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Preparation for release
Assessing accommodation
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Introduction

About the newsletter

The purpose of the newsletter is to provide a mechanism for communicating relevant research, statistics, updates and ideas, as well as information about Community Corrections and other areas within CSNSW.

More detailed information, such as the full text of research articles, will be made available on the intranet. All staff are encouraged to review this material, and to provide any feedback or suggestions. It is intended that this newsletter will be issued quarterly.

To access the Community Corrections newsletter online, go to;

Justice Intranet >> Divisions >> Corrective Services >> Community Corrections >> Community Corrections Newsletter

It is recommended that all staff bookmark the Community Corrections page in their favourites to make it quicker and easier to navigate to relevant pages.

Better late than never

This edition of the newsletter is running more than 3 months late, and the October-December edition is already due as well. The main reasons behind this significant delay have however been very positive; namely the considerable work that went into producing the Community Corrections Officer Handbook that was released in October, as well as preparation for the staff development seminar in the same month.

The Handbook represents a significant body of work to tie together research, practice and strategic direction, and reinforce the messages contained in the seminar and the newsletters to date. Most critical of these is the idea that Community Corrections officers can be highly effective as change agents for offending behaviour. It is expected that all Officers, Unit Leaders and Managers become familiar with the Handbook.

Transitioning offenders from custody

The current edition of the newsletter is focused on preparing offenders for release, and managing their transition from custody into the community. Although the concepts of transitioning offenders out to parole are reasonably well known, the practical challenges in implementing them are considerable. The issue is often not what the ideal solution is, but what the best option is within a range of limited choices. Factors such as inmate movements, programs access, limited beds, unrealistic expectations from both offenders and the community, accommodation availability, and numerous other factors add to the challenges experienced for offenders and for the Community Corrections officers managing them.

Successfully transitioning offenders is a joint effort between parole units, custodial staff, and community locations. Parole units have responsibility for identifying relevant risks and needs, determining if appropriate intervention has occurred in custody, communicating with community locations and providing sound and objective advice to SPA. Community offices need to assist the parole unit by providing advice on accommodation suitability and post release options. And while this is happening, custodial staff have to manage offenders to address both gaol security and order as well as both welfare and offence related needs; the latter often necessarily being last in the list of priorities in a custodial environment. It is important that each area works together to try and get the best outcome for the offender, and therefore the community, within the range of options that is realistically available. On a practical level, being pragmatic and sensitive to the individual offender’s risks and needs with regard to pre-release plans, accommodation assessments, and additional conditions is important for both community and parole based staff.

Whilst there is still much more to be done to improve the overall integration and seamlessness of offender transition envisioned by Thoroughcare, for now it is important to focus on those factors which can be controlled. In particular, beginning to implement engagement strategies to challenge offender attitudes and to build motivation can be done just through the CCO’s contact at pre-release. As demonstrated in the research, changing the offender in this way can be more effective at reducing future reoffending and returns to custody than ‘obvious’ factors like housing or employment.
**Research and Literature**


**Method**
704 parolees who had remained in the community for more than 3 years and 542 revoked parolees who had been revoked completed surveys on a range of factors designed to assess the reasons for their respective success / failure. It was hypothesised that housing and access to employment would be key factors.

**Result**
Contrary to expectations, access to housing and employment were not significantly associated with success or failure on parole. The most predictive variables were related to anti-social attitudes and peer groups. This included violators being much more inclined to identify the positives associated with reoffending (such as getting high or thrill seeking), and to be less cognisant of the negatives, in particular negative consequences affecting other people. The most common benefit identified for behaviours that breached parole was ‘to release tension’. Basic life skills were also found to be a more significant challenge for parole violators than successes.

**Comments**
These results underscore the importance of focusing on offender thinking and attitudes even at the pre-release stage. Building reasonable expectations and working on motivational techniques in the lead up to release could assist with shifting the mindset and expectations of an offender and therefore increase their likelihood of success on parole.

**Is It Safe to Parole Inmates without Jobs?** *(Stanton, 1966, US)*

**Method**
Records for 7,405 offenders released over 19 months were reviewed following a change in policy by the New York Parole Board to start releasing offenders who did not have jobs but gave assurances to seek work.

**Results**
Reoffending rates were lowest for offenders who had found jobs by themselves. However, the rate of offending for offenders that gave assurances they would find work was also significantly lower than those who were found jobs by their parole officer.

**Comment**
Although 50 years old, this study shows that motivating the offender to engage in positive activities such as employment is often more important than arranging it. This may be relevant when considering issues such as pre-release leave / works release.

