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How to “Make It Work”: Creating a Future for Bailees and Ex-Offenders

A Preliminary Report based on interviews conducted with key stakeholders.

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Promoting Community Integration of Marginalised People
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Introduction

Background literature

A person who has a criminal record faces a multitude of barriers that may affect their successful integration into the community. These barriers can have a significant long-term impact on the ex-offender. Various investigators have reported wide-ranging legal barriers and civil consequences of prior offending behaviour, including barriers to employment, problems obtaining safe, satisfactory, and affordable accommodation, poverty and debt, isolated or segregated social networks, difficulties resuming caring for their children, and short-term problems accessing public benefits (Christian, 2002; Dutreix, 2000; Hirsch et al., 2002; Integra, 2000; Ogilvie, 2001; Webster, Hedderman, Turnbull & May, 2001). Ex-offenders may also demonstrate a variety of psychological (e.g. depression), personal (e.g., substance-abuse issues), and behavioural problems (e.g., anger-management problems) (e.g., Heinrich, 2000; Hirsch et al; Webster et al). These barriers, alone, and in combination, can “tear families apart, create unemployment and homelessness, and guarantee failure, thereby harming parents and children, families and communities” (Hirsch et al. p.1). An analysis of this literature suggests that there are six critical areas identified as potentially imposing barriers to community integration for ex-offenders including personal conditions of the ex-offender, social network, accommodation, the legal system, rehabilitation and psychological counselling, and employment.

Numerous personal conditions have been identified as playing a critical role in community integration. As pointed out by Scanlon (2001), most ex-offenders are not violent offenders, but rather alcoholics and other chemically-dependent individuals who have resorted to crime to support their habits. Ex-offenders may present with various psychological conditions including depression, low self-esteem, and low motivation (Fletcher, 2001; Helfgott, 1997), mental and/or health-related problems and disabilities (Dutreix, 2000; Hirsch et al. 2002), behavioural problems such as anger-management (Heinrich, 2000), and lack skills including, basic life skills and key employment skills, together with limited education, low levels of numeracy and literacy, and poor social competencies, to name a few (Christian, 2002). The finding that persistent offenders were particularly unlikely to have any formal qualifications, skilled, well-paid, or stable employment (Webster et al., 2001) adds support to the view that personal conditions impact significantly on ex-offender status. Buck (2000) also indicated that inmates who had prior full-time employment or who had attended school before they entered prison had a significantly lower recidivism rate than those who did not meet these criteria. As well, people living with a spouse after release had lower recidivism rates compared to those who did not have a live-in partner post-release.

With respect to social network, we can see that once again, there is a complex inter-relation between factors that make the transition from incarceration or criminal and drug culture to the general community extremely difficult. As indicated by Buck (2000), the majority of ex-offenders are parents. In the US, 63% of men and 78% of women in jail have children under the age of 18, and most parents lose custody of their children when incarcerated. When released, most parents are then identified as
non-custodial parents. Hirsch et al (2002) maintains that any parent who goes to prison, even for a short time, faces the risk of losing their children forever. To protect their parental rights, incarcerated parents must work consistently against difficult barriers both while in prison and upon release to preserve parental rights. A key factor in assisting ex-offenders to re-establish personal relationships with children is the existence of support groups within the prison environment, and support and mentoring programs upon release (Buck, 2000).

Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone & Peeters (2002) described social isolation as a “core experience” of many ex-prisoners as a result of homelessness or unstable, unsuitable housing. Rokach (2000) investigated the experience of loneliness of ex-offenders compared with that of the general population and found significant loneliness among ex-offenders with differences between ex-offender sub-groups. Ward (2001) found that ex-prisoners frequently report that they experience fear, loneliness and low self-esteem, with a focus on family reintegration issues being common.

A range of social barriers including stigmatization and discrimination toward ex-offenders, loss of social standing in the community, fear and hostility among the general community, and a tendency to enquire about and reject applications for housing, employment, and further education have also been highlighted (Helfgott, 1997). For example, employers’ willingness to hire ex-offenders is generally low, particularly for those who have committed violent offences. However, when government incentives, education level, and relationship of the crime to the job are taken into account, some improvement in the attitude of employers has been noted (Albright & Denq, 1996).

Accommodation is a critical area that may affect successful transition into the community and present a barrier to a more positive lifestyle. Problems finding and sustaining stable, livable, and affordable accommodation can impact on various psychological and health-related conditions, social network and employment. Crisis accommodation such as backpacking hostels and transient hotels may, for example, provide a “breeding ground” for substance abuse and alcohol abuse, as well as limiting the ex-offender’s social network to other individuals with similar backgrounds (Rowe, 2002). Researchers have acknowledged that drug rehabilitation may be largely ineffective if problems related to the need for secure and affordable accommodation are not addressed (Webster et al., 2001).

Likewise, Hirsch et al (2002), discussed how unstable housing may disadvantage an ex-offender in terms of maintaining employment and resuming and reunifying family relationships including participation in child-care, and in turn, how lack of income may impact on finding and keeping stable accommodation. Ogilvie (2001) supports the view that financial limitations can make it extraordinarily difficult for recently released offenders to access reasonable housing. The unique problems faced by Australian women upon release was investigated by Dutreix (2000). She argued that a holistic approach to meeting accommodation needs be adopted by addressing issues such as limited social networks, financial problems, domestic violence, history of abuse, sexuality, and physical, psychological, and health-related factors.

Various legal issues may present problems for the ex-offender upon release, including difficulty in accessing public benefits both in the short- and long-term, the
risk of losing access to their children (if not lost already), and the difficulty (or even inability) to obtain federal financial aid to further study (Hirsch et al., 2002). Others have identified legal barriers including laws that prohibit entry into particular job positions, and the employer’s right to access an offender’s criminal record in some cases. (Mukamal, 2001). Bowker (1994), for example, pointed out that in the US, ex-offenders were restricted by state and federal statutes from 350 occupations that employ almost 10 million people, significantly reducing job options. Additional problems may relate to the difficulty meeting several responsibilities required for release, including finding employment, random drug screenings, day reporting, and regular parole or probation-officer meetings (Buck, 2000).

Factors related to rehabilitation and psychological counselling can also impact on the ability of ex-offenders to successfully integrate into the broader community. As indicated in the Victorian Department of Justice Annual Report (2000–2001), in the ten year period between 1990 and 2000, more than 80% of prisoners reported that drug problems related to their reason for imprisonment. The fact that offending behaviour is often linked to wider social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse means that appropriate interventions need to be made available to the ex-offender that deal with the underlying cause of the behaviour (Employment Support Unit, 2000). Drug rehabilitation strategies may include methadone programs in prisons, drug education programs, and transitional support for offenders upon release (Victorian Department of Justice 2000–2001), as well as personal counselling and drug awareness programs for relevant professionals (Employment Support Unit, 2000). Ogilvie (2001) stressed that, in addition to prison-based rehabilitation, post-release programs that relate to factors such as employment, accommodation, substance-abuse problems, and domestic violence must be addressed.

It has been suggested, however, that there are insufficient resources to provide treatment for the large number of prisoners with drug and alcohol abuse problems, so that many offenders do not gain access to treatment programs until their release (Heinrich, 2000). Likewise, an increasing number of offenders have mental-health problems that are not adequately dealt with in the prison environment, contributing to more severe mental health outcomes in some cases (Heinrich). Exclusion of offenders who are serving a short sentence (less than 6 months) from prison-based programs has also been reported as problematic (Webster et al. 20001). Nevertheless, the attitude of prisoners toward rehabilitation programs is generally reported as positive, although offenders with longer prison terms are typically more negative about their opportunities for rehabilitation (Nelissen, 1998). While offenders may wish to improve their post-release opportunities, they may lack the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve this aim, have limited support in the community, and lack knowledge about how to either access assistance or identify available services (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000).

