

A Future Beyond the Wall

Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison



A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison

Final Report

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Employment is recognised as a pathway out of offending, and yet few ex-prisoners are able to find meaningful work. This study examines the outcomes of Australian prison and post-prison education, vocational training and employment programs to provide new understandings of employment pathways for ex-prisoners and to inform evidence-based and effective practice. The study is a partnership among key academics in the field, peak national bodies and correctional and employment organisations.

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ASU	Additional Support Units
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DES	Disability Employment Services
DES-DMS	DES Disability Management Service
DES-ESS	DES Employment Support Service
ESA	Employment Service Area
Gundi	A prison industry program for Aboriginal prisoners in NSW
JSA	Job Services Australia
JSCI	Job Screening Classification Instrument
NSW	New South Wales
PEOP prison	Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People leaving prison
SDS	Statewide Disability Services (NSW)
STAJ	Sentenced to a Job
VET	Vocational Education and training

Executive Summary

Australian incarceration rates are rising and over a quarter of released prisoners are reconvicted within three months of release and more than a third reimprisoned within two years. A key aim of correctional programs is to break this cycle of offending. Approximately two-thirds of re-incarcerated people are unemployed at the time they commit an offence and employment has been identified as a factor in an individual remaining crime free. Despite this, ex-prisoners¹ have the highest rates of unemployment of any group in Australia—an irony given the established links between employment and desistance. The fact that prisoners are amongst the most socially disadvantaged Australians is a key factor in this phenomenon.

Reintegration (or integration, given many were not integrated into the broader community prior to incarceration) is the process of a prisoner returning to the ‘community’ (that is society outside prison), living a productive life and ceasing to offend. As being employed has been linked to desistance and successful reintegration, helping ex-prisoners to find and keep a job is a major focus of correctional programs around the world. The economic and social benefits of reducing offending and reoffending are obvious. Despite the acknowledgement of the benefits to society of ex-prisoners gaining employment and staying crime free, these job seekers are profoundly disadvantaged in gaining employment. The barriers to employment for ex-prisoners include: personal characteristics such as disability, attitudes, mental and physical health, level of education, skills and substance use; structural and subsistence conditions such as poverty, discrimination, finance and housing; and support conditions, which include the presence or absence of both formal services and informal supports. Given that being employed is directly associated with each of these factors, the provision of employment support for ex-prisoners is a key element in addressing recidivism.

While there has been considerable international and Australian research into the factors that promote the employment of ex-prisoners, there have been few attempts to analyse evidence-based practice in employment support across Australian correctional systems. As a consequence, in part at least, there have been relatively few attempts to provide theoretical frameworks for the role of employment in desistance. This project, *A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison* (hereafter, the ‘PEOP study’) described and analysed offender employment initiatives, pre- and post-release, across Australian correctional systems. It explored the contribution of offender employment programs to successful desistance and reintegration into the community through an investigation of both employment and recidivism outcomes. The project critically reviewed various theoretical perspectives and developed an overarching framework for effective prison and post-prison employment programs. An important innovation was the investigation of the impact of offender diversity on the effectiveness of offender employment programs. Indigenous Australian² offenders and those with mental and/or cognitive disability have unique needs and are over-represented in the prisoner and ex-prisoner population.

¹ The study focused on prisoners and ex-prisoners, that is, offenders who have received a custodial sentence. We acknowledge that those who have been on remand but are not subsequently convicted, and those who have received non-custodial, community-based sentences can experience similar disadvantages in employment and social integration. The terms ‘offender’ and ‘ex-offender’ are frequently used to describe the latter.

² Throughout the study and its reports we use the terms, Indigenous Australian, Aboriginal or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dependent upon the context and the term used in the particular jurisdiction or program. All these terms refer to Australia’s First Nations Peoples.

The PEOP study recognised the importance of investigating initiatives that attempt to address these needs.

Findings

The PEOP study confirmed, particularly through the findings of the national survey of employment services (Report 3) and the qualitative study on the experiences of ex-prisoner and employment services practitioners (Report 4) that the barriers to successful employment outcomes for ex-prisoners are many and that they interact in complex ways.

While these barriers are frequently conceptualised as obstacles to post-release employment, they represent barriers to many aspects of ex-prisoners' lives and to their reintegration as productive and fulfilled members of the community. Their difficulties often begin before conviction, with educational disadvantages including low levels of literacy and numeracy, disability (including cognitive disability), behavioural problems, drug and alcohol use / addiction, dysfunctional family relationships and a lack of work experience and positive job histories. The prison experience can entrench these disadvantages via institutionalization and stigma, and leave prisoners unprepared mentally and socially for life on the outside. On release, ex-prisoners are frequently confronted with a lack of stable housing, financial difficulties, lack of pro-social family support and segregated social networks, and lack of employment related skills. In addition, those who have drug and alcohol use problems may find it very difficult to move away from drug use; they are likely to experience low self-esteem and motivation and they are faced with negative attitudes of employers and the community. Difficulties in adjusting to a range of demands, including Centrelink regulations and processes and parole requirements, are further barriers to finding and keeping a job.

Female ex-prisoners have additional problems; there are often the stressors of reconnecting with children and returning to former, often violent relationships. Their work histories can be more limited than male ex-prisoners due to child bearing and support responsibilities. Job opportunities post release are often limited as their family responsibilities prevent travelling long distances to a job or relocating.

Indigenous ex-prisoners, who are significantly over-represented in the justice system, have similar barriers to non-Indigenous ex-prisoners. These can be exacerbated by cultural imperatives, including the expectation that they will return to rural and remote communities where there are limited job opportunities and negative impacts of family pressures. They also face racial discrimination in addition to the discrimination against people with a criminal record experienced by ex-prisoners in general.

Correctional programs, including rehabilitation programs and education and vocational training courses, have traditionally focussed on one or more of the identified areas of need. One of the challenges in the research in this area has been the multiplicity of approaches to rehabilitation. Identifying the effects of any one practice or intervention has been almost impossible due to the number of variables impacting on outcomes. For example, prisoners and ex-prisoners generally participate in more than one program, and for different lengths of time. They present with very different profiles (e.g. type of offence, length of sentence and risk level). They face very different environments post release relating to support (family and other), parole conditions and availability of suitable employment. Isolating the effects of any one practice or intervention on employment outcomes is therefore challenging.

The stigma of a criminal record for an ex-prisoner job seeker is among the most intractable barriers to employment. This area of disadvantage for ex-prisoner job seekers has not been actively tackled by service providers, at least not at a systemic level.

Models and practices

Correctional services in all jurisdictions are typically acutely aware of contemporary research evidence, both in Australia and internationally, into ‘what works’ for ex-prisoners as they negotiate transition to the community, and a life free of criminal activity. There is agreement that one of the interventions that works is “work”.

Across all Australian correctional jurisdictions, approximately three-quarters of sentenced prisoners who are eligible to work participate in a prison service or a commercial prison industry, and around one in three eligible prisoners participate in education programs to some extent. In-prison programs include education courses such as basic literacy and numeracy, vocational education and training (VET) courses, and programs focusing on behaviour change related to offences. However, eligibility is usually limited to sentenced prisoners with medium to long sentences, and prisoners with short sentences and those on remand have limited engagement with these programs. Continuity and completion of programs are variable. Even those who complete a VET program are not always able to get formal credentials that can be used on their résumés post release. In some jurisdictions, there are work release programs. These are well regarded by ex-prisoners as they introduce (and reintroduce) them to workplace culture and help them establish relationships with potential post-release employers. The PEOP study looked in depth at one such program, Sentenced to a Job (STAJ), which shows promising outcomes and provides a model for future similar initiatives. The challenges in the provision of these programs include eligibility (participants must be low security and close to the end of their sentence) and the availability and location of suitable work (as well as the cooperation of employers).

The PEOP study also investigated programs developed for vulnerable groups of prisoners and ex-prisoners, in this case Indigenous prisoners and prisoners with cognitive disability. The two selected programs reflected research-based knowledge of the needs and vulnerabilities of these individuals in the justice system. The Gundi program in NSW is designed to provide Aboriginal prisoners with construction skills that can be transferred to work post release, ideally within their own communities. The Additional Support Unit (ASU) program, also offered in NSW, applies a person-centred, flexible and strengths-based model of support to prisoners with cognitive disability. The model has universal applicability as it uses recognised best practice in learning (skills learning in context), uses multi-disciplinary approaches and is culturally sensitive.

Employment support for prisoners post release is provided by a range of service agencies including government, non-government and not-for-profit. However, these are not necessarily coordinated with correctional services, justice departments or other community-based post-release services, which leads to inconsistencies in methods of delivery and in the range of services provided. Ex-prisoners frequently find the demands of job seeking and parole, along with social challenges of housing, finances, health issues, transport and family, overwhelming. They would benefit from continuity of support workers and wrap around services in a throughcare approach so that needs and personal crises could be dealt with in a timely and flexible manner, and a return to criminal activity resisted.

The federally-funded employment services system is seen as being flawed in a number of ways, and the frequent changes to the system is challenging for service provider practitioners and for their ex-prisoner clients who typically need stability and order, having come from the highly regimented, routinized prison environment. The move to a fully privatised (but highly regulated) contract employment system in 1998 was followed by frequent and major changes. The current Government employment services program, *jobactive*, which replaced the previous program *Job Services Australia* in 2015, was criticised in relation to its funding model and job seeker classification process. Problems with assessment have resulted in a lack of clarity around ex-prisoner eligibility for the DES Employment Support Service (DES-ESS) and DES Disability Management Service (DES-DMS). The PEOP study found overwhelming support for more flexibility in funding and a recognition of the increased time and resources required by agencies to provide adequate support for highly disadvantaged job seeker clients.

Performance and outcomes

There is evidence of positive outcomes in employment and offending patterns for ex-prisoners who have participated in education and vocational training programs in prison and in the community.

The principal measure of performance and outcomes in corrections research is recidivism. The PEOP study conducted a series of logistic regression analyses to examine the longer-term impact of custody-based work readiness training programs on reoffending. The results showed evidence of positive effects post release for VET and education in prison. More specifically, participation in VET increased the likelihood of remaining custody free at two- and five-years post release for both male and female prisoners. For males, the relationship was moderated by risk level³; the higher the risk level the smaller the effect on recidivism. Work readiness programs are rarely offered in isolation from other types of educational and behaviour change programs and the PEOP researchers expected the effects of different programs to be cumulative. However, the analysis found a lack of interaction between participation in VET programs and participation in other programs despite all being influential predictors (with all other variables held constant) at five years post release. Non-Indigenous prisoners who completed the programs were more than twice as likely to remain offence free for two years following release, and the older the ex-prisoner the more likely they were to remain offence free. The patterns for female ex-prisoners were similar to those of males except for the moderating effect of risk level.

The performance of correctional employment programs was evaluated via a survey of employment service providers and interviews with stakeholders. Ex-prisoners described their backgrounds prior to conviction and their experiences of education, training and employment programs. Service providers identified the issues they had in service delivery and the challenges for their ex-prisoner clients seeking employment. The views of both groups of participants showed high levels of consistency.

Ex-prisoners expressed positive views about the provision of practical support on release, for example, help with housing, finances, transport and meeting the requirements of Centrelink. A strong finding was the support ex-prisoners need with job searching, résumés and applications, and interview skills. Partnerships with employers and identification of employers willing to employ

³ Risk level indicates the probability of reoffending. It is determined by considering risk factors, or variables identified through research as being associated with reoffending. There are a number of validated risk assessment tools used in Australian jurisdictions.

ex-prisoners are important. The most effective approach to support is a throughcare approach, which provides post-release and post job placement support with case managers who are realistic but optimistic, who are empathic, non-judgemental and understanding of the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners in finding employment.

Negative views of employment support included an over-emphasis on monitoring clients by providers and an over-emphasis on meeting *jobactive* contract obligations. There is a view that some employment services, driven by the need to keep their funding, place ex-prisoners into any jobs whether these jobs are appropriate or not. Being placed into an inappropriate job can undo the progress an ex-prisoner may have made towards desistance and reintegration. Ex-prisoners dislike the lack of privacy entailed in reporting wages and financial status to service providers. Both ex-prisoners and service providers dislike the surveillance role imposed by *jobactive* contracts on service providers.