**Planning to Avoid Risk or Planning for a Positive Life: The Relationship Between Release Plan Valence and Reoffending** *(Dickson & Polaschek, 2014, NZ)*

**Method**
Pre-release plans for a group of 67 inmates were analysed across 6 items, such as accommodation and prosocial support, and compared to reoffending rates. Plan quality was scored based on factors such as whether it addressed the identified domains, and whether the strategy was tailored to the individual. A distinction was made between ‘approach’ oriented plans, which focused on building positive influences and ‘avoidance’ plans which focused on stopping problem behaviours and avoiding negative influences.

**Results**
Overall, high quality pre-release plans resulted in reduced rates of offending, with an overall effect of between 16% and 23% on rates of reconviction. There was no significant difference identified between ‘approach’ and ‘avoidance’ plans, provided the plan was of a high quality for the individual offender.

**Comments**
Although the sample size in this study is relatively small, similar overall results demonstrating the relevance of pre-release planning have been achieved elsewhere; for example, Willis & Grace (2008, 2009, sex offender specific), Dickson et al (2013). Of particular note, the lack of distinction between the ‘approach’ and ‘avoidance’ types indicates that it is the attention to the individual case and addressing of relevant risk factors via the most appropriate strategy that is most significant.

**Recidivism Among Participants of an Employment Assistance Program for Prisoners and Offenders** *(Graffam et al, 2010, Victoria)*

**Method**
3,034 offenders participated in a voluntary employment assistance program. Reoffending was measured for 600 participants and 600 matched non-participants.

**Results**
Program participants had lower rates of offending than non-participants, irrespective of whether or not they found employment.

**Comment**
As the program was voluntary, and therefore likely to attract more motivated offenders, it is not surprising that participants fared well; what was most interesting is that the outcome of whether or not they obtained employment was not significant.
The Impact of Sex Offender Residence Restrictions: 1,000 Feet From Danger or One Step From Absurd?
(Levenson & Cotter, United States 2005)

Method
135 sex offenders subject to residential restrictions in Florida were surveyed to determine their impact from the perspective of the offender. The survey looked at the relationship between the restrictions imposed and other risk factors and offending triggers.

Results
Offender responses indicated that the restrictions lead to decreased stability and increased stress. This included social isolation, financial and emotional stressors which are associated with elevated risk of reoffending.

Comment
Finding suitable post release accommodation for sex offenders can be particularly challenging. Although CSNSW also employs residential restrictions in policy, it is important to remember that this is not evidence based. This article is one of many showing that residential restrictions do not work and can exacerbate risk (see the literature repository for several more examples). Most sex offending has nothing to do with the location of the offender’s residence, but displacing the offender can increase stress levels and remove access to supports. Care must be exercised to ensure that appropriate assessment of both risks and benefits to each address is undertaken to avoid causing more harm. In the long term, managing risk properly and having fewer victims is the most important goal.

The Offender and Re-entry: Supporting Active Participation in Reintegration
(Taxman, 2004, United States)

Summary
Active participation by an offender in their own re-entry process is critical to successful reintegration.

The assessment process in custody must allow the offender to define issues important to them.

Case management in custody should start up to a year prior to release and include building the offender’s skills in self-awareness of what influences their criminal behaviour and developing motivation to change.

90 days prior to release, focus the offender and assist with priority survival needs such as a place to live, employment and developing stable and secure interpersonal relationships.

In the first month after release, focus on the offender’s perception of adjustment and reassessment of criminogenic factors. Assist the offender to assess the risks of involvement in criminal behaviour.

Comment
The overall structure proposed by Taxman is reflected in aspects of the policy requirements for pre-release preparation and post release supervision, although practical concerns such as sentence length, preparation of reports, and inmate movement can prove challenges.

Discussion
Very little research looks specifically at the process of parole from the perspective of the parole officer working in custody; most look more broadly at pre-release or institutional programs. The articles reviewed here do however address a range of factors which can impact on parole process in custody and in the community, namely accommodation, employment, and post release plans. The clear implication from these findings is that the core principles of effective community supervision also apply throughout the pre and post release process.

Positive offender attitudes and engagement produce better long term results than outcomes such as housing and employment. This indicates that using similar skills to supervision in pre-release stage is likely just as important as in the community. Focusing on risk associated with environmental factors such as accommodation location may have little value, and if applied too harshly in a way that displaces or disengages the offender or removes supports (as often occurs with sex offenders) can lead to worse outcomes. Factors such as accommodation are much more visible and measurable than concepts such as offender motivation and attitudes, making it easier to become focused on those as the main objective because they give immediate and visible feedback whether positive or negative.