The Office of Correctional Services in Victoria estimates that approximately 60–70% of people who re-offend are unemployed at the time that they re-offend (Victorian Department of Justice, 2000–2001). Lower recidivism has been associated with employment in a number of studies (Infante, 1997; Rahill-Beuler & Kretzer, 1997; Soothill & Holmes, 1981; Uggen, 1999, 2000). A recent study by Webster et al. (2001) provided an overview of the difficulties faced by ex-offenders when seeking entry into the workforce. Reported barriers included attitudes of employers to ex-offenders and crime, lack of job contacts due to segregated social networks,
numerous financial difficulties impacting on interview attendance, purchase of clothing or equipment, and problems making the transition from benefits to employment. Various personal difficulties were also raised such as behavioural problems, lack of basic skills and/or poor qualifications, low self-esteem, confidence, and motivation, and absent or poor work-experience history.

The Employment Support Unit’s Integra program report (2000) affirmed many of the same difficulties for ex-offenders in gaining sustainable employment as well as identifying a lack of equal opportunity policy among employers, a lack of appropriate recruitment procedures, and difficulty for ex-offenders in meeting the key skill requirements of employers. Other difficulties relating to the personal and social circumstances of ex-offenders were discussed, including substance-abuse issues, accommodation problems, poor qualifications, financial problems, and responsibilities related to family care. In light of these wide-ranging difficulties in gaining employment, Integra provides a range of projects that has developed strategies including one-to-one training, counselling, and mentoring in order to address four primary areas that they view as important in reducing recidivism; basic skills, alcohol and substance abuse, promoting equal opportunity, and empowerment.

Heinrich (2000) conducted focus groups with ex-offenders and potential employers to identify factors that may impact on successful transition into employment. Like other studies, a number of complex factors were identified including the stigma associated with having a criminal record, employer attitudes, legal, educational and financial barriers, mental-health and substance-abuse problems, low literacy levels, lack of occupational skills, and difficulties finding stable accommodation. The fact that higher unemployment and lower pay (as much as 30%) is associated with this group (Waldfogel, 1994) adds to the view that this population experiences persistent difficulties in re-establishing themselves within the broader community. Other studies have also reported wide-ranging barriers to employment such as those mentioned above (e.g, Fletcher, 2001; Mukamal, 2001).

Recent correctional services policy has resulted in the development of a pilot employment program that is specifically aimed at assisting ex-offenders into employment. Provision of employment assistance to disadvantaged groups generally is recognized to be labour intensive and complex (Cook, Razzano, Straiton & Ross, 1994; Danley and Mellen, 1987; Graffam & Naccarella, 1997; Graffam, Smith, Shinkfield & Polzin, 2000). To make a successful transition into employment, support is likely to be necessary from criminal justice services workers, rehabilitation and counselling workers, employment support workers, and employers. Ex-offenders too must be positively disposed toward their own employment.

As indicated from the discussion above, the cumulative impact of barriers that ex-offenders face upon their release can make it virtually impossible to resume a normal life. Members of the public have a general understanding of how difficult it can be to face, perhaps, one of these barriers at a single point in time; however, it is unusual to have to deal with several major life-events at once. The likelihood that ex-offenders have the physical, psychological, and practical resources to overcome inter-related barriers that include obtaining employment and satisfactory accommodation, regaining custody or visitation of children and resuming family relationships, adhering to legal and civil restrictions, and dealing with a wide range of personal, behavioural, social, and psychological difficulties is, in most cases, extremely low.
The interest and existing research on employment for ex-offenders is laudable and quite encouraging. However, extremely high unemployment rates cannot be ignored. The difficulties faced by ex-offenders in obtaining and maintaining employment are clearly related to broader circumstances of disadvantage in their lives. This report attempts to provide a preliminary analysis of the life conditions of ex-offenders and bailees that influence transition into employment and improved lifestyle. A review of the literature has identified six broad domains, each with a large number of often very complex specific factors that are recognised as influencing the transition to employment and improved life prospects. Those domains are:

1. Personal conditions of the bailees and ex-offenders
2. Social network and social environment
3. Accommodation
4. The criminal justice system
5. Rehabilitation and counselling support
6. Employment and training support needs / conditions.

Method

Participants

There were thirty-four participants in this preliminary study, from four groups of stakeholders. One group comprised twelve bailees and ex-offenders, and the remaining three groups were professional individuals including seven people from the criminal justice system, four people from the accommodation and housing sector, seven people from employment support services, and four people from rehabilitation programs. The professional group comprised people who have significant knowledge with respect to their own area of involvement and broad knowledge of issues faced by bailees and ex-offenders in general. These individuals were selected by virtue of the positions they occupy and using a network of references by which they were identified as expert contributors. The bailees and ex-offenders were recruited through the office of the Bail Coordinator of the Melbourne Magistrates Court. Some of these individuals had participated in the WISE Make It Work Program, while others were non-participant bailees of the Magistrates Court. The bailee and ex-offender participants ranged in age from twenty-one to approximately forty years in age, with diverse backgrounds relating to life history and record of offending.

Interview format

The interview discussion sheet comprised an initial description relating to the major domains or areas that affect the transition to a more positive lifestyle for bailees and ex-offenders. The six domains were then listed, and participants were asked to identify any factors related to all of the issues within that domain that they think may affect success or failure of a bailee or ex-offender in making a positive life transition. The first domain referred to Personal Conditions such as education, work experience, social skills, habits, mental health, and finance. The second domain referred to Social
Network and Social Environment including family and peer relations, community environment, and social activity level. The third domain referred to accommodation incorporating issues such as availability, location, permanence, and appropriateness. The fourth domain referred to Rehabilitation and Counselling Support including issues related to groups, prescribed participation, and motivation. The fifth domain referred to the Criminal Justice System including courts, police, correctional services, and solicitors. The sixth domain referred to Employment and Training Support including issues related to experience and skills, motivation, social factors, and demand by other services. At the end of the discussion sheet, participants were asked to add any issues that were not addressed using the format provided, as well as offering recommendations for how to improve the prospects of positive lifestyle change for bailees and ex-offenders.

Procedure

The professional group was contacted by telephone in the first instance, although in some cases, authority to contact people was first obtained. In the initial telephone conversations with the professional group, a standard script was followed incorporating a general introduction and explanation of the aim of the report, and a request for assistance in identifying the issues that affect the success or failure of bailees or ex-offenders. If the individual agreed to participate a discussion sheet was faxed to them directly, with instructions to return the completed discussion sheet by secure fax at Deakin University. A telephone interview was then conducted in order to provide the opportunity to expand on their comments, add additional issues to the discussion, or to fill in gaps in the information gained. The duration of the telephone interviews was generally between 15-30 minutes.

The bailees and ex-offenders were invited to participate in a face-to-face interview to discuss the issues that affect success or failure in the transition to a more positive lifestyle. The discussion sheet was completed during the course of the interview in the form of field notes. Each interview was approximately one hour in duration.
Results

As described, the focus of this preliminary study has been on factors that influence successful transition to a positive, healthy lifestyle for bailees and ex-offenders. This in part includes obtaining and maintaining employment. Employment is integral to successful transition to a positive lifestyle. Unemployment is associated with poor physical, social and mental health, as well as recidivism for ex-offenders. In our discussions with bailees, ex-offenders, and key professionals working in the field, the focus has been on life conditions of bailees and ex-offenders, the current state of development with respect to supporting people in this transition, and unmet support needs. Because of the breadth of this topic, results have been divided into six broad domains, each with several often very complex specific factors that are recognised as influencing the transition to employment and improved life prospects. Those domains are:

1. Personal conditions of bailees and ex-offenders
2. Social network and social environment
3. Accommodation
4. The criminal justice system
5. Rehabilitation and counselling support
6. Employment and training support needs / conditions

Stakeholder views of each of the domains are presented below. For each domain, a brief description is provided of the general factors that are believed to impact on the transition to a positive lifestyle. Next, a table is provided that lists the main issues raised by both groups (bailees and ex-offenders and professionals) with the specific interpretations/perspectives of the two groups also listed. Next, a set of ‘illustrative statements’ (statements that best embody a collective sentiment or view) is provided to help illustrate the perspectives held in relation to each of the main issues. Finally, construction of a collective point-of-view, providing an explanation of similarities and differences in the perspectives of the two groups is presented.

