"The initial program was received well but we had to build the child relationship between people again, tackling it via video. That was one of the big issues, whether the family would be able to adapt the technology to re-establish the relationships they once had."

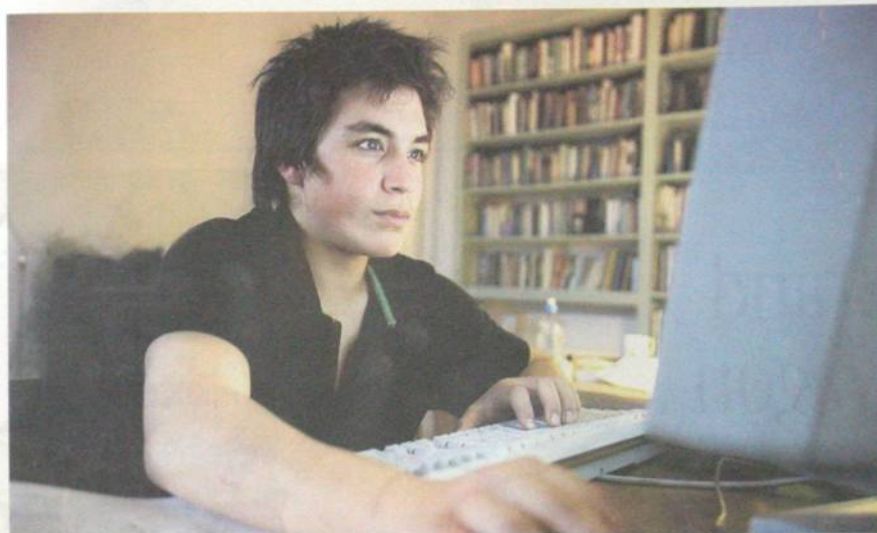
They found that children's short attention spans made it difficult for them to focus for an entire lesson, so the team looked for other ways to keep their attention and came up with the homework initiative. It gave parents a point of connection but another problem soon arose - many of the parents required further education to learn how to do the homework themselves.

As part of her rehabilitation, Brown is studying for a bachelor of arts through Griffith University and is majoring in sociology. Her case stands out as one of the initial successes of the videoconferencing program, thanks mainly to her initiative in

Homework gave my son and me an opportunity to form a bond where he could let me know the things he was doing. Samantha Brown\*

The Sydney Morning Herald

November 22, 2007 13



seeking it out and her strong desire to maintain contact with her children. Other female prisoners may be less willing or less trusting, Sharp says.

"We have families that don't necessarily want to do it, who don't want to keep in contact with the family member who is inside the correctional centre," he says. "And a lot of people in the jail have a concern it might replace their personal visits, which it certainly does not. Others are concerned about whether it's going to be taped, which we don't do either, but there are a whole range of reasons why there was a slow uptake. A lot of times they need to be pushed or really encouraged to do it."

For prisoner Kat Armstrong, who served 10 years in NSW prisons, the separation from her only

difficult aspect of her incarceration. Understanding the difficulties many mothers in prison face in maintaining contact with their children, she now mentors female prisoners and takes the two children of one female prisoner at Dilbeys Correctional Centre, near Windsor, for regular contact visits. During these visits Armstrong sees first-hand how hard it is for the mother to be an active parent. "She brushes her daughter's hair or changes the son's nappy. She tries to do everything that she possibly can, as limited as she is, but it's difficult."

Missing out on school events, concerts and even dressing her kids each day, Brown appreciates the homework as the only real avenue for her to stay actively involved as a mother. "You have to find that

established or grow. The homework is really important because I feel that's where the kids are most of the time and they need to feel as though I've got credibility when it comes to their schooling."

For now, the video visit technology remains in its infancy and there are further obstacles to people taking part, such as the lack of videoconferencing facilities in remote areas. Other options, like high-tech webcams, are being considered, Sharp says.

But for the few mothers who have embraced the technology, the video links remain a lifeline to reality. Brown says the quality of her video visits is good and there is plenty to talk about. "We run out of time every week," she says, laughing over the words. "Every week."

The Sydney Morning Herald

November 22, 2007 13

COMING UP NEXT:





**IT'S YOUR CHANNEL!**

# TUESDAY NIGHT

ON



Centre News (6pm - 7pm)



2ser Radio "JailBreak" (7pm)



"Doing Your Time" (9pm)



Support Information





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