The idea of managing an offender seamlessly from custody to community in an integrated and coordinated manner, or ‘Throughcare’, has been formally in place within NSW for over a decade, and has been understood for even longer. The challenges of coordinating services and implementing case plans to get offenders into the right programs and services are very well known, and with increasing inmate numbers have not become any easier. Although work will continue to improve this area at a practical level, the good news is that even the interactions the CCO has with the offender prior to release can by themself start to make headway in reducing risk of offending for when they get out.
In Practice

Institutional case plans

Case plans in custody often focus on referrals to programs and services in custody to address offending and health needs. While Community Corrections has limited involvement in case planning for the duration of an offender's imprisonment, the opportunities presented when it does can be used to support custodial interventions and lay the foundation for ongoing community-based management on release.

In custody, there is an opportunity to work with the offender on anti-social attitudes, associates, cognitions and behaviour away from many of the distractions that community life involves. This can allow the offender a practice and reflection space in which they can develop skills such as reframing. This can be used to assist in developing a risk management plan that will address the challenges faced when released to the community and can be reinforced and built upon during supervision.

Although contact with inmates is not as structured as for supervised offenders, this approach may be able to provide basic CBT type intervention with offenders that have not been able to undertake custodial based programs, and to reinforce and enhance program content when they have. Contact and coordination with relevant custodial and programs staff can assist in maintaining these contacts coordinated with any other similar efforts being undertaken elsewhere in the gaol.

Early engagement with the offender when the case is first allocated, as outlined in the Standards and KPIs for Community Operations, is an important part of making this process effective. Early contact provides time for the officer to engage with the offender and allows for any other core needs such as accommodation to be identified and acted on before they become a crisis.

If it is clearly framed within the institutional case plan with specific goals and strategies, there is also no reason why the work of the CCO cannot be identified as an relevant intervention strategy within a pre-release report. When this occurs, collaboration with the receiving community location should occur to ensure they have adequate awareness of the strategies for that individual to enable continuation post release.

It is of course acknowledged that with inmate numbers increasing, actually doing all of this can be a challenge. It should nonetheless be an objective to work towards whenever time permits. Further, effective behavioural intervention with an offender does not necessarily need to take more time, it is often about using what time there is more efficiently.

Recommending for or against release

Pre-release reports must address the legislative requirements outlined in S135a of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999. All of these requirements relate in one way or another to the risks posed by the offender and their willingness and ability to comply with parole and adapt to normal lawful community life.

The court has sentenced the offender with a specific time period in mind. The role of Community Corrections is both to prepare the offender as best possible for release within that time, and to only recommend against release where the risks are too great.

The recommendation in any report should reflect the culmination of all information gathered throughout the report writing process. It should be representative of interviews with the offender, contact and verification with family or the support network, contact and verification with custody wing officers, programs staff, psychologists, service and programs officers, worksite overseers; in short, anyone who has been relevant in managing the offender while they have been in custody.

To address matters logically and evidentially, it is necessary to think of the outcome you are trying to achieve and assess if you have the necessary information to make an informed recommendation. Is the information you have gathered factual or subjective? Are there any major gaps, and what does that mean? What are the risks posed and what would be the consequences? What recommendation best balances all of the relevant risks? Does it matter if a low risk offender hasn’t completed intervention? Is the temporary accommodation you found better or worse than keeping the offender in custody longer? Can you justify your recommendation and would you be comfortable giving evidence to SPA on your reasons?

Try to use this same questioning process to argue against your intended recommendation to see which is stronger.

A similar process should be employed for community officers undertaking pre-release field visit assessments. In particular, liaison with the parole unit should occur in the event that there is doubt over an assessment, to ensure the best overall outcome can be reached, even if the specific address is not ideal.

Utilising the framework for decision making found on page 42 of the Community Corrections Officer Handbook, can assist to form a recommendation for or against parole that is sound and logical.
In Practice

Pre-release home visits

The purpose of a Pre-Release Home Visit is to assess the benefits and risks associated with the offender’s nominated accommodation and to assist to put in place a plan that can manage any assessed risks. Sometimes the level of risk posed means the accommodation will be assessed as unsuitable. An unsuitable assessment should be rare however, as in most cases the accommodation options are limited and the alternatives may present very similar challenges (or worse). More significant risk are likely to be related to associates, which will often be a factor whether the offender is technically residing with them or simply living nearby and visiting frequently. The parole unit officer and the community officer may need to liaise and consider the whole picture, rather than looking at each address in isolation.