It is important to keep in mind that differences in statements made by the two groups do not necessarily mean that members of the other group do not also view an issue that way. It is reasonable to assume that differences between the groups points of view reflect differences in perceived level of importance rather than absolute differences. In other words, just because none or only a small number referred to a particular phenomenon, that doesn’t mean that it is not widely recognized, but probably does indicate that the two groups have different beliefs about the relative importance of that phenomenon to successful transition to a positive lifestyle. The various perspectives are best taken together, in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the wide range and complexity of the issues.
1 Personal conditions of Bailees and Ex-offenders

Some of the personal conditions that are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: level of physical and mental health, as well as health issues (existing and developing conditions; level of education and education history/experience; financial status as well as budgeting ability; level of sociability and social skills; and self-management skills such as time management (managing the ‘busyness’ of bail obligations), punctuality, personal hygiene, and self-presentation.

The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Issues</th>
<th>Bailees and Ex-Offenders</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readiness and Motivation</td>
<td>• Several people stated that ‘readiness’ is the key factor to quitting drugs and positive change. (‘readiness’ = simply experiencing an unexplainable shift in thinking and wanting)</td>
<td>• There was no reference to ‘readiness’ by any of the professionals group.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Motivation was not directly mentioned by anyone in this group, except in relation to ‘readiness’; the view was motivation to quit and change is not, by itself, a powerful factor.</td>
<td>• Most stakeholders in this group stated that motivation (wanting to stop drugs or make positive change) is very important to success.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Almost all of the group described a need to progress slowly, taking small steps (or one at a time) rather than attempt rapid total life change.</td>
<td>• A need to approach change slowly and in small increments was described by some of this group. Others did not state that, and still others suggested that it is difficult to make change in one area when other areas of a person’s life are still not in order.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical and Mental Health</td>
<td>• Most people in this group acknowledged that their physical health had been poorly affected by drugs, that health and strength are necessary to make a positive change, and that they are recovering their physical health gradually.</td>
<td>• Several professionals described fear (of failure, change, society, humiliation, falling back, letting people down, as examples).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Apart from references by several people to anxiety in public or in social situations and references to a tendency to react aggressively when threatened, there was no reference to psychiatric or neurological impairments.</td>
<td>• Most professionals also stated that physical health was an important issue, but they described the issue more broadly and as more complex; not just related to drug use, but poor nutrition, lack of exercise and smoking as well.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Most of the people in this group referred to mental ill-health as an important issue. Examples included personality disorders, drug-induced psychoses, drug and alcohol-related acquired brain injury, as well as anxiety disorders and paranoia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Finances
- Not having enough money or financial stability was described as very problematic by most of the people in this group.
- Long-standing debt was described as problematic to ‘getting on your feet’ by some, but not all, people in this group.
- Budgeting skill (and/or practice) was not identified as an issue by anyone in this group. The view that was expressed was not having money meant you can’t budget and having extra money meant you don’t have to budget.
- A number of people in this group described having money in their pocket as problematic because of what they described as a fragile resistance to using.
- Not having enough money or financial stability was described as an important and pervasive impediment to positive change by most stakeholders in this group.
- Long-standing debt was described as problematic to ‘getting on your feet’ by some, but not all, people in this group.
- Lack of budgeting skills was identified as a factor that impedes positive change by several professionals.
- No one from the professionals group identified money in the pocket as a potential threat to a bailee or ex-offender.
- One professional mentioned the ease of getting money illegally as a threat to progress.

### Social Skills
- Some of the bailees and ex-offenders identified themselves as having well-developed social skills with a sense of morality that meant that they would not take advantage of others or manipulate people.
- Another sub-set of the group identified themselves as distrusting others and skilled in manipulation (‘scamming’ or ‘talking shit’), but saw that as undesirable.
- A third sub-set described themselves as lacking basic social skills due to not having had enough exposure to ‘normal’ social settings.
- A few of the professionals referred to some bailees and ex-offenders having well-developed social skills (and overall life management skills) that operated well within the drug subculture, but not outside.
- Some of the group described a general tendency of distrust and manipulation among bailees and ex-offenders.
- Several of the professionals described lack of pro-social skills as pervasive among bailees and ex-offenders and explained that in terms of a lack of positive role models.
- A few cited institutional behaviour as a problem.

### Education and Training
- None of the bailees and ex-offenders identified lack of education or poor academic skills as an impediment to success.
- Most of the group stated a desire to undertake training to improve employment prospects rather than settle for a basic job.
- Several of the professionals identified lack of education or poor academic skills as an impediment to success.
- Several of the professionals suggested that employers were more concerned with criminal records than what training had been completed.
Some illustrative statements on personal conditions

Bailee and Ex-offender Comments

“Readiness is the factor, more than education, social skills, finance, even motivation.”

“I think I hated my life, that’s why I did it. Trying to escape what I hated.”

“All I’ve wanted is a fair go. I’m 35 and still need help to get my life together.”

“I get anxiety and panic attacks. I’ve got drug-related epilepsy.”

“I still worry about using drugs, so if I have money, I spend it to be safe.”

“Boredom. I get bored, with nothing to do. I get despondent, then get stoned.”

“I’ve got no budgeting skills. I always just made sure I had money. It’s not easy.”

Professionals’ Comments

“A high percentage of people have drug and alcohol related psychiatric problems.”

“It’s hard to break habits, not just drugs, but dishonesty, aggression, avoidance.”

“People are often isolated due to addiction and the high priority of scoring.”

“There is a correlation between conviction and anti-social behaviour.”

“Boredom triggers actions, often self-destructive actions; drugs, gambling, etc.”

“Oh, drugs and alcohol, poor literacy, no finance skills, communication skills, low self-esteem, history of sexual abuse….”.

“It’s like living, drowning in quicksand. The harder they struggle to free themselves, the deeper they get.”

The collective point-of-view

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical personal conditions experienced by bailees and ex-offenders include: poor physical and mental health; low self-esteem and lack of confidence; a high level of anxiety in general, with a number of specific intense fears; lack of education; lack of social skills necessary to function in the general community; poverty (often extreme) and lack of budgeting skills, co-existing with a reluctance to accumulate money to avoid temptation; lack of work ethos; and lack of positive work experience and work history. Successful
transition to a positive lifestyle is, to varying degrees, dependent on the somewhat hard to define and elusive state of ‘readiness to change’, an often very fragile confidence, and the strength to resist long-ingrained habitual behaviour.

There were a few differences of emphasis between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group. Those included: a greater emphasis on ‘readiness’ and less emphasis on motivation by the bailees and ex-offenders; greater emphasis on lack of budgeting skills and lack of education and training by the professionals. Variations within the bailee and ex-offender group related to only a few mentioning long-standing debt as an issue and there being a real mix of views on the level of their own social skills. Variations within the professionals group related to only a few mentioning the need for a very slow rate of positive change to be successful and only a few mentioned positive, adaptable skills having been learned within a negative subculture.

2 Social network and social environment

Some of the social factors that are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: the amount and quality of family contacts; the extent and quality of positive social relationships; the amount of contact and nature of relationships with people from a drug or criminal network; and opportunities and threats within the local community.