Implications of findings

The findings from the PEOP project demonstrate the absence of a national coherent framework for employment support for ex-prisoners. There are exemplary programs and strategies in all jurisdictions, and these demonstrate an understanding of the principles underpinning reintegration. Missing, however, are an overarching theoretical framework for the place of employment in offender rehabilitation and in social reintegration as well as systematic application and evaluation of successful approaches. The linking of these aspects is deliberate. Offender rehabilitation has traditionally focused on an offender's needs, and what must be done 'to' the offender to help them desist from reoffending. Recent work on the building of social and human capital, however, has identified the complementary role of the community and systemic application in the process of offender desistance.

In placing employment support at the centre of its investigation, the PEOP study has attempted to provide a theoretical framework. Our starting point was a staged model of transition (from offending to reintegration) which acknowledges the changes in the individual and in the various social policy and community environments in which they operate. We have found the work on human capital, and the development of social competencies in a reciprocal relationship with the community to be relevant given the role that employment plays in human capital.

Our findings suggest that desistance can be understood as a series of stages, as an individual's needs move from the personal to the community, with the need to be accepted and included becoming increasingly associated with reintegration. Viewed in this way, integrated models of post-release support for prisoners make sense. At the primary level of desistance there is a need for offence related interventions, as well as employment and educational skills. The barriers experienced prior to a first conviction include poverty, disability, dysfunctional families, and lack of education and employability skills. At the secondary level of desistance, attention should be paid to building the social and human capital of ex-prisoners, helping them see themselves as functioning members of the workforce and the community. At the tertiary level, ex-prisoners have the capacity and personal agency to be in a reciprocal relationship with society. The communities to which ex-prisoners return have also have a responsibility to promote desistance. This must be in institutional government and social policy environments and contexts that support all these human and community endeavours.

We suggest that theories of desistance can be understood within an ecological systems model of human and societal behaviour. The ex-prisoner operates in several social domains, those involving the individual, the family, the community, and the wider domain of Government policy, each of which interacts with and impacts upon the others. The kinds of communities ex-prisoners return to, the availability of employment and structured support, and the attitudes of others towards them, are all social factors that impact on their reintegration.

The PEOB study identified programs and strategies which can serve as demonstration models of good practice. The Gundi program in NSW and the STAJ program in the NT demonstrate close attention to the general research in offender reintegration and to specific evaluations of programs and interventions. These in-prison programs focus specifically on work readiness and transitional employment. There are holistic throughcare programs (e.g. Extended Throughcare in ACT) that understand transitional pathways and the changing needs of ex-prisoners as they move from one stage to another in the journey to reintegration. The ASUs in NSW are dedicated to the needs of prisoners with a cognitive disability and use flexible, person centred strategies to build on prisoners' strengths. The strategies used with these prisoners could well be applied to other prisoners and ex-prisoners. By focusing on a person's assets rather than their limitations, there is an increased chance that they can learn from positive role modelling and develop pro-social identities to replace the anti-social criminal identity they had previously. The problem with such in-prison programs is the lack of continuity or throughcare post release.

There are several general principles which emerge from the analysis of program outcomes and the experiences of ex-prisoners and the practitioners who work with them. There is a realistic understanding of the challenges of employment for ex-prisoners, and how difficult achievement of desistance can be. Practitioners believe in individualised support, support that builds self-determination, sustains hope and develops social and human capital embedded in a supportive enabling institutional environment. Significantly, our findings confirm that reintegration requires a multifaceted approach, commitment from employers, communities, families, the justice system and mainstream government departments.

Recommendations

Over 70,000 persons are released from full-time imprisonment (from a sentence or remand) every year in Australia. If we are to reduce the social exclusion of disadvantaged groups and concomitant crime, which would otherwise result in ever increasing social and financial costs to governments and the community, there must be an evidence informed response by governments, policy makers and all sectors of the justice system and community service providers. Based on the qualitative and quantitative findings of our study, we recommend that the following principles and associated strategies should underpin policy review and development.

Principle 1: Throughcare

Throughcare is coordinated and continuous. It reduces duplication in services and identifies gaps in services. It employs a case management approach to provide individualised, timely and flexible support to ex-prisoners. Throughcare recognises the stages of transition from prison entry to pre-release planning to transitional and then ongoing support. All Australian jurisdictions recognise the importance of throughcare in policy but few have provided this in practice (the ACT program is a

clear exception). Throughcare requires resources and support from mainstream services and organisations to succeed.

Strategies

- Comprehensive assessment of needs at intake to inform customised pre-release planning.
- Pre-release planning to begin as soon as a person enters prison.
- Integration of prison and community services with structured communication, follow through of pre-release plans and support for the continuity of staff.
- A 'one stop shop' approach (employment services hub) to employment support both pre- and post release, e.g. job search, interview skills, transport and work clothes/tools.
- Opportunities in prison and post release to undertake further education and training relevant to individual needs and labour market.
- Additional support in housing, finance and health when required.
- Continuity in staff and case workers.

Principle 2: Targeted program design and delivery

Approaches to program design and delivery need to be responsive to identified needs of prisoners, ex-prisoners and the community.

Strategies

- Customise the content and intensity of VET for specific groups, such as high-risk men, women, Indigenous prisoners and those with mental and / or cognitive disability.
- Increase availability of VET programs to prisoners, including those on short sentences or remand.
- Liaise with education providers, employers and industries to ensure currency and relevance of education and training programs.
- Provide documented credentials to prisoners who successfully complete education and vocational training modules and/or courses.
- Provide psychosocial programs, which can complement education and vocational training courses. Examples include: 'soft-skills' training including resilience, anger management, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence training.
- Provide practical life skills such as digital (computing), financial management and contract literacies.
- Ensure that programs are culturally sensitive, available to many and include practical, work-related skills.
- Improve the match between prisoner and employer needs.

Principle 3: Engaging communities

Communities have an important role to play in the social reintegration of ex-prisoners. Employer partnerships increase job opportunities for ex-prisoners.

Strategies

- Identify community stakeholders.
- Present the findings from the PEOP study to relevant government, employer and community groups.
- Implement mentor programs, using community members as mentors.
- Identify employers who have had positive experiences in employing ex-prisoners and encourage them to advocate for employment of ex-prisoners via media and community events.
- Promote the value of “giving a person another chance” to help change community attitudes.
- Encourage partnerships between prisons and employers to facilitate transitional and eventual full employment.

Principle 4: Culturally competent and gender-informed practice

There are distinct differences in the needs of women, men, Indigenous Australians and those of other ethnicities while in prison and after release. There are cumulative needs of groups among these prisoners and ex-prisoners such as those with cognitive disability, those with a mental illness and those who have no outside social support. A failure to recognise these and modify content, language and communication style will mean that programs may be resisted and outcomes limited.

Strategies

- Employ staff involved in assessment, planning and program delivery who are culturally competent and provide them with career structure and professional development opportunities.
- Assess staff for cultural competence and provide cultural competence education for staff working in prison education and post-release support.
- Ensure there is gender awareness and gender sensitive training for staff.
- Provide information in a variety of accessible forms on education training and employment possibilities and sources of support for ex-prisoners’ families, employers and social support workers.

Principle 5: Flexible employment services system

A flexible employment services system would recognise the multiple disadvantages of job seekers with a criminal history. It would promote specialist knowledge of disadvantaged job seekers and reward workers with a wide range of case management skills.

Strategies

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current *jobactive* program with a view to reform the following features:

- Revise the existing Job Seeker Risk Index classification system to better recognise the complex needs of ex-prisoners.
- Introduce employer incentives for employing an ex-prisoner.
- Increase availability of pre-release employment programs in collaboration with prisons.
- Increase service provider funding allocated for working with ex-prisoners.
- Promote partnerships and collaboration between service providers, employers and corrections and/or justice departments.
- Promote collaboration between employment service providers and local prisons to develop and implement pre-release programs that are integrated with post-release options.

Principle 6: Quality research and evaluation

Data on pre-prison employment history, in-prison employment and education and vocational education programs, post-release employment outcomes and recidivism, collected in consistent ways by all jurisdictions, would enhance the ability to generate evidence-based research. There is a need for ongoing, longitudinal collections of data about all aspects of in-prison and community-based education and vocational training support and ex-prisoner participation in employment. The use of linked datasets should be facilitated.

Such research will inform all government policy and resourcing and allow analysis of the economic and social implications of correctional policies. It should go beyond measurement of recidivism or employment outcomes alone and include psycho-social and community 'health' outcomes.

Strategies

- Audit prison risk assessment tools for consistency, validity and reliability.
- Improve data collection and develop standard definitions and criteria for eligibility of prisoners to programs to assess activity.
- Improve record keeping and introduce uniform cross-jurisdictional data collection technologies.
- Establish consistent eligibility criteria for participation in education and vocational training programs.
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation framework to assist organisations and corrections and/or justice departments in developing quality control frameworks.
- Conduct cost-benefit analyses of the benefit of education, training and employment programs and supports for prisoners and ex-prisoners.

1. Introduction

It is estimated that some 70,000+ prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) leave full-time incarceration from Australian prisons each year. The majority of ex-prisoners, internationally and in Australia, find it difficult to find and keep employment. Yet, engaging in meaningful work has been shown to reduce reoffending by ex-prisoners. The impact of recidivism on the Australian community is costly in terms of personal harm to victims, offenders and their families and financial impacts on communities.

Research into offender employment, which combines theoretical development, attention to context (institutional, systemic and policy) and performance (evidence-based practice), and is comparative, is rare. This project gathered and analysed comparative data from Australian jurisdictions and employment agencies on education and vocational training courses and employment programs in prison, post-release employment and recidivism.

This project, *A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison*, known hereafter as the PEOP study, conducted a series of studies using a range of methodologies to achieve its aims. One study conducted an analysis of recidivism data in four Australian jurisdictions to examine the relationship between prisoner participation in education and vocational training programs and reoffending outcomes. Another audited the provision of prison-based education, training and employment in all Australian jurisdictions. A further study conducted a national survey of employment service providers to identify strategies and programs provided to ex-prisoners and to provide details on the government employment services system. In a related qualitative study both ex-prisoners and service provider practitioners were interviewed on their experiences of prison and community-based employment programs for ex-prisoners. Finally, three case studies were conducted to investigate programs that focused on Aboriginal prisoners and those assessed as having a disability. The full reports of these studies are attached to this full report and can be accessed at: <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

The project makes an important contribution to the field by critically assessing relevant theoretical approaches and building an applied theoretical framework regarding principles and dimensions of effective offender education, vocational training and employment. This will assist governments and organisations in their offender employment policy and prison program development towards reducing recidivism. The project is also significant for its attention to diverse groups of prisoners and ex-prisoners, including Indigenous Australians and those with mental and cognitive disabilities, and will provide an understanding of the needs of these populations, as well as policy and program directions.

2. Background

Australian incarceration rates have increased by 40% over the past five years, with a 6.6% increase from 2016 to 2017 (ABS, 2017). In all states and territories, over half (57.7%) of all prisoners have had prior adult imprisonment. The majority of prisoners (sentenced and unsentenced) are incarcerated for under 12 months for lesser offences (ABS, 2015). Around one quarter of adult ex-prisoners are reconvicted within three months of release, with over one third being reincarcerated within two years (AIC, 2016; Payne, 2007), and more than half having had prior imprisonment (ABS, 2017). The impact of recidivism on the Australian community is costly in terms of personal harm to victims, offenders and their families and financial impacts. Recent work by Baldry, Dowse and Clarence (2012) revealed the costliness across all government agencies, non-government organisations, communities and families of individuals becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system rather than being socially engaged, especially in education and employment. Expenditure by governments on criminal justice in 2011 was estimated at \$16.3 billion, accounting for about one-third of the estimated overall costs (Productivity Commission, 2017), with significantly more spent on human and social services responding to the high health, housing and financial needs of ex-prisoners (Baldry, McCausland, Dowse, & McEntyre, 2015).