When undertaking a pre-release home visit, look at the benefits of the accommodation, such as affordability, support, and availability. If there are risks, are these risks unique to this address or are they likely to be everywhere? How can these risks be managed to enable the offender to live in this place? If the place is likely to be unsuitable, is the next available location likely to be better or worse? What if they intend to spend all their time at this place once released and just sleep elsewhere? Would revocation be likely if they moved here anyway without permission? What if assessing this place as unsuitable means the offender needs crisis accommodation and then becomes homeless a week after release?

For more contentious offenders a ‘not in my backyard’ mentality can sometimes arise either from the community, police, or at times within Community Corrections. Yet it must be remembered that any time an offender is moved on they will still be going to someone else’s backyard. More importantly, as a result they will often be more stressed, unstable and likely to offend especially if the move takes away positive family or social supports or displaces them to a worse situation. Risks must be assessed with regard to what is best for the whole community, not just the local one.

Adding conditions to parole orders

All NSW parole orders have conditions that relate to compliance with supervision by Community Corrections. At the time of releasing an offender to the community, a Community Corrections officer can request additional conditions.

Careful consideration is required when requesting additional conditions on a parole order, as most case management strategies that are necessary for most offenders can readily be employed through use of the ‘obey reasonable direction’ condition. This condition allows the flexibility needed to deal with the offender and their circumstances in an individual way. If the offender’s behaviour warrants breach action, this condition can adequately allow an officer to demonstrate to the State Parole Authority how the offender has not complied. Care must also be taken to be realistic in what can be achieved, and not to set the offender up to fail by recommending conditions that are unlikely to be able to be met.

Importantly, all recommendations for any additional conditions should be addressed to the specific risks and needs of the offender. With regard to the requirements outlined in S135A of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999, matters relating to community or victim expectation, punishment, or other such matters, are not relevant. Those factors do fall within the parameters of factors that SPA can consider, but do not form part of the purpose of the pre-release report. It is up to Community Corrections to provide sound and objective advice on what is necessary to manage the offender, so that SPA is able to make an informed decision using that advice and other relevant sources of information.

Law Reform Commission report on parole

In September 2015 the Law Reform Commission published a detailed report reviewing the parole system in NSW. This 495 page report took over 2 years to produce, encompassing the whole of the parole system, and making a wide range of recommendations for reform. Community Corrections provided significant input into the review, and many of its views are reflected in the final report. Some of the recommendations include changes to standard parole conditions to put most supervision conditions under a framework of ‘reasonable direction’ (eg reasonable direction regarding drug and alcohol use and treatment, rather than strict abstinence), a formal framework for Community Corrections to impose a range of intermediate sanctions following breach, Juvenile Justice responsibility for all offenders aged under 18 years, and the introduction of a back end home detention scheme. The full report is available on the Law Reform Commission website at http://www.lawreform.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/publication/reports/Report_142.pdf.
# Statistical Trends

## Community population

As at 1 September 2015

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<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total offenders</strong>*</td>
<td>14,310</td>
<td>2,396</td>
<td>16,726</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active offenders only*</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Court based parole</td>
<td>2,280</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>2,570</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPA parole</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>1,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>4,324</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>5,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S12</td>
<td>1,437</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>1,710</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bail supervision</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive correction order</td>
<td>1,252</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>1,424</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community service order</td>
<td>2,077</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>2,405</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home detention</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug court</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>279</td>
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<tr>
<td>All other (eg federal recog, interstate)</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>485</td>
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**Total supervision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,443</td>
<td>1,804</td>
<td>12,261</td>
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</table>

**Total community service work**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,309</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>3,807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total offenders is the count used in the Offender Population Report, and counts all orders active in OIMS, including suspensions, expired orders, and orders that have not yet commenced. Active offenders excludes these orders. Note that some offenders may have multiple orders, and are counted once in each category, and once in the overall total.