The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Network and Social Environment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Main Issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bailees and Ex-Offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The amount and quality of family contacts reported by bailees and ex-offenders varied greatly with different reasons.</td>
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<td>• A few reported regular and positive contact (affection, assistance, support).</td>
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<td>• Some reported irregular contact that was positive (separated by distance) or negative (family reservations).</td>
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<td>• Some reported no contact (very negative experiences with family members, but no one referring directly to abuse, rather declining to elaborate).</td>
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<td>• There was much less variation in the descriptions of family contacts reported by those from the professionals group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Most stated that only a small minority of bailees and ex-offenders have regular and positive contact with family.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• None described cases of irregular positive contact.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Most stated that a large majority of bailees and ex-offenders have either negative family relations due to family reservations about involvement or no family contact (for the same reason or because of early experiences of severe abuse).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Isolation and Boredom</td>
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<tr>
<th>“Acquaintances”</th>
<th>Almost all bailies and ex-offenders described having cut off all contact with previous negative “acquaintances” (refusing to refer to those relations as “friends”). In relation to this, they also suggested that almost no one actively seeks them out.</th>
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<td>Almost all described their previous “acquaintance” relationships as void of trust, allegiance, mutual care, or sense of commitment.</td>
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<td>Among the professionals group, no one referred to a proportion of bailies and ex-offenders who cut off all contact with previous negative “acquaintances”, but almost all identified doing so as important to successful transition.</td>
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<td>None of the professionals referred to negative qualities of previous relationships, instead referring to the temptation of being drawn back into a negative lifestyle or simply implicated in unlawful activity.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Very few bailies and ex-offenders described conditions in the local community to be threatening to their progress.</th>
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<td>Most described negative social contacts and drugs as easily avoided. In relation to this, the view was that knowing where people and drugs are located, it is easy to avoid them. In addition, it comes down to wanting to avoid them.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Most of the professionals group described conditions in the local community as, potentially, a significant threat to successful transition for bailies and ex-offenders. This was related to their view that negative social contacts and drugs are difficult to avoid within one’s local community (on the street and within all of the types of housing available).</td>
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<td>One of the professionals mentioned that in country towns, there is much publicity about a person’s crimes, and often they leave town.</td>
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</table>
Some illustrative statements on social network and social environment

*Bailee and Ex-Offender Comments*

“I’ve got no friends, really. You can’t call people you live with friends.”

“Heroin ended other relationships. On it I’m sociable. Off it I avoided people.”

“I’ve got too many friends. I’ve got to avoid heroin users, and I know heaps.”

“I know a lot of people, but if you don’t have heroin, you’re invisible.”

“I couldn’t go out in public, even ride transport. Now I can go anywhere.”

“I moved to get away from friends. Now they come over and want money.”

“I’ve got a good family. They know. They keep a distance, but are supportive.”

“No, no family contact. They’re no good. I don’t want to talk about them.”

*Professionals’ Comments*

“Usually, they have burnt a lot of bridges. Support of family and friends is minimal.”

“A large percentage of clients have no contact with family.”

“Families tend to pull back as offences get worse.”

“There is a profound lack of appropriate role models for most of these people.”

“Some people have parents, family and friends with incarceration and drug histories.”

“Those trying to stay clean tend to stay away from street acquaintances.”

“Poverty restricts opportunity to engage in a lot of social activities.”

“In general, the community is not open to integration of ex-offenders.”

*The collective point-of-view*

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical social network and social environment conditions experienced by bailees and ex-offenders include: having cut off or been cut off from earlier non-drug and criminal relationships; having cut themselves off from their drug and criminal “acquaintances”; having often, at best, strained family relations, if not no family contact, or a family with its own
involvement in drugs and criminal justice; as a result of these circumstances, having essentially no social network and spending long hours alone and bored; living in a neighbourhood characterized by poverty, high rates of crime and drug use, high rates of unemployment, and poor physical and mental health among inhabitants; and, in more suitable communities, community resistance to integration of ex-offenders. Successful transition to a positive lifestyle appears to be dependent upon dealing with, at least in the short to medium term, often profound social isolation and boredom. Both isolation and boredom are threats to falling back into former behaviours and yet, if tolerated, allow avoidance of negative contacts and relapse. Having lost or destroyed relationships and being estranged from children and other family members is generally very painful and frustrating. They are also isolated or alienated within their local community. All of this suggests that the struggle to make a positive change is conducted alone, without any informal support, only whatever attention is provided by support workers.

There were a few differences of emphasis between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group. Those included: a greater proportion of professionals describing negative or non-existent family relations; and, in relation to former (drug and crime) acquaintances, bailees and ex-offenders emphasised avoidance, while professionals more often referred to temptations. Variations within the bailee and ex-offender group related to amount and quality of family relations, with a range from tentative or partial support and regular contact to absolute lack of contact. There was very little variation in the responses from the professionals group.

### 3 Accommodation

Some of the factors that relate to accommodation and are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: availability of affordable housing; locations of affordable housing; conditions in “crisis accommodation” settings; conditions in “transitional housing” settings; regulations and conditions regarding public housing; and the centrality of stable housing to success in transition to a positive lifestyle.
The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Issues</th>
<th>Bailies and Ex-Offenders</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
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</table>
| Availability  | • A small minority of bailies and ex-offenders were in private rental accommodation; the rest were in transitional or public housing. Almost everyone described available and affordable housing as rare and hard to get. Long waiting lists and eligibility conditions were cited as reasons for this.  
• The locations of all affordable housing was cited by a large proportion of bailies and ex-offenders as problematic, in terms of the neighbourhoods being depressing, with high crime and drug use prevalent (not described as temptation, rather as depressing and too like their past situations.) | • Several of the professionals group identified stable, appropriate housing as the most important ingredient in successful transition to a positive lifestyle.  
• Among the professionals group there was also a perception that available and affordable housing is in extremely short supply with long waiting lists and eligibility conditions that restrict entry.  
• Location of housing was described as problematic by most professionals as well, mainly in relation to neighbourhoods and specific sites having high rates of crime and drug use. |
| Crisis Accommodation | • Crisis accommodation was described by almost all bailies and ex-offenders as extremely inappropriate because of high prevalence of drugs, addicts, and ex-offenders living there and because of the short-term nature of the arrangement.  
• The cost of this type of accommodation was cited by most people in this group as very high and, therefore, difficult to maintain (high cost of ‘rent’, need to eat out, high risk of loss of property). | • Like the bailies and ex-offenders, most of the professionals described crisis accommodation as highly inappropriate because of the prevalence of drugs, addicts, and ex-offenders living there. Very few mentioned the instability resulting from such short-term accommodation.  
• The high cost of this type of accommodation was cited by several professionals, with additional reference to poor health outcomes related to ‘fast food’ consumption. |
### Transitional
- Supported housing (group accommodation) was described as having good and bad features by the bailees and ex-offenders.
- Problematic features related to use of drugs and ‘drug talk’ by residents, a need to isolate oneself from other residents, and non-productive group discussion sessions.
- Positive features included learning how to cook, clean, maintain a household, grocery shop, and work with others.
- Independent transitional housing was mentioned by a few people, mainly in positive terms of being away from the negative atmosphere of supported group housing. Negative features included social isolation and material deprivation (lack of furniture, television, radio, etc).
- Several of the professionals described an extreme shortage of transitional accommodation as an important impediment to successful transition.
- Most of the professionals described supported housing (group accommodation) in positive terms related to provision of stable housing for a period of up to several months.
- A few of the professionals mentioned use of drugs and ‘drug talk’ by residents and high turnover due to breaking rules (mainly using) as negative features of group housing.
- Independent transitional housing was identified by the professionals as a more positive and ‘normal’ alternative.