There is widespread recognition that unemployment is related to reoffending and re-conviction (e.g. Baldry & Maplestone, 2003; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012; Uggen, 2000). Approximately two-thirds of re-incarcerated people are unemployed at the time of being breached or committing an offence. Indigenous Australians, who are incarcerated at 14 times their proportion in the total population (ABS, 2017), as well as people from other ethnic minority groups, have poorer work history and the added discrimination of racism (Cunneen et al., 2016). High rates of unemployment for ex-prisoners are socially and economically counterproductive given the identified positive links between employment and ceasing offending (e.g., Coyle, 2009; Cletcher, Degenhardt, Alati, & Kinner, 2014; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012; Uggen, 2000).

Policies to prevent crime must address the factors that are protective against offending and those that contribute to reoffending by individuals who have already experienced incarceration and, upon their release, fail to reintegrate into the community. Note that this report uses the term “reintegration” for the successful integration of ex-prisoners into the community. In the international literature the terms “re-entry” and “resettlement” are similarly used. The term is used with caution, however, as reintegration suggests that an individual was integrated prior to conviction and this is clearly not the case for many. Many offenders were not integrated into the mainstream community prior to their offending, but were marginalised due to significant social disadvantage encompassing, for example, criminal justice involvement as young people, disability, poverty, dysfunctional families, experience of trauma and/or abuse, lack of education and work-related skills.

Ex-prisoners have a very difficult time breaking the cycle of release and reoffending. In addition to the many conditions of disadvantage and disability for ex-prisoners, post-release employment has its own challenges. There is therefore an increasing focus among policy-makers and corrections and justice practitioners on identifying strategies that will help prisoners successfully reintegrate and desist from reoffending. The range of programs provided in prisons and the community to ‘rehabilitate’ offenders and support them in their return to the community include psycho-social interventions such as anger management and sex-offender programs, drug and alcohol abuse

treatment, and the provision of education and vocational training courses and employment related programs. Many of these programs are based on program evaluation findings in the corrections field, the goal being the identification of “what works” in offender reintegration.

There has been considerable research in Australia into the factors that are important to the successful integration of ex-prisoners into the community (e.g., Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Dawe, 2007; Graffam, Shinkfield, & Lavelle, 2005; Heseltine, Day, & Sarre, 2011; Victorian Ombudsman, 2015). These factors include those personal characteristics that can impact on social interaction and integration, such as disability, attitudes, psychological and physical health, education history, interpersonal skills and substance use and employability skills. There are structural and subsistence conditions that impact on reintegration, including social disadvantage, discrimination, finance and housing; the presence or absence of both formal and informal support services; and social and public policies supportive and enabling of employment for ex-prisoners. Engagement with employment post release is associated with each of these factors.

We have an extensive research base of knowledge about what helps and what hinders employment for ex-prisoners. This has, however, come almost entirely from research conducted in the USA with the accompanying limitations that what pertains in the USA may not pertain in Australia and the significant limitations of very different legislative and policy contexts. An added limitation is the relatively few studies that have used rigorous and controlled methodologies. A number of longitudinal studies conducted by the Urban Institute in the USA⁴ found that offender employment outcomes were impacted by pre-incarceration work experience, connection to employers before release and stable family relationships, and that poorer employment outcomes were associated with drug use, physical and mental health problems, and being non-white. Visher et al. (2011) found that those working six months prior to imprisonment, who held a prison job and who were in paid employment soon after release were significantly less likely to reoffend than those who were not. Age has been identified as a factor, with older ex-prisoners being more likely to desist (Bierens & Carvalho, 2010; Uggen, 2000). The provision of vocationally relevant education, training and employment pathways for prisoners has been identified as a key element in addressing recidivism (e.g. Brown, 2011; Cavendish, 2013; Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2014; Duran, Plotkin, Potter, & Rosen, 2013; Hopkins, 2012; McGregor, 2015; Victor & Gardner, 2005).

A meta-analysis of programs providing education and training to prisoners in the US, conducted by Davis et al. (2014), found that receiving education and/or vocational training while incarcerated reduces an individual’s risk of reoffending after release. When only rigorous evaluative studies were included, the meta-analysis found a 43% reduction in recidivism. Even when all studies were included, there was a 13% lower chance of reoffending after release for prisoners who studied. However, Davis et al. acknowledged the difficulties in drawing strong conclusions, given that their meta-analysis included few controlled studies and that there was substantial heterogeneity in programs, participants, contexts and methodologies reported in the primary studies. Davis et al. also found stronger evidence for cost effectiveness of vocational education programs measured in terms of reimprisonment. These findings indicate the need for high quality research and program evaluation.

⁴ For a comprehensive view of the Urban Institute’s reintegration projects see <http://www.urban.org/center/jpc/returning-home/publications.cfm>

Analysis of the effects of education programs on post-release employment rather than on recidivism alone, is challenging. The aforementioned meta-analysis by Davis et al. (2015) also looked at the relationship between education in prison and employment post release. The findings in this case were limited by the small number of high quality evaluative studies. However, they did find a positive association between correctional education and post-release employment, as did Aos et al. (2006) and Mackenzie (2006). An earlier systematic review by Davis, Bozick, Steele, Saunders and Miles (2013) refers to a variety of primary studies of the effectiveness of correctional education which, in the absence of experimental methods, estimate recidivism differences using various methods of correcting for selection bias. More recent primary studies use selectivity bias correction techniques such as propensity score matching (for example Pompoco, Wooldredge, Lugo, Sullivan, & Latessa, 2017), Heckman's two-stage regression technique (Giles & Whale, 2016) and the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method (Giles, Cooper, & Jarvis, 2014). Drake and Fumia (2017) argue that these methods are useful, providing valuable comparisons of post-release outcomes in the absence of experimental design. However, they also suggest using multi-level modelling to further reduce the ambiguity that comes from non-experimental design which has selection bias issues and a study context which refutes the binary of 'what works' and 'what does not work'.

A randomised trial of a transitional employment program conducted by Redcross et al. (2009) found that although the program did not lead to sustained employment it did result in reduced recidivism. This suggests that it is not necessarily employment *per se*, but the skills acquired during training and employment that lead to desistance. What is less clear, however, is whether it is education and vocational training in prison or post-prison or a combination of training in prison, post-prison and employment that leads to reductions in recidivism. The components of the PEOP study address this important, policy-relevant research question.

Newton et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of the current evidence for the impact of education and training programs on recidivism. That the authors could include only seven studies that met their stringent criteria for controlled experimental methods (all from the US), reinforces the fact that there is a paucity of rigorous comparative research in the field. Newton et al. did find, however, some evidence for the benefits of providing multifaced programs, for example, those that include cognitive skills and behaviour change, that target dynamic risk factors, and that provide 'soft skills' training.

The in-prison education and vocational training landscape in Australian jurisdictions is different to that elsewhere but presents similar complexities in evaluating employment outcomes. There are general education programs, predominantly basic literacy and numeracy. The vocational education and training courses (VET) are usually at pre-certificate and certificate 1–3 levels and include work-related areas such as construction, workplace hygiene, forklift, dogman, first aid, warehousing, horticulture, forestry, electrical, engineering, hospitality, laundry and cleaning, clothing production, business studies, small motor maintenance, welding, textiles and information technology. There are examples of pre-release and transition work programs but differences in economic and labour force contexts preclude robust comparative analyses.

The challenges associated with implementing employment programs for prisoners and ex-prisoners are many, with multiple and competing program objectives, incongruity between resourcing and priority attached to programs, the complex and highly disadvantaged nature of the target populations including disadvantage related to regional and remote locations, lack of clear

organisational goals and models of programs, and poor data gathering (Buchanan & Considine, 2007). A particular challenge arises from the diversity in these programs and their client groups. Understanding this is key to developing appropriate support, and draws attention to the specific needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Indigenous people, those with mental and cognitive disabilities and histories of problematic drug and alcohol use, as well as the specific needs of female and young male offenders. The pattern of incarceration for these groups, who tend to cycle in and out of prison most frequently, creates significant difficulties in how employment support programs should be conceptualised (Baldry, McDonnell, Maplestone, & Peeters, 2006).

The evaluation of post-prison, community-based education and vocational training programs for ex-prisoners is similarly difficult. Variables include location, delivery method, resourcing, duration, personal characteristics and judicial status of participants (e.g. release conditions such as parole). In Australia, while there have been a number of discrete evaluations of offender employment programs (e.g. Graffam, Edwards, O'Callaghan, Shinkfield, & Lavelle, 2006; Graffam, Shinkfield, Mihailides, & Lavelle, 2005; Graffam, Smith, Shinkfield, & Polzin, 2000), there have been no studies comparing the processes and outcomes of different types of services. Two major problems are controlling for measures of outcomes and collecting data that will allow for comparisons.

An individual's transition from prison into the community is difficult and avoiding reoffending may be the least of a person's problems (Visher, 2003). Much of the research has focused on recidivism while ignoring the complex interplay of other factors, for example personal background and characteristics; mental and physical health; and social environment, including family and community and justice, social and public policies. Untangling these factors to identify the impact of one or the other on employment, recidivism and reintegration of ex-prisoners requires interdisciplinary, multilevel and longitudinal studies of the processes of reintegration for ex-prisoners (Baldry et al., 2006).

2.1 The Future Beyond the wall — the PEOP Study

The ARC Linkage Project, *A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release outcomes for People Leaving Prison* (ID: LP140100329) was conducted 2014-2017. It gathered and analysed comparative data from Australian jurisdictions and employment agencies on the relationship between in-prison and post-prison vocational education and employment programs, employment and recidivism.

2.1.1 Study aims

The project aimed to:

- investigate the models, practices, performance and outcomes of education and vocational training and employment services
- provide insights into the extent to which successful completion of education and vocational training and/or employment programs is related to positive employment and recidivism outcomes
- apply theoretical frameworks and practice models that are useful and appropriate to the development of future effective services.

2.1.2 Design

The project involved three related studies:

Study 1 — Recidivism

Study 1 involved the collection and analysis of relevant de-identified data on all sentenced individuals released from prison in 2010 and 2011 and any returns to custody by 30th June 2016 in jurisdictions that were willing and/or able to participate. It included a review of the literature on employment, vocational education, prisoner industry programs and services for prisoners pre and post release. This study provided insights into the extent to which successful completion of training and/or employment programs is related to recidivism outcomes.

Study 2 — Programs and Services

Study 2 had three components:

- A. an audit of all government employment service provisions for prisoners pre- and post-release in all Australian jurisdictions, and a report on the proportion of eligible adult prisoners who participated in prison industries, education and vocational training programs in all Australian correctional jurisdictions from 2008/09–2014/15
- B. a national survey of all employment agencies to identify the types of services provided to prisoners and ex-prisoners as well as the key barriers to gaining employment for ex-prisoners
- C. a qualitative study of the experiences of ex-prisoners who are seeking employment, the experiences of practitioners who work with ex-prisoners seeking employment, and the models of practice used by a range of agencies.

Study 3 — Nested studies

Study 3 comprised three case studies that addressed specific issues, program approaches and outcomes for two vulnerable groups in the criminal justice system: Indigenous Australians and those with an identified mental and/or cognitive disability.

2.1.3 Outcomes

Each of the studies and their related components have produced a separate, stand-alone report. These reports are listed below and are available at:

<https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

1. Australian prison vocational education and training and returns to custody among male and female ex-prisoners: A cross-jurisdictional study
2. Adult Prisoner Participation in Education, Training and Employment in Australia, 2008–15: An audit
3. Results from a National Survey of Employment Services

4. A qualitative study on the experiences of ex-prisoners who are seeking employment, the experiences of practitioners who work with ex-prisoners who are seeking employment, and the models of practice used by a range of agencies

The “nested studies”

5. Sentenced to a Job: A case study
6. The Gundi program⁵
7. Education, training and employment for prisoners with cognitive disabilities: A case study (The Additional Support Units in NSW support prisoners with cognitive disabilities)

The findings from each of these related studies are summarised in section 4 of this report.