**Includes a small number of offenders where gender has not yet been recorded.

## Institutional population

As at 6 September 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total offenders in custody</strong>*</td>
<td>11,105</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>11,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentenced</td>
<td>7,629</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>8,193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remand</td>
<td>3,427</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>3,690</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All offenders in custody, including those with no Community Corrections contact

## Reports

Average reports per month, August 2014 to September 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Court advice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full pre-sentence</td>
<td>9439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short pre-sentence</td>
<td>13844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICO assessment</td>
<td>849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD assessment</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Pre release**        |       |
| Full pre release       | 1523  |
| Supplementary          | 970   |
| Balance of parole      | 275   |
Trends in pre release reports

The below graph shows trends in the total number of full pre release reports (including anniversary) and all other pre release reports (supplementary, balance of parole, transfer etc). With the prison population increasing there has been some growth in the volume of institutional activity for Community Corrections, resulting in a number of additional positions being recently approved for several parole units. However the bulk of increase in inmate numbers has been in remand, where the impact on Community Corrections is less significant overall.

Revocations prior to release

The below graph shows trends in revocation prior to release hearings each month over the last 10 years. Detailed review of the data indicates that the main reason for the upward trend is related to difficulty or delays obtaining accommodation. One of the most common circumstances is where proposed accommodation has been assessed as unsuitable, rather than where no accommodation was available at all. Of particular interest, growth in revocations prior to release occurred at a rate very similar to the growing rate of bed availability of COSPs after they were first opened in 2008. This suggests that the direct service provision approach of the COSP did not greatly assist in resolving post release accommodation compared to ‘normal’ release processes. Although the relationship is too complex to directly link the two, details of case reviews suggest that raising post release expectations of staff, or acting as a defacto extension of the prison environment, may have simply prolonged accommodation issues rather than resolving them (see for example Weelands, 2009 in Current Issues In Criminal Justice).
Dubbo’s knitting converts

Dubbo’s community service team, led by Senior Community Corrections Officer Jennie Phillips, is currently run a knitting group for offenders who have limitations in undertaking other more physical or environmentally challenging community service work. The knitting group runs in the office group room twice per week and usually has approximately 8 male and female offenders attending at any one time. The group is supervised by two local Country Women’s Association members who teach and coach the offenders in knitting, crochet and looming. The offenders create beanies, blankets, scarves and knitted toys for donation to local and overseas charities such as “Wrapped with love”, “Burnside”, “Barnardos” and dementia patients at the local hospital.

Sometimes participants arrive for their community service day delighted that they had seen others in the community wearing their products. Jennie says that “The knitting has helped many of the offenders to connect better with their families, often the men in the group will go home and teach their partners or children skills that they’ve learnt. Female offenders often comment that the group allows them ‘time-out’, is relaxing and connects them to older family members such as grandparents”. Jennie believes this pro-social community service activity has also benefited the CWA supervisors; “they return to the CWA meetings with all the donated products and feel that they’re contributing to their community by assisting in the management of the scheme. Sitting in the knitting group challenges the CWA members’ beliefs about offenders in the community”.

Nonetheless, getting offenders to join the group can initially be difficult and trying. One offender received a Community Service Order of 500 hours. He arrived at induction stating that he couldn’t undertake outdoor work because of severe allergies and was unable to be in a room all day with other people because he suffered from depression. The CSO team and a Unit Leader explored his physical limitations and resistance to the order and developed a strategy that he agreed to. The first week, he attended for two hours only and was joined for short periods throughout that time by both the Unit Leader and Jennie to see how he was coping. The following week they did the same, only this time increasing the hours he stayed. Jennie said by the third week he was happy to attend for two days per week and within a short time requested permission to attend early on one of the days so that he could perform more hours of service per week.

The offender is near completion of his order and recently remarked proudly to Jennie that while in the knitting group he has made 130 teddy bears, over 200 beanies and sewn together more than 20 blankets all of which have been donated to those in need, often within his own community.

Leichhardt collaboration

The partnership created between Transitional Supported Accommodation provider Rainbow Lodge and Leichhardt Community Corrections Officer Michael O’Donnell has meant a complex medium-high risk offender has completed their three months parole period without returning to custody.

The offender was released in August with three months temporary supported accommodation. He presented as resistant to supervision and to the terms of the accommodation and was actively using drugs and alcohol. His supervising officer and Rainbow Lodge staff liaised and discussed management options that were firm and supportive. They maintained a positive, inclusive attitude towards the offender especially in developing a reduction and relapse prevention strategy.

Over the following months, both staff at Rainbow Lodge and Michael were able to build trust and rapport with the offender. On the occasions he relapsed, he was able to admit to his use and articulate how he might prevent himself relapsing again in the future. The offender stabilised to a point where he began developing pro-social life skills, and now mentors other residents at Rainbow Lodge, and often leads group discussions. Through Rainbow Lodge’s outreach program, he has been accepted for accommodation with metro housing. He will remain an outpatient with Rainbow Lodge and has successfully finished his parole period in a stable place and without further offence.