### Public Housing
- None of the bailees and ex-offenders mentioned the affordability of public housing. However, some did refer to trying to get public housing in the future, being on a long waiting list, and hoping to be successful at some point.
- Several of this group described public housing as an undesirable option due to the condition of buildings, the social conditions within complexes, and prevalence of drugs and crime.
- Some people commented that although higher quality public housing was available, it was farther removed from employment opportunities.
- Some of the professionals did suggest that affordability of public housing made it a positive option for bailees and ex-offenders.
- However, they also referred to waiting lists of 5-25 years, depending on type and location.
- Some of the professionals described public housing as an undesirable option, mainly due to social conditions within complexes and prevalence of drugs and crime.
- Professionals working in public housing cited lack of privacy and police involvement in housing complexes as an additional issue for bailees and ex-offenders.
Some illustrative statements on accommodation

_Bailee and Ex-Offender Comments_

“I was homeless for months before going to jail. ”

“With no place to sleep you get too tired to work. I lost my job.”

“Crisis accommodation sucks. It costs a lot, gives you no privacy, and is full of people using drugs.”

“You can’t live in crisis accommodation if you want to stop. It’s in your face. You meet people, ‘do a few things’, hit up.”

“The best way to survive in transitional housing is by avoiding other residents; most of them want to promote drug and alcohol culture.”

“Transitional housing is good for short term. They have programs and training. Still, the chances of relapse are high.”

“Temporary housing is great. I’m stable, developing life skills I never had.”

“Temporary housing is safe, but very boring. “

“I’m in a private rental. It costs three-quarters of my income, but I feel safe.”

_Professionals’ Comments_

“Homelessness, recurring homelessness is a problem; it goes with all the rest.”

“The severe shortage of suitable accommodation leaves clients with no option but crisis accommodation, usually havens for drugs.”

“Crisis accommodation is simply not suitable for young or vulnerable clients.”

“We need more supported accommodation with less restrictions on entry.”

“Permanent or private accommodation is just too expensive.”

“Commission housing has no sense of community. There is so much poverty and the drug and alcohol elements are there. A high percentage are also ex-offenders.”

_The collective point-of-view_

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical accommodation and housing conditions experienced by bailees and ex-offenders include: being in a tenuous condition with respect to any present housing situation (threat of becoming homeless and breaching bail); living in crisis accommodation which is expensive, provides no
facilities for cooking and very little privacy, but does place the person in an environment that houses drugs, drug users, and petty criminals; transitional supported housing that does provide room and board, some training in daily living skills, and minimal rehab support, but also surrounds the person with other people on bail, in an environment where drug talk and drug culture still often prevail; temporary housing which places them in a subsidised accommodation of their own, generally living alone; or public housing, for which there are extremely long waiting lists, and which is generally located in depressed communities and populated by a high proportion of drug users and ex-offenders, with high crime rates and police presence. Successful transition to a positive lifestyle is clearly heavily dependent upon being able to create a stable housing situation. Homelessness is very debilitating in many ways. Crisis accommodation and even transitional housing are ripe with temptations. Transitional and temporary housing are just that, temporary. In certain respects, an ex-offender must get stability in their life, for example employment, before they can financially afford to achieve stable accommodation. Of course, having stable accommodation is necessary to achieving employment stability, creating a dilemma.

There were no real differences of emphasis between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group. One small difference was that some bailees and ex-offenders mentioned that higher quality public housing was farther removed from employment opportunities. There was very little variation within both the bailee and ex-offender and the professionals group related to accommodation.

4 The criminal justice system

Some of the factors that are related to the criminal justice system and are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: the procedures and performance of police in enforcing laws and interacting with bailees and ex-offenders; the judgments and dispositions of the courts, as well as the conditions that they set (bail and sentencing); the conditions within correctional services’ facilities and the programs and supports available within correctional services; and the standard of legal support services.
The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Issues</th>
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</table>
| Police      | • Most of the bailees and ex-offenders expressed the view that there was a lot of variability in the way that they were treated by individual police officers (some being polite and informative, others “arrogant”, rude and provocative). | • Like the bailees and ex-offenders, most of the professionals group described treatment by police as highly variable (some being polite and informative, others “arrogant”, rude and provocative).  
• A few of the professionals also stated that police understanding of bailees and ex-offenders and their ‘culture’ is low, with little facility to train police in such matters. |
| Courts      | • All of the bailees and ex-offenders described courts as focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment and described their treatment in courts as fair and supportive. A few suggested that courts might be too lenient (related to serious, repeat offenders).  
• A few people suggested that, in some cases, courts are inconsistent in sentencing and administering sentences (“a different day, a different way”).  
• All of the bailees and ex-offenders stated that the laws are reasonable/good, and that it is necessary for courts to hand down judgments and sentences to maintain social order; some suggesting that some people need to be protected from themselves. | • All of the professionals described courts as focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment and stated that bail conditions and sentences are generally strongly oriented toward rehabilitation, with high rates of utilization of court programs.  
• A few of the professionals referred to the quality of court programs as very high, with improved case management and more psychologists involved.  
• None of the professionals suggested too much leniency or inconsistency, and none suggested that bailees and ex-offenders agree with processes and outcomes of court. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correctional Services</th>
<th>Solicitors and Barristers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Several of the interviewees had</td>
<td>• With respect to solicitors and barristers, only a few</td>
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<tr>
<td>been to prison. None of them had</td>
<td>professionals commented on the quality of legal assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>anything positive to say about</td>
<td>received by bailees and ex-offenders. Those who did</td>
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<td>the experience. They described</td>
<td>suggested that some clients are well-supported, and others get</td>
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<td>having access to drugs in prison,</td>
<td>‘standard treatment’, but have high support needs (due to drug</td>
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<td>developing a prison identity and</td>
<td>and/or health conditions).</td>
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<td>culture that were hard to shake off</td>
<td>• There were few statements about legal aid, and those</td>
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<td>when released, and developing more</td>
<td>described the service as important for those unable to pay</td>
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<td>unhealthy associations inside.</td>
<td>for representation.</td>
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<td>• A few reported fighting a desire</td>
<td>• With respect to solicitors and barristers, the view of</td>
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<td>to return to the ‘safety and security’</td>
<td>bailees and ex-offenders varied. Some described getting a</td>
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<td>of prison because of difficulties</td>
<td>great deal of support and attention, while others described</td>
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<td>managing outside after several years</td>
<td>solicitors and barristers lacking information about the case,</td>
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<td>inside.</td>
<td>paying little attention to details, and being ill-prepared</td>
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<td>• Bail or remand were described by</td>
<td>for court.</td>
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<td>several people, in much the same</td>
<td>• Statements about legal aid were also varied, with some</td>
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<td>terms as prison.</td>
<td>people describing the service as important for those without</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A few people referred to CBOs</td>
<td>money to pay for representation and getting a good service</td>
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<tr>
<td>(community based orders). They were</td>
<td>and others describing it as a ‘second rate’ service for</td>
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<tr>
<td>described as a positive option in</td>
<td>people who are underprivileged.</td>
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<tr>
<td>some cases, but that sometimes the</td>
<td>• There was not much comment made by the professionals on the</td>
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<tr>
<td>length of the order impedes future</td>
<td>impact of correctional services experiences on transition to a</td>
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<tr>
<td>development due to restrictions on</td>
<td>positive lifestyle.</td>
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<td>the person.</td>
<td>• Several of the professionals referred to a need to provide</td>
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<td></td>
<td>plans and supports prior to release from jail or prison, to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>facilitate successful transition. These statements related to</td>
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<td></td>
<td>accommodation, rehabilitation, and employment plans and</td>
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<td>support.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• None of this group referred to CBOs in their discussions.</td>
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<td>support.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• None of this group referred to CBOs in their discussions.</td>
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Some illustrative statements on the criminal justice system

**Bailee and Ex-Offender Comments**

“I’ve had good treatment from everyone, considering what I’ve done.”