2.1.4 Limitations of the study

There are typically methodological problems in both quantitative and qualitative studies that aim to measure outcomes of correctional programs on employment and recidivism. There is, for example, selection bias in correctional programs, which makes it difficult to identify which of the identified effects are related to programs, and which may be related to the characteristics of the participant. While analyses can control for characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and level of risk, it is difficult to quantify personal characteristics such as motivation to desist, behaviour or social background.

A key challenge in the PEOP study was the inconsistency of and gaps in data collection across Australian jurisdictions and the resulting impediment to comparative analyses.

Our study highlighted other methodological issues including:

- measures of recidivism, e.g. length of time after release before a reoffence, seriousness and type of reoffence (inclusion or not of breach), type of sentence and length of time before a reoffending event
- differences in employment opportunities and impact on employment outcomes
- lack of consistent, validated risk assessments of prisoners prior to participation in programs
- variation in programs, e.g. type, duration, delivery and completion rates
- other education, vocational training and employment programs accessed after release
- other support available and provided to ex-prisoners which may impact on employment outcomes
- definitions of employment and the issue of informal (and/or illegal) work
- data on type and longevity of employment.

⁵ Day, A., Wodak, J., Graffam, J., Baldry, E., & Davey, L. (2017). Prison Industry and Desistance from Crime: An Australian Programme. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 1-11.

3. Theoretical perspectives

We note at the beginning that the terms “offender” and “ex-offender” are used generically in the literature and denote “a person with a criminal record”. The current project focused on the general education, vocational education and training (VET) courses and employment programs of prisoners and ex-prisoners (therefore excluding those who did not spend time in prison). However, to remain true to the language used in the literature we use a mixture of the terms ex-offender and ex-prisoner as appropriate to the context.

Employment programs for offenders are, overall, based on theoretical models that do not place employment in the broader context of offender rehabilitation and reintegration. Both international and Australian studies identify a relationship between unemployment and crime, with some research indicating employment problems and unemployment can be an indirect cause of crime, and other research finding that poor employment status can be a result of criminal behaviour (e.g. Hopkins, 2012; Skardhamar & Telle, 2012). In general, the relationship between crime and employment is understood to be very complex. A variety of theoretical approaches during the late 19th and throughout the 20th centuries influenced attitudes to and ways of addressing offending. Theories pertinent to offender and ex-offender employment are rehearsed briefly below.

General Strain Theories of crime (Agnew, 1997; Agnew & White, 1992) conceptualised the relationship between employment and offending in ways that recognised the influence of social capital and social inclusion. Strain theory contended that the cultural goals of society, such as prosperity, good education, family connections and secure, well-paid employment, put enormous strain on people who are not in a position to achieve these goals. A minority choose illegitimate means of achieving these cultural goals. Agnew (1997) explained the differences in the way people react to social strain and suggested that a person’s emotional, intellectual and psychological characteristics will affect their propensity to conform or deviate.

Social Control theories also focused on the social causes of crime. Social Control theorists, such as Travis Hirschi (2001) saw the loss of control on the part of the individual and the breakdown of social order in religion, the family, education and the economy, as causes of crime. In the late 1960s, researching causes of juvenile crime, Hirschi and Gottfredson further developed control theory into what later became known as the General Theory of Crime (Hirschi, 2001; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1993). This theory identified social bonds as the means by which individuals conform; they are developed within social systems, the significant ones being the family and the school. Employment of ex-offenders was not highlighted, possibly because the social bond theorists were focusing on juveniles⁶.

A significant postmodern theory is *labelling*, or *societal reaction* theory. Labelling theory investigates the impact that being known as an ex-offender has on people’s perspectives of a person’s employability. Labelling theory, as originally conceived by Lemert (1974), proposed that putting people who have committed crimes into the justice system does not in fact reduce crime, but rather increases it, that state intervention is itself, criminogenic. Much of the related research identified bias in society’s and the justice system’s response to law breakers, and showed how

⁶ Social bonding and social control theory are in essence the same thing. The difference in name comes from social learning theorists who referred to social control theory as social bonding theory, in part as a response to their ongoing debates with social control theorists such as Hirschi.

characteristics such as race, class and gender influenced criminal justice responses to crimes and lawbreakers (Chambliss, 1984; Cullen & Cullen, 1978). Significantly, labelling theorists distinguished between primary and secondary deviance, suggesting that secondary deviance is caused by the stigma and stereotyping experienced by the offender.

Social disorganisation and life-course theories emphasised the concepts of social capital and social cohesion in the 20th and early 21st century, which have had a substantial impact on the understanding of the place of employment in our societies. Stable employment is one of the most important ingredients of *social capital* for people in western societies, as well as one of the most cited correlates of desistance from crime (Farrall, 2004). Social capital has been variously referred to as the development of connections between people (Bourdieu, 1986), social ties (Coleman, 1988), trust (Fukuyama, 1995), and engagement in civil society (Putnam, 2000, 2002), with most definitions emphasising the reciprocal nature of social networks and the value of these as a social resource. Most people in western societies develop these kinds of relationships with those with whom they work as well as with family, friends and those in their surrounding communities and networks. Prisoners and ex-prisoners have little opportunity to create these workplace-based networks.

The literature on social capital suggests that social relationships are strongest when built on trust. This may be crucial in regard to ex-prisoners and their social capital because during incarceration, bonds based on trust are weakened, as are the relationships formed prior to conviction. The social capital of offenders is likely to be diminished by "... the instability created by incarceration, as well as by the effect of incarceration on the prisoner's sense of trust and ability to reciprocate and identify with the outside world" (Wolff & Draine, 2004, p. 463). In non-custodial sentences relationships with family and friends can also be broken and social capital depleted. The *Good Lives Model* (Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward & Fortune, 2016; Ward & Stewart, 2003) and work by others on social capital-building (e.g., Berg & Huebner, 2011; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003) have drawn attention to the role of ex-prisoner assets in successful reintegration.

Social capital is related to *human capital*, that is, the skills and personal resources an individual needs to function effectively in employment and in the community. There have been a number of studies investigating the employment of ex-offenders. These have looked at ex-offenders' characteristics in terms of human capital, that is, the degree to which their attitudes to work and their self-esteem, for example, might lead to increased employment opportunities (Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Sampson & Laub, 2001). Research into the effects of incarceration on the social capital of individuals and communities has found that ex-offenders have diminished social and human capital, which in turn affects the neighbourhoods to which they return by increasing poverty and crime. The related concept of *social inclusion* suggests that the more a person is linked into the fabric of mainstream society via for example employment, the less likely they are to feel alienated from society, to build social capital within offending groups and to commit offences.

The *process of desistance* from offending (Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004; Ward & Maruna, 2007) is a relevant approach to understanding the elements involved in an individual ceasing to offend and becoming more integrated into their community. This is primarily a descriptive and individualistic approach to understanding those factors (McNeill, 2006; McNeill & Whyte, 2007). Maruna et al. (e.g. Maruna, Immarigeon, & LeBel, 2004; Maruna & LeBel, 2010; Maruna, Lebel, et al., 2004) have developed a competency-capital approach examining the

interaction between ex-offenders and their social context, with employment being a major factor in desistance for males.

The work on the process of desistance has also focused on the factors that may trigger desistance or serve as a 'desistance signal' (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Understanding what these factors are and how they might relate to the personal shifts in an offender's sense of identity or to external influences from the community (such as employment) has led researchers to distinguish between levels of desistance as primary, secondary and tertiary (Day, Wodak, Graffam, Baldry, & Davey, 2017; McNeill, 2012). At the primary level of desistance, the offender is encouraged to recognise their offence related attitudes and behaviour. Correctional programs are likely to focus on these and the aspects of their lives prior to conviction, which may have led them to offending. These include poverty, dysfunctional families, low levels of education and self-esteem. At the secondary level of desistance, offenders are encouraged to see themselves in pro-social ways. The *Good Lives* model (e.g., Ward & Brown, 2004; Ward & Fortune, 2013) proposes the redeeming consequences of offenders seeing themselves as non-offending citizens and believing that they have acquired something more valuable than any benefits they could gain from criminal behaviour.

Intervening with ex-offenders at the tertiary level of desistance encourages positive interaction with the community (McNeill, 2006; McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, & Maruna, 2012). The aim of support at this level is for the ex-offender to feel a sense of belonging to the community, and for the community to reciprocate (Maruna, 2001). Cherney and Fitzgerald (2014) describe the importance of employment for ex-offenders at this level of desistance, as they develop pro-social roles and responsibilities. Fox (2014) investigated the role of the community in actively communicating a sense of belonging to ex-offenders and the forging of relationships of mutual obligation and respect and concluded that community integration is in itself a factor in desistance rather than an outcome.

Drawing on insights from a number of these theories and in particular applying Maruna and King's (2009) concept of "belief in redeemability" and the more recently emerging body of literature around *desistance signalling*, Reich (2017) has investigated ways that ex-prisoners can challenge an employer's negative attitude about their employability. Belief in redeemability refers to the extent to which an individual views criminality as fixed, with prisoners being unable to desist from crime (Maruna & King, 2004). Desistance signals, on the other hand, are recognizable signs indicating that an individual is no longer engaged in criminal activity (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Reich's (2017) study found that redeemability is a positive predictor of an employer's willingness to employ an ex-offender.

The attitudes to criminality, both those of the community (including service providers and employers) and those of prisoners and ex-prisoners, are central to the social context of reintegration. The social psychological literature suggests that what people believe about others controls the way they act towards them (e.g. Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, & Macri, 2011). Impression formation is central to the process of making decisions about others and occurs through stereotypical beliefs, which are based on characteristics such as a criminal record, as well as the personal attributes of an individual. In relation to employing an ex-offender, an employer may (stereotypically) believe that past offending is a sign of future offending (e.g. Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996). Thus, attitudes toward ex-prisoners are likely to be related to the kind of person people imagine an ex-prisoner to be. Employment is associated with the social and human capital of ex-prisoners and their attitudes towards themselves and their employability. The attitudes of the ex-prisoner are as important to their employability as are the attitudes of employers and others in

the community. Even an ex-prisoner's belief about the negativity of employers' attitudes is a barrier.

To address socio-structural and systemic concerns, a number of social theories have been employed. For example, there has been increased research interest in the social contexts for re-integration (Farrall, 2002; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; La Vigne, Visher, & Castro, 2004; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Maruna, Immarigeon, et al., 2004; Petersilia, 2003). The kinds of communities ex-prisoners return to, the availability of employment and structured support, and the attitudes of others towards them, are all social factors that impact on their re-integration. Kubrin and Stewart (2006), for example, conducted a quantitative study into the effects of neighbourhood context on re-integration, and concluded that ex-prisoners returning to neighbourhoods with high levels of social and economic disadvantage have increased risks of reoffending. The longitudinal studies conducted by the Urban Institute (e.g. Steurer, Smith, & Tracy, 2001; Visher et al., 2011), demonstrated the impact of social context on recidivism, irrespective of the psychopathology of ex-prisoners (Wolff & Draine, 2004), and Baldry et al. (2015), using life course pathway data, documented the concentration in a very small number of disadvantaged towns and suburbs in NSW of prisoners' places of living both prior to prison and post release.

Cumulative disadvantage and life course theory (Dannefer, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1997) is a useful approach to understanding how negative and disadvantageous life events and structural and institutional arrangements such as a lack of appropriate education, health care, employment opportunities, racism and classism accumulate and compound in an individual's, family's and community's 'life' to create individual and structural inequalities (Baldry, 2017). Most prisoners and ex-prisoners experience cumulative disadvantage, which impacts negatively on their employability.

The *ecological systems* model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1994, 1995) has been adapted and appropriated to many contexts beyond his initial educational framework and has significant applicability to the study of the justice system and the experiences of ex-prisoners. The model conceptualises the individual operating within complex social systems, each of which interact with and impact upon the others. In the model, *the microsystem* includes the activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced in the context of an individual's face-to-face relations, for example, the individual's cognitive, biological and emotional characteristics and relationships within the family. The *mesosystem* comprises interactions in two or more settings, such as between home, the work place and a health service. The *exosystem* encompasses the connections and interactions between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the individual, but in which events occur that influence processes within the person's immediate setting. For example, for an ex-prisoner, the *exosystem* might encompass the relations between an employment support service and an employer, and the ex-offender's family's relationships with a health service. The final environment is the *macrosystem*, which Bronfenbrenner (1989) defined as consisting of subcultures, or other broader social contexts, with particular reference to the developmentally-institutive belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems. In relation to the justice system and related policies, the macrosystem includes the labour market and employment opportunities, and society's attitudes to punishment at any given time.