Both Jennie and Michael will receive a $25 book voucher, awarded by the Assistant Commissioner. If you would like to make a submission to show an example of your work or that of a colleague that may assist in developing skills or knowledge, e-mail jason.hainsworth@dcs.nsw.gov.au with the subject line of ‘newsletter’.
Self perception and justification

What sort of cognitive distortion is going on here, and what is likely to be the cause? How might it be challenged without building up resistance? Are there any positives in the offender’s self perception that could be leveraged?

I’ll drink beer to start, half a bottle of vodka, and a few glasses of wine. Once I’m buzzing I’ll top up with meth or coke, whatever is around. I’ll have some weed and maybe some bennies to help balance out after that. If I’m not partying I just feel like crap.

Outstanding report writing

At the recent Community Corrections staff development seminar, Cheryl Robinson received an award recognising her work in writing pre-release reports, at the recommendation of the State Parole Authority.

SPA advised that they identified Cheryl’s reports as being consistently of a high standard because they are:

- Well researched and investigated, demonstrating information gathering from staff interviews, multiple offender interviews, discussions with significant others
- Provide both information and analysis of the information that has been collated
- Provide a balanced assessment of the offender’s situation
- Identify post release plans and accommodation irrespective of the recommendation for or against parole
- Provide a continued custodial pathway in the event refusal of parole is recommended
- Are submitted within the required time frames
- Supplementary reports are provided prior to meeting consideration if required.

Particular to supplementary reports:

- Supplementary reports address the issues of concern the Authority raise at the time of standover
- Cheryl seeks guidance and clarification if she is unclear about the request
- Her evidence demonstrates that she is prepared, she is able to provide up to date information about the offender’s matters, has sought entry dates for programs both in and out of custody and is prepared to advise the Authority that she does not know information rather than trying to come up with an answer she is unsure of.

Assisting offenders to pay fines

Bowral Unit Leader Louisa Hardgrove has listed herself as an advocate with the State Debt Recovery Office. This enables her to log onto the SDRO website on behalf of clients, see how many fines are outstanding and register a payment plan with the offender. This can assist them in taking ownership of their debt. Often there is an incentive of gaining/regaining privileges such as a driver’s licence which can reduce risk of further offending.

Please note that becoming an advocate is not the same as becoming an approved agency. Community Corrections at this stage is not registering itself as an approved Government agency with the State Debt Recovery Office. It is acknowledged that offenders who complete the EQUIPS program in custody are eligible to have their fines reduced. For a number of reasons relating to the different ways in which custodial and community sentences are served, this will not be applied in the community at this stage.
SPA perspective on reports

The State Parole Authority recently provided feedback to Community Corrections on some of the key points it considers particularly important when submitting reports. Most of the below points are already contained within current policy and Standards, but these give a perspective on what SPA is most concerned about.

All reports
- Reports submitted within required time frames.
- Contact made with SPA to determine whether an extension of report submission date is possible.
- Balanced and objective reports.
- Reports that have correct dates, spelling and grammar.
- Updated information provided in reports no later than the day prior to a meeting.
- Reports that require urgent consideration being prepared prior to contacting the Authority to request urgent consideration.

Pre Release Reports
- Post release plans and accommodation being investigated, irrespective of an Officer’s recommendation.
- A custodial program pathway being identified in the event refusal of parole is being recommended.
- Referring to attached documents if they are provided for the information of the Authority. If they are not referred to in the Pre Release Report, it may be that they do not need to be attached.
- Considering summarising the PSR if you can otherwise provide a more succinct statement, rather than just referring to PSR.
- Explicitly identifying any additional conditions being sought.
- Explaining why any additional conditions being sought, such as alcohol abstinence, psychological and/or psychiatric counselling and assessment are necessary.
- Naming co-offenders in the Pre Release Report if it is recommended that they not associate.

Breach Reports
- A copy of all of the court based orders attached to the breach report.
- A succinct statement regarding what conditions have been breached under the heading Date and details.
- In the case of re-offence, reference to be made to the date of the offence, the court and court date.
- A balanced and objective overview of response to supervision.
- Making reasonable attempts at home visits, phone calls and contact with significant others before determining that an offender’s whereabouts is unknown.
- Making reasonable attempts to continue with intervention until such time as the Authority has made a determination on the breach, including the submission of an updated report.
Community Corrections Offices

Nowra

Location
Nowra Community Corrections covers an area that extends from Shoalhaven Heads in the north to Berry and Kangaroo Valley to the west and Termeil to the south. It includes the Jervis Bay and St Georges Basin area that stretches from Culburra to Basin View, a total of some 4660 square kilometres. While the Nowra CBD is the major commercial centre for the region, other centres are located in Bomaderry, Ulladulla/Milton, Huskisson/Vincentia, St Georges Basin and Sussex Inlet.