“No complaints. The cops were pretty good to me. I got what I deserved.”

“There are good and bad cops. Some have hassled me. Others helped me.”

“I wanted to make mayhem … I trafficked. The courts have been fair to me.”

“The court programs are good. I’ve got a chance to make something of myself.”

“Courts are inconsistent. ‘A different day, a different way’. No equal playing field.”

“The courts are not hard. They focus on rehabilitation more than punishment.”

“Jail and prison, they’re no good. Same old shit. You still take drugs if you want to.”

“You change solicitors all the time. They come and go and don’t pass things on.”

**Professionals’ Comments**

“There is a high success rate in terms of utilizing court services. Although punctuality and attendance are issues, once clients use the services, they are effective for lifestyle change. Better than punitive approaches.”

“This is a new world for them. They are not used to outside demands. Punctuality, following directions, even remembering are all difficult.”

“With all court programs, transport and non-attendance is a big issue.”

“A lot of (criminal justice) people are white Anglo Saxon and have a different perspective on life. They can’t understand how someone arrives at such a place. They see transience as an anomaly, not a reality.”

**The collective point-of-view**

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical criminal justice system experiences of bailees and ex-offenders include: variability in the way that they are treated by police; generally fair treatment, with a focus on rehabilitation from the courts; often multiple mandatory reporting requirements that include appearing at police stations for signatures, reporting to the bail co-ordinator, attending regular drug rehabilitation sessions, and completing random urine tests; extremely negative experiences within jail and prison (exposure to drugs, jail culture and hardened
criminals, along with losing contact with the outside); and legal representation that is highly variable, in some cases lax and in others knowledgeable and dedicated. Successful transition to a positive lifestyle appears to be dependent upon avoiding any further difficulties, including antagonistic interactions with police, complying with court-ordered mandatory reporting, and managing to integrate those obligations into a recovery schedule that might include a range of training and support activities, as well as employment.

There were a few differences of emphasis between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group. Those included: some bailees and ex-offenders citing CBOs as a positive option and referring to legal aid as variable in quality, while no professionals did so in reference to either issue. There was a great deal of consistency within the bailee and ex-offender group; the only issue on which there was variability was related to treatment by police. The only variation within the professionals group related to a few referring to police awareness of the ‘culture’ from which bailees and ex-offenders come.

5 Rehabilitation and counselling support

Some of the rehabilitation and counselling support factors that are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: level of access to rehabilitation programs; appropriateness of rehabilitation and counselling programs available (group vs individual, frequency of contact, in or out patient); nature of involvement (voluntary or ordered); and program efficacy.

The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Main Issues</th>
<th>Bailees and Ex-Offenders</th>
<th>Professionals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detox Programs</td>
<td>• All bailees and ex-offenders for whom rehabilitation was relevant (almost all) stated that detoxification programs were important when they save lives, but limited in value as part of rehabilitation. Detox was described as an opportunity to get healthy for a time, but only a temporary aide.</td>
<td>• Detox programs were not mentioned by any of the professionals interviewed.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rehabilitation and Counselling Support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main Issues</strong></td>
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<td>----------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detox Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Rehabilitation programs were described in very negative terms by almost all bailees and ex-</td>
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<td>offenders. Most had done at least 3 or 4 different programs unsuccessfully.</td>
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<td>• Most people described rehab as an opportunity to get clean and healthy, and to have someone</td>
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<td>to talk to periodically. No one described any lasting benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The use of alternative drugs to replace heroin was criticized by several of the bailees and</td>
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<td>ex-offenders (all of whom also reported being involved in those programs). The view was that</td>
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<td>replacing one drug with another does not really address the problem of addiction.</td>
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<td>• Very little comment was made about the efficacy of rehabilitation programs, apart from the</td>
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<td>process-related comments described below. Low success rates were acknowledged by several</td>
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<td>professionals, but in the context of explaining process limitations.</td>
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<td>• Only one of the professionals reported misuse of alternative drugs as a problem in that</td>
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<td>approach to rehabilitation. No one suggested that providing alternative drugs was not</td>
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<td>dealing with addiction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A few stated that supported housing provides minimal rehab support by design.</td>
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</table>

**Some illustrative statements on rehabilitation and counselling support**

*Bailee and Ex-Offender Comments*

“Detox is very valuable as a short-term, immediate help. It keeps people alive.”

“What, methadone? That’s not rehab!”

“I don’t know anyone who succeeded. Some people use the day they get out.”

“After 8 months, I still think about using almost every day. Mainly when I stress.”
“I’ve been through rehab several times, in jail and out. Then come out and use. If you want to get off it, you get off it.”

“Rehab is not that good. You get cleaned up a bit and do it again. You come out with no place to live, sleep anywhere you can and get back on drugs.”

“They don’t give me any plans. I’ve got to do it all myself.”

“Drug replacement is not helpful; same problem, different drug. You need skills for changing behaviour.”

“It’s easy to stop using drugs. To change your life is hard, very hard. It’s easier to take drugs and forget about life.”

“It’s not rehab really, it’s advice and information with no follow up.”

Professionals’ Comments

“There are many reservations among this group to meeting with others of similar circumstances for any reason, including rehab.”

“Rehab programs are all full. Consequently, people might get 15 minute sessions. They’re trying to do the right thing, but don’t have the resources.”

“Too many criteria for inclusion is some rehab programs. People get excluded for prescription drug use or violation of curfews.”

“Group counselling is intimidating to a lot of clients. Many fear humiliation.”

“Programs are usually too short. Life change takes a long time.”

“Participation as part of a mandated order does not work.”

The collective point-of-view

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical rehabilitation and counselling support experiences of bailees and ex-offenders include: having participated in drug or alcohol rehabilitation in the past (often 3 – 4 times) with no success; mandatory participation in a rehab program while on bail or post-release that involves perhaps fortnightly short sessions with a counsellor; use of alternative drugs to replace heroin (requiring additional appointments that can interrupt other recovery activities such as training and employment) and do not resolve issues of drug dependency; often dealing with rehab counsellors who they perceive as “out of touch” with their needs and the extent of those needs. Successful transition to a positive lifestyle appears to be dependent upon succeeding at drug rehabilitation with little or no substantial support in the attempt, apart from mandatory testing and reporting and occasional brief conversations about “how things are going”.
There were a few differences of emphasis between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group. Those included: a few bailees and ex-offenders mentioning university-trained counsellors as out of touch, while no professionals did so; almost all bailees and ex-offenders referring to detox as important in saving lives, while no professionals referred to detox at all; almost all bailees and ex-offenders referred to the inefficacy of rehab programs, while no professionals did so, except a few indirectly referring to the minimal rehab support in transitional housing being a design feature. There was little variations within either of the two groups. Among the bailees and ex-offenders the only real variation related to inexperienced counsellors. Among the professionals the only variation related to a few professionals referring to post-release rehabilitation being planned prior to release.

6 Employment and training support needs / conditions

Some of the employment and training factors that are likely to impact on a person’s ability to successfully make the transition to a positive lifestyle include: amount and kind of work experience and history; qualifications earned; work ethic and understanding of the ‘culture’ of work; issues related to disclosure of criminal records; need for active assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment; level of remuneration (which is often low, due to lack of work experience and qualifications); legal system obligations to report during working hours for a variety of matters (court, solicitor, police, urine tests, etc); need for finances to seek and commence employment; and the widely recognized issue of needing stable accommodation to maintain stable employment.