Visher and Travis (2003) proposed a model of reintegration that sits within an ecological system's paradigm. It is based on extensive longitudinal studies of prisoners returning to communities (e.g. Visher et al., 2011; Visher, Debus, & Yahner, 2008; Visher, La Vigne, & Travis, 2004; Visher,

Winterfield, & Coggeshall, 2005). Visher and Travis identified four domains that have an impact on the reintegration of ex-prisoners. These domains, i.e. individual, family, community and Government policy, approximate Bronfenbrenner's (1989) micro, meso, exo and macro systems. Visher and Travis argued for a longitudinal view of the impact of these domains, showing that experiences prior to conviction, during sentencing and incarceration, post-release transition and post-release reintegration all have an impact on each of the domains and on long-term reintegration outcomes.

This model can accommodate the later theories on desistance (Maruna & LeBel, 2010; McNeill, 2006; McNeill et al., 2012), those on role of the community in building social capital (Farrall, 2004; Fox, 2014) as well as socio-structural aspects.

4. Findings: Study One

The findings of the seven studies that comprise the PEOB study are summarised below.

4.1 Australian prison vocational education and training and returns to custody among male and female ex-prisoners: A cross-jurisdictional study

The following is a summary of the forthcoming article 'Australian prison vocational education and training and returns to custody among male and female ex-prisoners: A cross-jurisdictional study' that will be published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology.

Across all Australian correctional jurisdictions, approximately three-quarters of all sentenced prisoners who are eligible to work participate in a prison service or in some form of prison industry (Productivity Commission, 2017). These work opportunities aim to provide some level of vocational training that, wherever possible, can lead to the award of a qualification which has the potential to improve post-release employability and, as a result, contribute to achieving the rehabilitative goal of correctional services. In addition, eligible prisoners can enrol in formal education and vocational training courses that can also lead to an accredited qualification or academic record that can be used, post release, for entry into further study and/or employment. Finding (and keeping) employment in the community has been identified as a factor in desistance from further offending (Skardhamar & Telle, 2012; Uggen, 2000).

Based on the balance of evidence that suggests employment helps to prevent reoffending, there has been a growing interest and investment in prison industry and prisoner vocational training. For example, from 2018 the Australian Government's new 'Prison to Work' program aims to give Indigenous prisoners access to the support that they need on release to better prepare them to secure employment, with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) finding that time in prison could be better used to set up pathways to employment (COAG, 2016). There have been some recent analyses of Australian prison industries and vocational training programs (see Day et al., 2017; Wodak & Day, 2017).

It is plausible that an important determinant of the success of this type of re-entry is the work readiness training that prisoners receive before they exit prison and gain employment in the community. However, there is only limited evidence that prison-based programs have any direct impact on reoffending rates. A recent systematic review of the outcome literature identified only seven peer-reviewed evaluation studies (worldwide) that were methodologically robust, and the available evidence to support program effectiveness is weak (Newton et al., 2016).

Reduced recidivism is the most common outcome in studies of correctional program effectiveness. However, there is no ready consensus on how recidivism should be measured. Across primary studies, a variety of measures are used. Re-arrested, re-convicted, and re-imprisonment might be used; the offence may be either a breach of a previous sentence or a new offence; the time period in which the recidivism occurs may be as short as within one year of release or as long as seven years (or more); and the recidivism may be, for example, return to the same prison, return to prison in the same state or return to prison within a number of states in the same country. Comparison of primary studies where the key measure differs in so many respects is therefore difficult. Even

studies that have experimental designs can differ in terms of their recidivism measure, as is the case with Newton et al. (2016).

Given that a majority of released prisoners recidivate over their lifetime, it is apparent that even small reductions in recidivism as a result of correctional intervention can be important. This study represents the first Australian cross-jurisdictional analysis of the longer-term impact of work readiness training programs for prisoners on reoffending. It aimed to determine whether the successful completion of prison work readiness programs across four jurisdictions predicts whether offenders remain offence free following release from prison (at the 2- and 5-year time points). In addition, the study aimed to examine the relative impact of work readiness program completion when compared to other types of educational and behaviour change programs that are routinely offered to Australian prisoners. This is important as work readiness programs are rarely offered in isolation from these other programs, and it is reasonable to expect the effects of different programs to be cumulative. Finally, there may be prisoner demographics that systemically influence reoffending outcomes. These include age at release, gender, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, and the level of assessed risk of reoffence. Each of these variables has been shown in previous research to be associated with rates of post-release offending.

In investigating the impact of in-prison vocational education and training (VET) on returns to custody among Australian adult prisoners, VET, education, and behavioural change program participation in custody and demographic and risk assessment data were provided by correctional services in four Australian states and territories (NSW, South Australia, the Northern Territory and ACT) for 10,834 Australian prisoners released from custody in 2010-2011 as well as data on any return to custody by 30th June 2016. After removing cases without a risk assessment (NT) and those having spent less than 60 days in custody (to allow for completion of a basic program), this information was used to predict returns to custody by 2015-2016. Logistic regression was conducted to determine whether successful completion of vocational education (VET) could predict whether offenders remained offence free at the 2- and 5-year time points following release from prison. The covariates included age at release from prison, Indigenous status, risk level, completion of education programs and/or behaviour change programs, and the interaction between effects (did not complete/participate vs. completed), VET program completion and risk level, education program and behaviour change program completion.

The results are consistent with other research which has found positive effects post-release for VET and education in prison. They showed that participating in VET in custody contributed to the likelihood of remaining custody free at two- and five-years post-release for both male and female prisoners. However, for males, the relationship was moderated by risk level; the higher the risk level the smaller the effect on recidivism. Education programs had greater impact over the five-year period although this might be a consequence of sentence length (i.e. the time needed to complete programs). However, the analysis found a lack of interaction between participation in VET programs and participation in education and/or behaviour change programs despite all being influential predictors (with all other variables held constant), again at five years post release. There were effects for Indigenous status, with non-Indigenous prisoners being more than twice as likely to remain offence free for two years following release, and a smaller effect for age, with a 5% increase in the likelihood of remaining offence free for each additional year in age.

The pattern of predictors for female offenders showed similarities with their male counterparts. Both VET and education programs were found to have an influence, particularly over time. The

samples differed in the effect for risk. There was no significant VET-risk interaction, suggesting that while this may be attributable to the sample under investigation, it may be also a consequence of gender bias in risk assessment tools.

4.2 The Northern Territory component of Study One

Findings from the analysis of the Northern Territory (NT) corrections data were excluded from the analysis presented in Section 4.1 as the data did not include a variable for risk assessment.

The NT is one of eight sub-national jurisdictions (six states and two territories) in Australia. With just over one percent of the Australian population (ABS 2017), NT's prison population of 1,600 was 3.9 percent of the total prison population of 41,200 in Australia in 2017. Sentenced prisoners in the NT are slightly younger than those across all jurisdictions and the proportion of prisoners who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the NT is almost three times the national proportion (84.3 percent compared with 27.4 percent). As with other jurisdictions in Australia, the NT government provides a variety of programs in their adult prisons for sentenced prisoners. These include education and vocational training courses, behaviour management programs, which are usually mandated in sentencing, and employment in prison services (for example, gardening and cleaning) or industry workshops (such as welding, scaffolding and catering). These programs and opportunities are intended to ameliorate the weak pre-prison education achievements and labour market engagement of these prisoners so that they are better suited to life in the community on their release. The findings demonstrated that in the NT context, it was prison employment specifically that was central to positive outcomes post-release.

5 Findings: Study Two

Study Two comprised three related studies. The first was an audit of the availability and participation of prisoners in education, training and prison-based employment in Australian jurisdictions. It provided useful background information for the connected studies: the survey of employment service providers; and the study on the experiences of ex-prisoners who are seeking employment, and those of the practitioners who work with them.

5.1 Adult Prisoner Participation in Education, Training and Employment in Australia, 2008–2015: An audit

The full report is accessible at : <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

This report presents a summary of data on the proportion of eligible adult prisoners participating in prison industries and in prison education and vocational training in all Australian correctional jurisdictions in the period 2008/09 to 2014/5. This data was accessed from Reports on Government Services (ROGS), prepared by the Australian Productivity Commission (2010–2016), and from jurisdictional Annual Reports, supplemented by jurisdictional responses to survey questions about current correctional education, training and employment programs, and responses to follow-up questions by phone and/or email by managers of various sections within each jurisdiction. The data provides a snapshot of sector activity in the seven-year period covered by the report and allow comparison between jurisdictions.

Correctional services across Australia are under pressure from an increasing prison population in ever-tighter fiscal situations, which demand greater efficiencies and more stringent monitoring of

performance. At the end of the period covered in this report, the structures, strategies and performance measures of many jurisdictions were in the process of revision or change. For example, WA Corrections was undergoing a major restructure; Queensland Corrections was reviewing and remodelling its matrix of programs and re-entry strategies; NSW Corrections was in the process of relocating education and training from programs and services to prison industries and had announced plans to outsource 90 per cent of the education delivery and replace teacher positions with assessment officers and coordinators; both SA and Tasmania Corrections were reviewing their education provision and delivery; and Corrections Victoria was in the process of responding to and implementing recommendations from the 2015 Ombudsman's Report regarding programs and services, including education and training. These developments and their impacts were outside the time frame for this audit.

In the time covered by the audit, nationally more than 70 per cent of all eligible prisoners had participated in a commercial or service industry at some stage during their sentence, and around one in three eligible prisoners had participated in education to the extent of at least one session of one unit of competency for each of the years covered in the audit. All eligible prisoners are given financial incentives to work at pay rates that correlate with the level of skills and responsibility involved, and some jurisdictions provide additional incentives for productivity and performance. In all jurisdictions, an unemployment benefit is paid to prisoners willing to work when no work is available, to prisoners categorised as ineligible for work, and to prisoners on remand who choose not to work. However, no benefit is paid to eligible sentenced prisoners who refuse to work. In all jurisdictions, prisoners are given financial encouragement to engage in courses that develop their basic literacy and numeracy, employability and vocational skills. However, education is voluntary. All jurisdictions provide education and training specifically linked to prison industry jobs, and efforts are made to ensure that employment conditions and employee performance maintain the standards that apply in the real world.

The report notes that different jurisdictions use different methods of calculating employment rate data. For example, in some jurisdictions employment rate data is based on the number of prisoners employed on a single day calculated against the number of eligible prisoners in custody on that day. Others average the proportion of eligible prisoners employed on the first day of each month. It is not clear what impact these different counting methods might have on reported results or the proportion of eligible prisoners unable to work because there is not enough work to go around.

The same variation exists for calculating the rate of prisoner participation in education programs. There is also a wide variation in how eligibility is defined. For example, length of sentence, prisoner status and location within a prison are criteria for participation and some groups of prisoners are excluded. Education rate data for some jurisdictions are based on the number of prisoners in education on a single day, calculated against the number of eligible prisoners in custody on that day. In some other jurisdictions, the rate is the averaged proportion of eligible prisoners in education on the first day of each month. Only one jurisdiction bases its rate on a count of each prisoner participating in education. Again, it is not clear what impact these different counting methods may have on reported results.

With respect to post-release employment, responsibility for employment and further education outcomes in most cases terminates at the prison gate. However, each jurisdiction lays claim to efforts to engage potential employers and secure job placements for prisoner workers post release, in partnerships with service providers.

The study concluded that there is a need for improved data collection and the development of standard definitions across jurisdictions to assess activity. Jurisdictional agreement on other across-the-board eligibility criteria for education (such as only sentenced prisoners and/or only prisoners with a minimum sentence of 3 months) would provide for greater comparability of data.