Nowra Community Corrections also services the South Coast Correctional Centre, undertaking pre release work and providing reports for offenders in custody.

Staff
Manager – Brett Cousley
Unit Leaders x 3 (2 community, 1 parole unit)
CCOs x 13 – 8 community, 5 parole unit
F/T AAs x 2 1 in each of the business units
P/T AA x 1 in the community
CSO AA x 1
Co-existing disorder project coordinator x 1

Major issues and challenges
Idleness and unemployment are significant issues in the area. Many of the workplaces that employed semi-skilled workers have closed down forcing unemployment higher. Unemployment coupled with the rise in methamphetamine use and subsequent violence has led to an upsurge in the number of parolees coming onto supervision.

Local Initiatives and Achievements
In addition to the office and parole unit, Nowra Community Corrections operates a reporting centre once weekly at Ulladulla and once weekly at Sanctuary Point. Nowra also provides court duty assistance at Milton Local Court on a fortnightly basis and Nowra Local Court weekly.

There are five (5) aboriginal communities in the Shoalhaven, located between Bomaderry in the north to Ulladulla in the south. The office has effective relationships with the major aboriginal service providers including the outreach service for the southern boundaries as well as the Jervis Bay Territory community and Waminda, a dedicated aboriginal women’s service.

Circle Sentencing has operated in Nowra Court since 2001 and has remained a crucial part of the sentencing process for indigenous offenders the area. Nowra Community Corrections is utilised by the Circle court in an assessment role, to determine suitability of offenders primarily for Community Service work.

Community Corrections chairs the local Community Partnerships program in Nowra, which sees project work/maintenance work undertaken within the Shoalhaven area and surrounding LGA’s. A significant contribution is provided by the South Coast Correctional Centre Community Projects team. There have been joint (community and custodial offenders) projects in the past which have been successful. The Community Partnerships meetings occur every two 2 months at which time, community groups are able to forward referrals for assistance from CSNSW.

The Transitional Supported Accommodation at John Purcell House has five high risk offenders housed and co-case managed in the accommodation in Nowra. A very strong relationship has been formed with the staff at the hostel and contact is usually maintained with the case manager, by either the supervision officers or the manager on a daily basis.

Nowra Community Corrections has a Co-Existing Disorders Project Co-ordinator role in the office and that staff member is the conduit between the office and most NGO/Government agencies that have involvement with our offenders.

Nowra Community Corrections and parole unit strive to be well regarded as an office amongst colleagues.

Offenders
There are currently 237 offenders in the community being supervised and over 500 prisoners allocated to the parole unit. Of those in the community, there are 81 parolees, 93 probationers, 26 on ICOs, 42 on CSOs and 1 home detention offender.

Domestic violence accounts for around half of the offices workload. Indigenous offenders also represent 25-30% of offenders on caseload.
Silverwater

**Location**
Silverwater parole unit prepares work for all the gaols at the Silverwater Correctional Centre, located in Sydney’s west.
This centre comprises:
- the Metropolitan Regional Remand Centre (MRRC) – a maximum security centre for men;
- Dawn DeLoas – a minimum security centre for men and women with works release;
- Silverwater Women’s (Mulawa) – a maximum security centre for women; and
- the Parramatta Transitional Centre (works release).

**Staff**
Manager – Erica Mulvany
Unit Leaders x 3
CCOs x 13
AAs -3

**Offenders**
There are over 2000 offenders across the Silverwater Correctional Complex however given the large remand population, Community Corrections prepare reports and release arrangements for approximately 900 of these.

The work of CCOs at the parole unit is split amongst the four centres. There are 5 CCOs that work at the MRRC preparing Pre Sentence reports and managing release arrangements for back dated court orders; 2 CCOs prepare Pre Release reports and undertake court based release arrangements at Silverwater Women’s; 5 CCOs prepare Pre Release reports and court based release arrangements at Dawn DeLoas and 1 CCO works preparing Pre Release reports for offenders on works release at the Parramatta Transitional Centre.