The main issues raised by stakeholders in our discussions included:

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<thead>
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<th>Professionals</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Work Experience and Work History| • There was great variability in reported work experience of bailees and ex-offenders. Some reported long, patchy histories of unskilled labour; others fairly regular work in one semi-skilled area; others almost no work experience due to drug use and incarceration.  
  • Those people with work experience all reported losing work for drug-related reasons, getting held in jail, missing too much work, poor performance, and/or anti-social behaviour.  
  • None of the people in this group described low level of education or lack of skills as problematic to employment. | • Most of the professionals described the work experience of bailees and ex-offenders in general as very poor, in terms of amount of work and work performance.  
  • The suggested reasons for low participation and poor performance were mainly related to long-term drug or alcohol abuse/addiction and incarceration.  
  • Almost all of the professionals described typically low level of education, poor literacy and numeracy skills, and lack of technical skills as problematic to employment for bailees and ex-offenders in general. |
### Motivation
- All of the bailees and ex-offenders described employment as an essential part of establishing a positive lifestyle; all wanted to work.
- No one in this group mentioned the importance of work ethic or knowledge of the ‘culture’ of work.
- All of the people in this group stated a need/desire to progress at a slow rate, taking one element of change at a time.
- Almost all of the professionals also described employment as an essential part of establishing a positive lifestyle.
- Almost all of the professionals described existence of work ethic and knowledge of the ‘culture’ of work as important.
- Several of the people in this group referred to the comprehensive nature of required change and the need to be realistic.

### Other Priorities
- Almost all of the bailees and ex-offenders described having priorities necessarily more urgent than employment such as: meeting various reporting requirements and other bail conditions, getting stable accommodation, and staying off of drugs (all of which related to staying out of jail).
- Almost all of the bailees and ex-offenders expressed a desire to do some kind of training course in order to improve employment prospects (some wanting to get into community services work, others wanting to upgrade a skill base).
- Several of the professionals described bailees and ex-offenders having to juggle several unresolved issues related to bail or parole conditions such as: reporting and periodic testing orders, obtaining and maintaining stable accommodation, meeting requirements for receipt of pensions or allowances.
- A few of the professionals mentioned the need for education remediation as relevant to employment. A few mentioned technical training as necessary for some people.

### Psychosocial Aspects of Work
- Several of the bailees and ex-offenders reported being fearful of certain aspects of being employed including fears of failure in a job, of having to interact socially with others, of entering an ‘unknown’.
- A few of the people in this group suggested that their incarceration had given them a way of talking and acting that was out of sync with the rest of the community and easily noticed as ‘jail talk’.
- Several of the professionals described bailees and ex-offenders as being tentative about employment due to fear of failure in a job and of interacting socially with others.
- None of the professionals referred to people having a noticeable ‘jail way’, but a few mentioned people being out of step with community values.
Employment Support Services

- All of the bailees and ex-offenders involved in the WISE program referred to the support received as extremely helpful (‘hands on’, comprehensive, client needs driven).
- A few of the people in this group described regular Job Network and Centrelink services as insufficient or inappropriate for their needs.
- Several of the professionals described Job Network and Centrelink services as insufficient or inappropriate because they lacked the intensive support required.
- A few mentioned poor links between Centrelink and Correctional Services.

Reporting

- A few of the people in this group described requirements to report to police, obtain regular urine tests, and meet court obligations as affecting their employment prospects.
- Several of the professionals described the requirement that people report to police, obtain regular urine tests, and meet court obligations as affecting their employment prospects.

Some illustrative statements on employment and training support

Balilee and Ex-Offender Comments

“I’ve had a lot of jobs, none meaningful. A vehicle to support a habit. Now I want more. I want to do a course and work in the drug and alcohol area.”

“I’ve had one job, robbing to make money, to buy heroin. I’ve always worked.”

“You’ve got to take it slow, it’s easy to get stressed out, things can build up. You have to build strength to tolerate stress and resist the urge to go back.”

“You can’t focus on two things, a career and drugs. You have to choose.”

“I would settle for a ‘getting started’ job, but I want to make something of myself.”

“I’ve had a few jobs, didn’t stay long. I got lazy, too many ‘chemicals’. I want to take a course first and see how I go. Then maybe get a job.”

“Centrelink was hard to deal with; all these rules and no support. Now I got a support worker. Now there’s no hassles.”

“Regular Job Network services are not enough. Too much on your own. We need extra support.”

“The Make It Work program is great because it has a total life focus.”
Professionals’ Comments

“Employment requires a whole new routine. No more going out at night and sleeping through the day, disappearing for long stretches. Re-orienting takes time.”

“Having to report twice a day, like some do, makes keeping a job difficult.”

“Motivation is present in most clients, but fear overrides motivation.”

“A large percentage of clients have not worked for approximately 10 years. That makes it hard.”

“Lots of ex-offenders are only capable of part-time work due to court reporting and rehab obligations. It also takes time to build stamina for work.”

The collective point-of-view

From the point-of-view of our interviewees, the typical employment and training conditions experienced by bailees and ex-offenders include: highly variable work histories, with a majority having very poor histories affected by drug-taking and incarceration; low levels of education, social skills, literacy and numeracy skills, and work-relevant technical skills; often high motivation to work, but with poor sense of work ‘culture’ and a need for very slow progress toward employment; other demands on their time (such as mandatory reporting and court appointments) that impinge on employment and training opportunities and responsibilities; fears associated with failure at a job, inability to interact socially, and being ‘discovered’ by their style of interacting that resembles other ex-offenders; and insufficient and inappropriate support received from Centrelink and Job Network providers. Successful transition to a positive lifestyle appears to be dependent upon remaining free of drug and alcohol dependency, addressing basic education and training needs, being patient and realistic enough to keep to a process of slow growth and recovery; and finding a source of support that will provide long-term, ongoing assistance in all aspects of the process of obtaining and maintaining employment.

The only real difference between the bailee and ex-offender group and the professionals group related to several of the professionals describing the work histories of bailees and ex-offenders as poor, while none of the bailees and ex-offenders did so. There was one real variation within the bailee and ex-offender group. This related to differences in reported work experience and work history. There was a great deal of consistency within the professionals group. The only variation in this group related to only a few (those being employment support professionals) mentioning employer reservations about employing a bailee or ex-offender.
Conclusions

To summarise, each of the domains that were investigated appear to provide their own challenges to bailees and ex-offenders trying to create a more positive lifestyle for themselves. In each of those domains, the conditions described by our interviewees as typical were:

**Personal Conditions** — poor physical and mental health; low self-esteem and lack of confidence; a high level of anxiety in general, with a number of specific intense fears; lack of education; lack of social skills necessary to function in the general community; poverty (often extreme) and lack of budgeting skills, co-existing with a reluctance to accumulate money to avoid temptation; lack of work ethos; and lack of positive work experience and work history.

**Social Network and Social Environment** — no long-term, non-drug or criminal relationships; having to avoid drug and criminal “acquaintances”; strained family relations if not no family contact or a family with its own involvement in drugs and criminal justice; essentially no social network; intense, prolonged boredom; living in neighbourhoods characterized by poverty, high rates of crime and drug use, high rates of unemployment, and poor physical and mental health; and, in more suitable communities, community resistance to integration of ex-offenders.

**Accommodation** — threat of becoming homeless and breaching bail; options for accommodation that include crisis accommodation which is recognised as highly unsuitable by all concerned because of the unstable and extremely drug-influenced nature of conditions; transitional supported housing and temporary independent housing, both of which are better, but still occupied by users and are temporary; public housing which requires long waits and provides accommodation in depressed communities within flats surrounded by drugs, drug users and ex-offenders.