5.2 National Survey of Employment Services

The full report is accessible at: <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

This study comprised an online national survey sent to Australian employment agencies that are most likely to provide services and supports for prisoners/offenders and ex-prisoners/ex-offenders. These agencies included 136 Disability Employment Services providers, 44 *jobactive* service providers and 57 Group Training providers. A response rate of 39% was achieved, capturing qualitative and quantitative data on the models, practices, performance and outcomes of vocational education and employment services assisting prisoners and ex-prisoners.

The survey findings identified the following four core issues:

1. Individual issues – Ex-prisoners are frequently characterised by multiple and complex needs. These include: social and educational disadvantage, lack of employability skills, lack of job opportunities, lack of stable housing; financial difficulties, lack of pro-social networks, behavioural problems, low self-esteem and confidence, parole and rehabilitation requirements, and problems making the transition from benefits to employment.
2. Practice issues – Service providers recognised the complexity and multiplicity of ex-prisoner needs and yet most used the same employment servicing approach with ex-prisoners as with non-offender jobseekers. There were no incentives to offer alternative approaches.
3. Social issues – The societal stigma attached to ex-prisoners and the associated fear and mistrust of them by employers and the wider society remain a significant barrier to employment. Ex-prisoners often return to criminogenic communities and environments that lack positive social and family support.
4. Systems issues – The constantly-changing federally-funded employment services system is challenging for both clients and employment services providers. The current employment service funding model does not accommodate broader employment-related support needs of ex-prisoners through a unique needs classification system or specialist contracts as did previous models. The model prioritises speed over quality of placement. The assessment process is flawed and results in inadequate resourcing of services supporting the most disadvantaged of jobseekers.

In summary, the employment service providers who participated in the survey were critical of a system that frustrated their attempts to provide individualised, timely and flexible support to ex-offenders/ex-prisoners who invariably had complex needs. These providers were both small single office agencies and large cross-jurisdictional multi-office providers.

5.3 The experiences of ex-prisoners who are seeking employment and practitioners who work with ex-prisoners who are seeking employment

The full report is accessible at: <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

This qualitative study investigated the experiences of ex-prisoners in finding and keeping employment as well as those of the practitioners in employment services who support ex-prisoner clients.

Ex-prisoner participants in this qualitative study provided information about their employment and education experiences prior to their incarceration, during their imprisonment and after their release. They reported negative experiences of education, limited employment skills and difficulties in transferring skills gained in prison to employment after release. Other barriers described by participants were negative attitudes of employers, difficulties with the processes of applying for jobs, lack of stable accommodation, physical and mental health issues, substance use and pro-criminal social environments. Participants also highlighted a lack of continuity in support related to both the employment services system and agency personnel.

The employment agency staff corroborated many of the difficulties identified by the ex-prisoners. In addition, they described the lack of employability skills of their ex-prisoner clients and other challenges they faced in adjusting to life in the community after incarceration and the routinised culture of prison. They provided detailed information about the current employment services system and its *jobactive* program and suggested that the competitive nature of *jobactive* hindered the achievement of positive employment outcomes for their ex-prisoner clients.

Both ex-prisoners and employment services staff suggested ways of improving the employment prospects of ex-prisoners. A clear finding was that paying attention to single areas of disadvantage will have limited impact because there are many disadvantageous factors in their lives and in society that interact and compound. Both groups identified the need for an integrated, holistic support system, which could operate with throughcare principles. Such a system would recognise the transitional nature of reintegration and would target the changing needs of ex-prisoners as they move from pre-release to post-release and thereafter to employment, reintegration and desistance from offending. The features that emerged are consistent with an ecological approach to social support in that they acknowledge the stages in transition and the ways in which social and policy environments impact in different ways and at different times on transitional pathways. That both participant groups in this study identified similar features strengthens the argument for basing future policy and development on evidence-based practice. Both groups of participants identified the barriers to finding and keeping employment for ex-prisoners. Barriers commonly reported related to:

- having a criminal record, and associated negative attitudes of employers
- physical and practical issues, such as a lack of safe accommodation, transport and financial resources
- personal factors such as physical and mental health issues, drug and alcohol use
- a lack of employability skills, including poor literacy and numeracy and social skills

- difficulties finding and applying for employment and using job search technologies
- justice system requirements such as parole conditions
- criminogenic environments and lack of family support
- lack of agency, confidence and low self-esteem.

A clear finding from both groups of participants was that attempts to redress disadvantage by paying attention to single areas of disadvantage will have limited impact. The cumulative and compounding effects of complex and multiple needs over time must be recognised. Ex-prisoners' needs change as they move from pre-release to post-release and thereafter to employment, reintegration and desistance. The findings from the study highlighted the need for an integrated, holistic and throughcare employment support system for ex-prisoners, which would acknowledge the transitional pathways to reintegration. The features of such a model are:

Pre-release

- Comprehensive assessment of needs at intake, including job readiness, to inform customised pre-release planning.
- Individual planning begins at intake and is based on comprehensive assessment. Planning includes: VET programs, social and 'soft' work skills programs, work release where practicable; day release to connect with services; post release services.
- Prison education/training programs are culturally sensitive, available to many and include practical, work-related skills that are applicable to the current job market.
- Prison employment programs are related to jobs outside prison and documented credit is provided to the prisoner on completion.
- Job searching begins before release and links with employers and employment services are established.

Post-release

- There is integration of prison and community services with structured communication, follow-through of individual plans and continuity of staff.
- Community-based organisations are resourced to deliver relevant programs and services.
- There is a 'one stop shop' approach to employment support to facilitate the transition from prison to community.
- Attention is paid to quality and suitability of employment placement, to minimise the likelihood of failure when the client/job match is poor.
- Post placement support is available to assist with any adjustment issues arising and to help with job retention.
- Financial support is available for undertaking further education and training.
- Additional assistance is provided for ex-prisoners who have no pro-social support (including housing, finance, transport and work clothes).
- Information about release conditions (parole) and impact on work requirements is communicated to employers.

- There are strategies for promoting the value of “giving a person another chance” to help change community attitudes.
- Employers who are willing to employ people with a criminal record are identified.

Service delivery

- There is continuity of staff.
- Staff in prisons and in the community are culturally competent, experienced and have the skills to develop motivation, self-esteem and a commitment to change.
- Staff in employment services have knowledge of the parole requirements of clients and factor these into job placement and support.
- Staff have professional development opportunities and a clear career structure.

Employment Services System

- Funding is adequate and sustainable and allows flexibility in supporting a range of needs in a throughcare approach to employment support.
- Resources allow sufficient time to deliver effective services to high need clients.
- Competition between providers is minimised and other ways of providing incentives for achieving outcomes are explored. For example, service providers are rewarded according to qualitative criteria (e.g. successful outcomes for high need clients) and not merely quantitative criteria such as number and speed of placements.
- The classification system for clients is responsive to the specific needs of ex-prisoners and pays attention to:
 - parole requirements
 - need for continued active support
 - accurate assessment of job readiness
 - identification of intellectual and cognitive disabilities.

6. Findings: Study Three

Study 3 comprised the 'Nested Studies' and addressed specific issues, program approaches and outcomes for two groups who are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system: Indigenous Australians, and those with an identified mental and/or cognitive disability.

6.1 Sentenced to a Job: A case study

The full report is accessible at: <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

Across all Australian correctional jurisdictions, approximately three-quarters of sentenced prisoners who are eligible to work participate in a service or commercial prison industry. Less than one percent participate in work release programs (under industrial award conditions) as part of a pre-release scheme. The exception to this is the Northern Territory Department of Correctional Services 'Sentenced to a Job' (STAJ) program, which commenced in late 2012. This case study presents quantitative and qualitative information about the program based on publicly available data and interviews with prisoner participants, employers and correctional staff.

The aim of the STAJ program is to engage employers and the community in prisoner rehabilitation and to normalise having a job for prisoners who for the most part have little work experience or work skills. In this respect, the analysis suggests that the STAJ program could be considered a success. Participation rates are high (and increasing), and the program is regarded positively by prisoners, staff and employer stakeholders alike. The program holds promise as a model that has the potential to be implemented in other jurisdictions.

At the same time, a number of risks to the sustainability of the program were identified by staff, employer and participant interviewees. These make it clear that ongoing collection of detailed data about prisoner worker characteristics and program outcomes will be critical to further evaluations of the program. This will allow for the identification of the characteristics of those who most benefit from this type of program, the optimal matching between prisoner and employer to ensure long-term success and the estimation of the rate of return to the program.

However, as most participants have to be low risk to meet the eligibility criteria, and as there are many external factors that adversely affect maintaining employment, especially for Aboriginal offenders, the program is likely to have a limited effect on reducing recidivism. This conclusion is supported by the results of a preliminary analysis of program outcomes.

6.2 The Gundi program

Prison industries are an important component of service delivery in corrections around the world, and yet there has been limited evaluation of their impact on ex-prisoner reintegration. There are many factors that make it difficult to quantify the impact of such programs on post-release employment, reoffending and reintegration. These include variations in programs (type, length, context), eligibility criteria for participation, levels of risk of participants, factors influencing completion and non-completion of programs and the number of other variables impacting on participants, to name but a few. Given the difficulties of gathering empirical data on prison industry

programs, this study gathered information on a single prison industry program in NSW with the aim of positioning it within a broader rehabilitation framework.

The Gundi prison industry program commenced in 2011 as an externally funded and managed initiative which aimed to help prisoners acquire building and construction skills. The target group was Aboriginal male prisoners with a low security classification, a minimum three-month prison sentence and considered to be motivated to work and learn new skills that can help to improve opportunities for gaining and retaining employment after release. It was hoped that participants would build modular, transportable houses for Aboriginal families in rural and remote locations, and that in the longer term, they would transition into building and construction work – including the maintenance of buildings that they themselves had constructed – after their release. At any one time, places were available for a maximum of 20 prisoners, who would participate in the program for between 3 and 12 months. Prisoners were trained in all aspects of residential construction, achieving assessed competencies in building related areas, and in basic literacy. Upon completion of the in-prison component of the program, participants received six months post-release support to obtain and maintain employment.

The study reviewed documentation about the service delivery model, funding, eligibility criteria and policies and practices as well as currently available outcome data. Interviews with key program and managerial staff were conducted and participants were asked to describe the development of the program, its key features, and what they saw as positive outcomes on employment outcomes and recidivism post release. They were also asked to identify the factors that had negative impact on program delivery and how they would like to see the program develop in the future. The aim was to understand the program logic and how program and managerial staff evaluate the success of the program.

The study found that correctional staff have clear ideas about the factors that influence the outcome of industry programs in Australian prisons. These included the importance of *intensive mentoring and support*, allowing for the *preferred learning styles* and *work preferences* of prisoners, and the use of *existing referral pathways* to post-release employment to provide some additional stability over time.

Study participants also identified the aspects of the program that threatened the integrity of delivery. These included *too much flexibility* as it may divert attention and resources from the essential business of the program (i.e. training) into job-finding activities that could be provided by other agencies. Similarly, the development of *self-worth* and *contractual continuity* were both seen to be compromised by the lack of prefabricated housing work and its consequent replacement with prison cell construction. This also had a negative impact on what was seen to be an important cultural element of the program.

The definition of program ‘success’ related largely to program completion, as well as securing post-release employment that lasted for longer than six months. However, the available data were limited in scope and there was no comparison group and so conclusions about effectiveness could not be drawn.

The study concluded that there is a need for a theoretical framework in which to empirically test prison industry programs. A model was developed to provide a framework for discussing the broader reintegrative potential of this type of service. The model was informed by desistance

theories (e.g. Maruna, Immarigeon, et al., 2004; Maruna & LeBel, 2010; McNeill, 2006; Ward & Maruna, 2007), and suggested that distinguishing between levels of desistance (primary, secondary and tertiary) may help positioning different kinds of reintegration and employment programs to maximise their rehabilitative impact.