**Criminal Justice System** — generally fair treatment by police: fair treatment, with a focus on rehabilitation from the courts; often multiple mandatory reporting requirements; extremely negative experiences within jail and prison that do not lead to rehabilitation in any real way; and legal representation that is highly variable, in some cases lax and in others knowledgeable and dedicated.

**Rehabilitation and Counselling Support** — having participated in drug or alcohol rehabilitation in the past with no success; mandatory participation in a rehab program that involves perhaps fortnightly short sessions with a counsellor; use of alternative drugs to replace heroin (requiring additional appointments that can interrupt other recovery activities such as training and employment) and do not resolve issues of drug dependency; often dealing with rehab counsellors who they perceive as “out of touch” with their needs and the extent of those needs.

**Employment and Training Support** — highly variable work histories, usually affected by drug-taking and incarceration; low levels of education, social skills, literacy and numeracy skills, and work-relevant technical skills; often high motivation to work, but with poor sense of work ‘culture’ and a need for very slow progress toward employment; other demands on their time (such as mandatory
reporting and court appointments); fears associated with failure at a job, inability to interact socially, and being ‘discovered’ as ex-offenders; and insufficient and inappropriate support received from Centrelink and Job Network providers.

Successful transition to a positive lifestyle is, to varying degrees, dependent on a number of factors within each of these six domains including:

- The somewhat hard to define and elusive state of ‘readiness to change’, an often very fragile confidence, and the strength to resist long-ingrained habitual behaviour.

- Dealing with profound social isolation and boredom, being alienated from former friends, family, and alienated within the community is also an issue impinging on success.

- Creating a stable housing situation. In certain respects, an ex-offender must get stability in their life, for example, employment, before they can financially afford to achieve stable accommodation. Of course, having stable accommodation is necessary to achieving employment stability, creating an imposing dilemma.

- Avoiding any further difficulties, including antagonistic interactions with police, complying with court-ordered mandatory reporting, and managing to integrate those obligations into a recovery schedule that might include a range of training and support activities, as well as employment.

- Succeeding at drug rehabilitation with little or no substantial formal support in the attempt, apart from mandatory testing and reporting and occasional brief conversations about “how things are going”.

- Remaining free of drug and alcohol dependency, addressing basic education and training needs, being patient and realistic enough to keep to a process of slow growth and recovery; and finding a source of support that will provide long-term, ongoing assistance in all aspects of the process of obtaining and maintaining employment.

The kind of existence described by our interviewees is, without doubt, a Hellish existence. This Hell appears to be surrounded by immense barriers on all sides. Barriers related to personal conditions, social network and social environment, accommodation, criminal justice system obligations, rehabilitation, and employment and training. Some might say that this Hell is “a Hell of their own making”, and that may well be true. But it is by no means “a Hell of their own choosing”. The bailees and ex-offenders who have been the focus of attention in this preliminary study are people who are at various stages of committing to creation of a new life for themselves, drug and crime free. Amongst all of the dysfunction, alienation and real tragedy, one is also struck very strongly by the resilience of these people. In the face of often horrific early life experiences, extreme deprivation, social isolation, drug and alcohol dependency, poverty, and incarceration, these are people who have not surrendered. They continue to struggle to survive and make their way out of Hell. The question is what can be done to assist them.
Interviewees were asked to make recommendations about addressing problems and challenges that confront bailees and ex-offenders and improving support services for them. Several people contributed to that exercise. The recommendations are taken in part from the recommendations offered by interviewees and in part from an analysis of all of the interviews and discussion sheets. In broad terms, creating a future that is free of drug and alcohol-dependence as well as crime, is reliant on the continuing struggle of bailees and ex-offenders and adequate and appropriate support from professionals (in the first instance, due to estrangement from family and friends). Recommendations relate to both strengthening and supporting individuals in this transition to a positive lifestyle.

There are four suggested principles or ‘pillars’ that should underlie a program of strengthening and supporting bailees and ex-offenders. Those principles include: early intervention; responsiveness; comprehensiveness; and long-term commitment. We briefly expand on each.

Early intervention in supporting bailees and ex-offenders can be approached in terms of three different perspectives on what is meant by ‘early’. First, providing active intervention at a point as early in a person’s drug and criminal ‘career’ as possible would be an obvious advantage. Rather than waiting for offences to be repeated or to become more serious before mandated intervention occurs, if active intervention occurred from the first encounter with the criminal justice system, it may well divert some people out of the drug and crime pathway before that becomes a ‘career’ at all. Early intervention, in a second sense, refers to intervention with bailees awaiting trial. If effective, supporting people at this stage can prevent some of them from going (or returning) to prison and avoid involvement in that domain altogether, a domain that has not, historically, contributed to rehabilitation to any real extent. The WISE “Make It Work” program is an initiative attempting to address this aspect of early intervention. A third sense in which we can think of early intervention is in terms of providing pre-release support. Preparing prisoners and those held in remand for conditions that they will face once released should be the minimum of this kind of support. Training to support the information about life ‘outside’, and pre-arranged contacts and support services with clear commitments to provide support is necessary.

Responsiveness of support refers to support that can be provided rapidly, virtually ‘on demand’, as well as support that is suited to the needs of this client group and flexible in terms of adapting to individual idiosyncrasies. In general, bailees and ex-offenders do not wait well. When in need of accommodation or ready to undertake a rehabilitation program or training course, it is important that they be engaged immediately or almost immediately because the likelihood of major negative ramifications is high. Waiting lists and formal starting dates are not conducive to their success. Expecting someone to be able to wait is simply unrealistic in most cases. Flexibility is often necessary in terms of program eligibility or entry criteria, adjusting rates of progress through a training or support program, adapting programs.
Comprehensiveness of support means several things. Support should obviously cover all areas of need. The amount of support provided should be determined by need rather than program design or standard allocations. Also organizations providing support services should be linked by various formal and informal communication mechanisms. Likewise, consideration should be given to assigning case managers (with relatively small caseloads) to assist bailees and ex-offenders in accessing and maintaining their support program. A “shortlist” of the range of support services that should be readily available is likely to include (but this should not be considered an exhaustive list): psychological counselling that addresses personality, cognitive and affective needs; personal development and social skills training; personalized education remediation; prevocational and work-related training; an extensive range of intensive rehabilitation programs that provide individualized support; a well-organized system of adequate and appropriate accommodation options; a mentoring program that provides a role model and informal contact person; and a case manager to provide the co-ordination function.

Long-term commitment to providing support is the fourth principle underlying these recommendations. Life change is a slow process. The client group in question generally requires slow rate of change to maintain stable progress. Even then, progress is likely to be difficult. The degree of change required, as we have discussed, is profound. It is not reasonable to expect six-week rehab programs or so-called ‘intensive assistance’ to be either intense or long enough to produce lasting results. For example, the beginning of support may be well before a person’s release from prison and continue for several years. Acknowledging the profundity of change that is required to transform a life, and acknowledging that self-sufficiency is an ambiguous point in the developmental process, and a point way down the developmental path, is essential to building a support system that will serve bailees and ex-offenders.

A support system built on these four principles and comprising the kinds of supports described might appear very costly on the surface. However, the health-care system costs of chronic drug and alcohol dependency are extremely high. Costs of administering criminal justice and incarceration are likewise very high. The social costs to individuals, families, victims, and communities are incalculable, but are understood to be, in their own way, extremely high. The recommendations discussed here are, to a very large extent, based on changes to existing services, improving linkages between services, and increasing funding to certain types of services, rather than construction of a new system. The beginning of this work is in discussions between key stakeholders within the various areas or sectors of support. Discussions between large entities are also suggested. Those large entities are likely to include organizations such as the Office of Correctional Services, Department of Justice, Magistrates Courts, Office of Housing, other large accommodation providers, Centrelink, Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services, and Victorian Department of Human Services (as examples).
References