6.3 Education, training and employment for prisoners with cognitive disabilities: A case study

The full report is accessible at: <https://socialsciences.arts.unsw.edu.au/research/research-initiatives/a-future-beyond-the-wall/project-resources/>

People with cognitive disability are increasingly over-represented in prisons internationally. The clear majority of this group has low levels of education, are generally excluded from the labour market and are unable to participate meaningfully in mainstream prison programs. They are also more likely to return to prison than their non-disabled peers.

However, while there is evidence from international jurisdictions of the efficacy of specialised education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability for improving reintegration outcomes and reducing recidivism, such programs in Australia remain scant. Increasing the provision of such programs calls for an understanding of the foundational principles associated with good practice in this domain.

The focus of the study was the Additional Support Units (ASUs), administered by Corrective Services New South Wales, which provide specialist education, training and employment programs. The study investigated the organisational and operational context of the ASUs and identified key principles and challenges associated with the ASUs practice model.

The findings reveal that the model is theoretically informed by person-centred, relational, strengths-based and holistic practice principles. A multidisciplinary team of professionals work collaboratively to meet the complex and varied support needs experienced by inmates with cognitive disability. Skill building is understood as fundamental to improving rehabilitative outcomes and reducing the risk of recidivism. To achieve this aim, mainstream programs are delivered in a flexible manner, and programs are adapted to suit the specialised needs of prisoners with cognitive disability. In addition, the importance of providing culturally appropriate services and programs to Aboriginal prisoners is well understood.

The study also reveals challenges for the model. The comparatively safe, nurturing environment of the ASUs can, in some circumstances, encourage dependency for inmates. The presence of the ASUs can also encourage mainstream prison staff to defer responsibility for prisoners with disability to staff involved in the ASUs. In addition, the persistent lack of appropriate and sufficient specialised community-based services and supports for ex-prisoners with cognitive disability continues to undermine the positive outcomes achieved at the ASUs.

Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that a practice model that is informed by and delivered from a well-considered theoretical base by a collaborative multidisciplinary team that is capable of adapting mainstream education, training and employment programs in a flexible manner, and where appropriate is delivered in a culturally sensitive manner, offers an opportunity to provide improved outcomes and greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group.

The research also highlights the need for the systematic collection of sufficient and appropriate data to judge the efficacy of specialist education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability. Such robust evaluation is critical to developing an evidence-based understanding of good practice in this domain. There is a need for an evaluative framework that moves beyond a simplistic measurement of recidivism or employment outcomes alone. A range of outcomes need to be considered. This requires the systematic collection of a range of quantitative and qualitative outcome data. Quantitative outcome data should address factors such as a) the recidivism rates of program participants; b) the length of time between an inmate's release from custody and any subsequent return to custody; c) the post-release education, training and employment outcomes of inmates; and d) the accommodation, health and community connections of program participants post release. Qualitative outcome data should aim to elicit a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness or otherwise of the program, including social and emotional well-being from both the perspective of program participants and people involved in supporting them. The systematic collection of such data will be critical to developing an evidence-based understanding of 'what works' in terms of education, training and employment support for prisoners with cognitive disability. Moreover, it is crucial to achieving greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group.

7. Discussion

7.1 Complex needs

The findings from all PEOP studies strongly corroborate existing evidence for the multiple and complex needs of ex-prisoners and their associated cumulative and compounding disadvantages. While these are frequently conceptualised as barriers to employment post release, they represent barriers to many aspects of ex-prisoners' lives and to their reintegration as productive members of the community. Their difficulties frequently begin long before their first conviction, with educational disadvantage, including low levels of literacy and numeracy; intellectual and cognitive disability; behavioural problems; drug and alcohol addiction; dysfunctional family relationships and a lack of work experience and positive job history. Time in custody exacerbates many of these disadvantages. On release, ex-prisoners are frequently confronted with a lack of stable housing, financial difficulties, a lack of pro-social family support, segregated social networks, and a lack of employment related skills. In addition, their drug and alcohol use problems may persist; they may have low self-esteem and poor motivation and they are faced with negative attitudes of employers and the community as a whole. Difficulties in adjusting to a range of demands, including Centrelink and parole requirements, are further barriers to employment.

While the PEOP study did not focus on issues for female prisoners and ex-prisoners, their specific barriers were noted and recognised by service provider practitioners. Women exiting prison may have to resume child care responsibilities, or conversely, start the long road to regain care of their children and reconnect with family and former, often violent, relationships. Their work history is frequently more limited than male ex-prisoners due to child bearing and support responsibilities. Family responsibilities prevent them from travelling long distances to work, and yet there may be few job opportunities close to home. While their employment preferences are often in the carer professions, for example child or aged care, their criminal record may prevent employment in these areas. The stigma of a criminal record is also often higher for women, with employers regarding female ex-prisoners even more negatively than they do males.

Indigenous ex-prisoners have additional barriers. They commonly return to rural and remote communities, where there are limited or no job opportunities and pro-criminal environments. Their families often expect to garnish any wages they earn and have low expectations of their desistance from further criminal activity. In addition to employers' negative attitudes connected with their criminal background, they experience racial discrimination. A high proportion of Indigenous prisoners and ex-prisoners have an intellectual disability or other cognitive impairment. This compounds their disadvantage and makes finding and keeping a job even more difficult. While the two programs studied in some depth (STAJ and Gundi) demonstrated understanding of the needs and the entrenched disadvantage of Indigenous offenders, this understanding was inconsistent in mainstream programs.

Individuals with intellectual disability and other cognitive impairments are over-represented in prisons and yet there are very few programs designed for these prisoners. The PEOP study's review of the ASUs in NSW found a program designed specifically for the learning and behavioural needs of these prisoners. It acknowledges and accommodates the complex issues in diagnosis and service provision. The strategies applied here are strength-based and relational, flexible and culturally sensitive. These strategies are appropriate for all prisoners, including those who have not

been assessed as having cognitive disability. This program and other special programs (e.g. the Joint Treatment Program in Victoria) need to be evaluated for their employment and recidivism outcomes to inform the development of much needed programs for these prisoners and others.

The attitudes of employers and the community to criminality was identified in all the qualitative components of the PEOP study as a major barrier to employment and consequently to reduction in recidivism. Comments from participants in the qualitative study of lived experiences emphasised the loss of hope, low self-esteem and anger that ex-prisoners experienced when they are not given another chance. Punishment for a crime (which is but one goal of sentencing) goes far beyond the prison wall, and in many cases, lasts a lifetime.

The negative attitudes of others have a major impact on ex-prisoners and their attitudes to themselves. The attitudes of ex-prisoners become as important to their employability as are the attitudes of employers and others. Even an ex-prisoner's belief about the negativity of employers' attitudes is a barrier. This area of disadvantage for ex-prisoner job seekers is not easily dealt with and like racism and other forms of discrimination in the community is complex and resistant to change. Employment service practitioners suggest that partnerships with willing employers can help change attitudes especially when they have positive experiences with these employees. Positive experiences of employment for both employers and ex-prisoner employees depends on appropriate employment support both pre- and post-release. The PEOP study found no examples of active strategies in Australia to address negative employer and community attitudes although these exist overseas. The *Yellow Ribbon Project* (YRP) in Singapore is an example of a social initiative, supported by the government, which aims to promote a society that is accepting of ex-prisoners and willing to give them a second chance (see Tang, 2010). Another example is the Circles of Support and Accountability program in the USA, which Fox (2014) described as a program of community support for ex-prisoners where positive relationships are forged.

The PEOP study collected data on in-prison, pre-release and post-release programs. Programs delivered in prisons include general education programs (e.g., literacy and numeracy), vocational education and training (VET) courses, and programs focusing on behaviour change related to offences. There are also examples of work release programs delivered near the end of a prisoner's sentence. Employment services post release are provided through a range of service agencies including by government, non-government and not-for-profit. However, these are not necessarily coordinated with correctional services or justice departments or with other community-based post-release services, and this leads to inconsistency in methods of delivery and the range of services provided.

In-prison programs related to employment included commercial and service industries and VET. Nationally, more than 70 per cent of all eligible prisoners participate in a commercial or service industry in prison at some stage during their sentence, and around one in three eligible prisoners participate in correctional education to the extent of at least one session of one unit of competency. The qualitative components of the PEOP study found positive views of work release programs in general. They give prisoners an experience of work place culture and can lead to employment post release. However, there are limited opportunities for work release programs. The challenges in the provision of these programs include eligibility (participants must be short sentence prisoners, low security and close to the end of their sentence) and the availability and location of suitable work (and the cooperation of employers). The in-depth study of *Sentenced to a Job* (STAJ), the only large-scale specialist work release program in Australia, confirmed the positive views of work

release expressed by ex-prisoners in other components of the PEOP study. An understanding of levels of desistance is relevant here as the experience of work, a resultant increase in a sense of self-worth and pride in achievement is also evident in the Gundi program (Day et al., 2017). As with other components of the PEOP study, quantifying outcomes from this program is almost impossible due to selection bias, levels of competency and skills on entry, lack of risk of reoffending assessments and limited data collection.

Post-release support is provided by the Australian Government employment services program. The program, *jobactive*, replaced the previous program *Job Services Australia* in 2015, and is scheduled to operate in its current form until 2020. With the establishment of *jobactive*, the number of service providers contracted by the government was reduced and the former system of 'specialist contracts' for supporting ex-prisoners/offenders was removed. It was replaced with a new classification system, which funds employment services according to the levels of need of their clients.

The Australian Government employment services program also includes Disability Employment Services (DES) which provides two kinds of services: the DES Employment Support Service (DES-ESS) and DES Disability Management Service (DES-DMS). DES-ESS is for people with permanent disability and with an assessed need for longer term, regular, ongoing support in the workplace, while DES-DMS is for people with a disability, an illness or an injury not deemed to be permanent, who need help from an employment service but are not expected to need long-term support in the workplace. Ex-prisoners with a disability may be eligible for the Disability Support Pension and/or DES support depending on their level of need as assessed by Centrelink.

The models of practice demonstrated by employment service providers include employment-specific case management, where the provider focuses on employment related issues such as job search, résumés, applications and placement; and holistic case management where clients have a broad range of social and health issues. There are also examples of integrated case management where clients with a disability are provided with Individual Support Packages that allocate funds to meet these needs. The self-sufficiency case management model, while offered by only one provider surveyed in the PEOP study, addresses a broad range of supports based on a need in time basis. From a baseline assessment of 'level of self-sufficiency' across several life domains, support is provided to assist the client in moving from 'surviving' at the lowest possible point through to 'thriving', that is, a healthy level of self-sufficiency.

7.2 Performance and outcomes

The principal measure of performance and outcomes in corrections research is recidivism. The PEOP study used quantitative methods to analyse the longer-term impact of work readiness training programs in custody on reoffending. It applied qualitative methods to evaluate performance according to stakeholders' perceptions of successful and negative outcomes.

In the quantitative study on the impact of VET in prison on recidivism, regression analyses found results consistent with other research which has found positive effects post release for VET and education in prison (Newton et al., 2016). The finding that Indigenous ex-prisoners are more than twice as likely to reoffend two years following release is disturbing and corroborates other research into Indigenous offenders and the justice system (Baldry et al., 2015; Bartels, 2010). An important implication of these findings is the moderating effect of risk level. If prisoners assessed as high risk

are less likely to benefit from existing education and vocational training offerings than those with lower risk assessment, additional and more targeted, intensive programs should be developed, rather than excluding higher risk prisoners and ex-prisoners from such programs. Intensity of program should be matched to risk level. While it would be easier to have a 'one size fits all' approach to employment programs for prisoners, there is obviously a need to target delivery and content according to risk and need. An application of the theories of desistance to program design and delivery may be beneficial (Day et al., 2017; Maruna, Immarigeon, et al., 2004; McNeill, 2006). Such an approach would target prisoners and ex-prisoners according to risk and reintegration readiness.

It is clear that correctional systems in Australia have the knowledge and experience necessary to develop effective programs for prisoners and ex-prisoners. The case studies (the nested studies component of PEOP) demonstrated awareness of the needs of vulnerable groups of offenders. The STAJ program in the NT, which aims to engage employers and the community in prisoner rehabilitation and to normalise having a job for prisoners, is considered a success. Participation rates are increasing, and the program is regarded positively by prisoners, staff and employer stakeholders. The Gundi program in NSW trains Indigenous prisoners in building and construction with a view to supporting them post release in jobs in the industry. The approaches in both these programs are culturally sensitive and focused, with the hope that these ex-prisoners will add value to their communities by returning with useful and marketable skills. However, they are rare examples of programs customised for this group of prisoners, and they require considerable resources. The qualitative study of the experience of ex-prisoners and service providers presented some evidence of service providers' awareness of the issues for Indigenous prisoners and ex-prisoners, without, however, systemic structures to support them.

The other vulnerable group included in the PEOP study was prisoners with cognitive disabilities. The case study of the Additional Support Units (ASUs), which are operated as part of NSW's Statewide Disability Services (SDS) shows positive features. The key principles of the model designed to prepare prisoners with cognitive disabilities for employment post release could well be applied to programs for other prisoners. These principles include: person-centred, relational, strengths-based approaches in a holistic practice model. This is the only study in PEOP that mentions prisoner assets and strategies for building on these.

The survey of employment service providers and interviews with ex-prisoners and service provider staff produced a coherent picture of the field. Employment service providers agree about the complexity and multiplicity of ex-prisoner employment and related needs. They also agree that current employment support programs are not well-suited to provide support for high needs clients. The high usage of DES is an indication that the generic approach to support is inadequate for these high needs clients. The system does not enable an integrated approach to the broad range of ex-prisoner needs. A service funding model that is based on minimal time to placement and number of placements disadvantages job seekers with a criminal record and works against the aim of getting ex-prisoners into appropriate and sustainable jobs. The performance framework guidelines for employment service agencies imposes unfunded and burdensome administrative compliance obligations.

Analysis of the kinds of support most valued by ex-prisoners points to the advantages of an integrated, throughcare model of employment services with an appreciation of the cumulative disadvantages and lack of social capital experienced by most ex-prisoners. Ex-prisoners spoke

positively about receiving practical support on release with housing, finances, transport and meeting the requirements of Centrelink. They were positive about receiving essential help with job searching, résumés and applications, and interview skills. They identified reverse marketing as being an effective method of connecting with potential employers. They wanted case managers who were realistic but optimistic, who were empathic, non-judgemental and understood the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners in finding employment. Continuity of case managers was also noted as important.

Employment service providers described the difficulties they had in meeting these needs. Practical support such as finding accommodation, dealing with Centrelink, preparing résumés for job search, helping with transport to appointments and explaining parole requirement to employers and families are just some of the tasks that cannot be adequately managed within the current performance framework. An integrated and well-resourced system, based on throughcare principles, would enable a multidisciplinary approach and be flexible and responsive in a timely manner to the needs of ex-offenders (Annison, 2015; Victorian Ombudsman, 2015). The notion of a hub, similar to the community justice centres in the UK is promising for its capacity to provide success to multidisciplinary teams (see Corston, 2007). In Australia, the *Extended Throughcare* program in the ACT is providing a model for implementing integrated programs although at present, this program does not include employment support (Griffiths, Zmudzki, & Bates, 2017).

A multidisciplinary and integrated model would enable timely and appropriate responses to the needs of the individual in different stages in desistance (Day et al., 2017; Maruna, Immarigeon, et al., 2004; McNeill, 2006). The integration of different support services reflects an ecological model of personal development, in which the individual is supported across several social dimensions in a timely and flexible way.

8. Conclusions

The experiences of ex-prisoners prior to conviction, during sentencing and incarceration, and while in post-release transition have an impact on each of their social domains (individual, family and community) and on their long-term reintegration outcomes. The disadvantaged communities ex-prisoners return to, the (un)availability of employment and structured support, the institutional barriers, lack of coherent and integrated policy and the attitudes of others towards them are all social and institutional factors that impact negatively on their reintegration.

The importance of employment in our society has been long understood. Stable employment is associated with social capital, with social connections between people, with trust and with engagement in civic activities. Prisoners on release are likely to have diminished social capital and they commonly return to communities that are characterised by poverty and higher crime levels. Related to social capital is human capital, the skills and personal resources that people need to work and otherwise function effectively in the community. In addition to a lack of employability skills, ex-prisoners often lack the personal resources such as positive attitudes to work, self-esteem and confidence.

Corrections and justice programs commonly focus on building (and re-building) social and human capital. They pay attention to the individual and their needs, in relation to employability skills, levels of education, mental health and drug and alcohol addictions. Recently, attention has turned to the

personal assets (as opposed to the deficits) of ex-prisoners. Theories on desistance suggest that a much wider range of factors than the personal and individual need to be considered, including the interaction between ex-offenders and their social and structural context, and the changes in need according to stage of transition, with a major factor in desistance, for males at least, being employment.

Breaking the cycle of reoffending cannot be achieved at a single point in time or by a single intervention. Rather, it happens through a series of transitions. Desistance can also be seen on a continuum, with an individual's needs and their view of themselves changing at primary, secondary and tertiary desistance stages. Most ex-prisoners need structural and systemic arrangements, policies and support. To be effective, support needs to be timely and provided in the right context. 'One size does not fit all'—support needs to be individualised and flexible. An integrated, holistic support system can provide the maximum opportunity for this by bringing together employment, housing, disability services, drug and alcohol treatment, mental and general health care, education, vocational training, and generic social services in a context of enabling policies and unified efforts to support equitable access to all these services in ex-prisoners' communities and lifestyle changes that are necessary for desistance and successful reintegration. Such a system requires a 'whole of government' approach; it is more than an employment services, corrective services or criminal justice issue.

The PEOP study researchers propose an employment support model for ex-prisoners that is theoretically informed by an ecological understanding of the complex individual, community and social factors impacting negatively on prisoners' and ex-prisoners' lives and is based on person-centred, relational, strengths-based and holistic practice principles. In such a model, policies direct resources to enable greater equity in disadvantaged communities from which the majority of prisoners come, and a multidisciplinary team of professionals who work collaboratively to meet the complex and varied support needs of ex-prisoners. Skill building is understood as fundamental to improving rehabilitative outcomes and to reducing the risk of recidivism. To achieve this aim, mainstream programs are delivered in a flexible manner in the community, and programs can be adapted to suit prisoners and ex-prisoners with special needs. In addition, the importance of providing culturally appropriate services and programs to Indigenous prisoners is well understood.

Principles and Recommendations

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings of our studies, we recommend that an integrated, holistic, multi-disciplinary and throughcare model of timely, flexible and individualized support for prisoners returning to the community be developed and implemented. Policies enabling and resourcing a 'whole of government' approach are required to ensure consistency across all jurisdictions, while allowing corrective services departments to develop programs that respond to specific issues and local cultural contexts.

The principles of such a model acknowledge that transition is a process and ex-prisoners in transition are subject to a complex interplay of relationships. Prisoners and ex-prisoners move through stages of desistance and their needs fluctuate with changes in individual and social circumstances. An integrated system of support would bring together employment, housing, disability services, drug and alcohol treatment, mental and general health care, education and vocational training as well as generic social services.

The following six principles and associated strategies should underpin policy review and implementation.

Principle 1: Throughcare

Throughcare is coordinated and continuous, it reduces duplication in services and identifies gaps in services. It employs a case management approach to provide individualised, timely and flexible support to ex-prisoners. Throughcare recognises the stages of transition from prison entry to pre-release planning to transitional and then ongoing support. All Australian jurisdictions recognise the importance of throughcare in policy but few have provided this in practice (the ACT program is a clear exception). Throughcare requires resources and support from mainstream services and organisations to succeed.

Strategies

- Comprehensive assessment of needs at intake to inform customised pre-release planning.
- Pre-release planning to begin as soon as a person enters prison.
- Integration of prison and community services with structured communication, follow-through of pre-release plans and support for the continuity of staff and case workers.
- A 'one stop shop' approach (employment services hub) to employment support both pre and post release, e.g. job search, interview skills, transport and work clothes/tools.
- Opportunities in prison and post release to undertake further education and training relevant to individual needs and labour market.
- Additional support in housing, finance and health when required.

Principle 2: Targeted program design and delivery

Approaches to program design and delivery need to be responsive to identified needs of prisoners, ex-prisoners and the community.

Strategies

- Customise the content and intensity of VET for specific groups, such as high risk men, women, Indigenous prisoners and those with mental and/or cognitive disability.
- Increase availability of VET programs to prisoners, including those on short sentences or remand.
- Liaise with education providers, employers and industries to ensure currency and relevance of education and training programs.
- Provide documented credentials to prisoners who successfully complete education and vocational training modules and/or courses.
- Provide psychosocial programs, which can complement education and vocational training courses. Examples include: 'soft-skills' training including resilience, anger management, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence training.

- Provide practical life skills such as digital (computing), financial management and contract literacies.
- Ensure that programs are culturally sensitive, available to many and include practical, work-related skills.
- Improve the match between prisoner and employer needs.

Principle 3: Engaging communities

Communities have an important role to play in the social reintegration of ex-prisoners. Employer partnerships increase job opportunities for ex-prisoners.

Strategies

- Identify community stakeholders.
- Present the findings from the PEOP study to relevant government, employer and community groups.
- Implement mentor programs, using community members as mentors.
- Identify employers who have had positive experiences in employing ex-prisoners and encourage them to advocate for employment of ex-prisoners via media and community events.
- Promote the value of “giving a person another chance” to help change community attitudes.
- Encourage partnerships between prisons and employers to facilitate transitional and eventual full employment.

Principle 4: Culturally competent and gender-informed practice

There are distinct differences in the needs of women, men, Indigenous Australians and those of other ethnicities while in prison and after release. There are cumulative needs of groups among these prisoners and ex-prisoners such as those with cognitive disability, those with a mental illness and those who have no outside social support. A failure to recognise these and modify content, language and communication style will mean that programs may be resisted and outcomes limited.

Strategies

- Employ staff involved in assessment, planning and program delivery who are culturally competent and provide them with career structure and professional development opportunities.
- Assess staff for cultural competence and provide cultural competence education for staff working in prison education and post-release support.
- Ensure there is gender awareness and gender sensitive training for these staff.
- Provide information for ex-prisoners’ families, employers and social support workers.

Principle 5: Flexible employment services system

A flexible employment services system would recognise the multiple disadvantages of job seekers with a criminal history. It would promote specialist knowledge of disadvantaged job seekers and reward workers with a wide range of case management skills.

Strategies

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the current *jobactive* program with a view to reform the following features:
 - Revise the existing Job Seeker Risk Index classification system to better recognise the complex needs of ex-prisoners.
 - Introduce employer incentives for employing ex-prisoners.
 - Increase availability of pre-release employment programs in collaboration with prisons.
 - Increase service provider funding allocated for working with ex-prisoners.
 - Promote partnerships and collaboration between service providers, employers and corrections and/or justice departments.
 - Promote collaboration between employment service providers and local prisons to develop and implement pre-release programs that are integrated with post-release options.

Principle 6: Quality research and evaluation

Data on pre-prison employment history, in-prison employment and education and vocational education programs, post-release employment outcomes and recidivism, collected in consistent ways by all jurisdictions, would enhance the ability to generate evidence-based research. There is a need for ongoing, longitudinal collections of data about all aspects of in-prison and community-based education and vocational training support and ex-prisoner participation in employment. The use of linked datasets should be facilitated.

Such research will inform whole of government policy and resourcing and allow analysis of the economic and social implications of correctional policies. It should go beyond measurement of recidivism or employment outcomes alone and include psycho-social and community 'health' outcomes.

Strategies

- Audit prison risk assessment tools for consistency, validity and reliability.
- Improve data collection and develop standard definitions and criteria for eligibility of prisoners to programs to assess activity.
- Improve record keeping and introduce uniform cross-jurisdictional data collection technologies.
- Establish consistent eligibility criteria for participation in education and vocational training programs.
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation framework to assist organisations and corrections and/or justice departments in developing quality control frameworks.

- Conduct cost-benefit analyses of the benefit of education, training and employment programs and supports for prisoners and ex-prisoners.

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