**Major issues and challenges**
The female offenders at Silverwater often present with more acute complex needs and therefore require more involved and unified support. There has also been an increase in the number of female sex offenders recently. Until recently there were limited provisions in the community that provided support to women leaving custody, in particular, in the area of housing. Projects such as the Funded Partnership Initiatives (FPI) Transitional Supported Accommodation (TSA) (Guthrie House) service and the Aboriginal Women Leaving Custody collaboration between CSNSW, Health and Housing have had some impact on lessening this issue. The Link to Home project may also show an increase in positive support for women leaving custody in the coming year.

Silverwater Correctional Complex will lose the works release in the new year when it moves to Nunyara COSP at Long Bay. It is expected that many of those beds will be made available for people on remand or for offenders with a C2 on and off complex classification for work.

The recent implementation of Joined Up Justice has significantly impacted Silverwater’s administrative workload. With the high volume of newly sentenced cases coming through the MRRC, the automatic processing of ICMs and ISOs means many more orders being registered at Silverwater, although frequently the inmate will be moved to another centre very quickly.

**Local initiatives and achievements**
Silverwater Parole Unit strives to provide quality reports and informed recommendations to Courts and Sentencing Authorities. It has a high level of involvement with other parole units across the state, particularly with the volume of inmates coming from the MRRC. The less than ideal circumstances of some of these movements, particularly where a sentence is back dated, can prove challenging for both Silverwater and the receiving locations when transferring work out.

The Mental Health Screening Unit and the ‘step down’ unit allows one CCO to specialise in working with acute mental health and participate regularly in case conferences with Justice Health to arrange release management plans.
Overview of Standards and KPIs

The Standards for Community Operations (the ‘Standards’) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were first developed in 2012 to assist managers and staff to enhance quality service delivery to offenders in the community. They also form the basis for assessment during reviews undertaken by the Operational Performance Review Branch.

Standards and KPIs are grouped into six key areas, including Assessment and Planning, Supervision, Reports, Community Service Work, Administration and Record Keeping, and Office Management.

The Standards are outcome focused and are intended to assist staff in moving away from process driven work practices to a culture of contemplating why they are performing a task, and what they are trying to achieve. The Standards have been developed to allow scope for personal work practices and professional judgement and do not generally provide a prescriptive framework for offender management. In some areas such prescription may however be given within policy.

The Standards and KPIs should be viewed as complementary measures of performance, with common outcomes.

Below is an overview of the Standards and KPIs relating to verification of information. The full Standards documents provide more detail regarding the purpose and evaluation of the Standards, and can be found online via the Community Corrections homepage.

Reports

Outcome

Decisions made by courts and releasing authorities in relation to sentencing and release of offenders are informed by advice which is timely, accurate and comprehensive.

Benefits

- Providing comprehensive, accurate and professional reports assists sentencing and releasing authorities to exercise informed judgement when imposing or managing a sentence.
- Comprehensive and accurate advice to courts and releasing authorities enables these authorities to make decisions which maximise the effective use of CSNSW resources and minimise risks to the community.
- Reports can provide a synopsis of issues which may be relevant to offender management.

Risks

- Poor advice to the courts and releasing authorities can result in decisions which do not represent the best outcome for the community and / or the offender.
- Inappropriate assessments may result in offenders being given sentences / released on orders with which they are unable to comply, leading to inefficient use of CSNSW resources and increasing risks to the offender and broader community.

Standards

Pre-Release Reports

3.2.S.3.1 The Pre-Release report provides the releasing authorities with relevant information, and appropriate recommendations.

3.2.S.3.2 Supplementary Pre-Release reports provide releasing authorities with relevant information.
Staff Development Seminar and DVD

Corrective Services NSW and the Probation and Parole Officers Association collaborated to produce a two day staff development seminar, ‘Defining the Role of Community Corrections in 2015 and Beyond’, with internationally recognised expert speakers including James Ogloff, Guy Bourgon, Justice Wood, Chris Trotter and Don Weatherburn. The Community Corrections Officer Handbook was launched at this seminar. Feedback received at and after the event was overwhelmingly positive, with staff particularly appreciative of the opportunity to meet with colleagues from across the state. Nearly all Community Corrections locations were represented, with half of those present coming from regional areas of NSW. All of the presentations at the seminar were recorded, and each office will receive a DVD of the keynote speakers and the question and answer sessions that followed each speaker. Those officers that were unable to attend the seminar will be provided with time to watch the speakers and participate in the activities that applied to each speaker. Videos have also been uploaded to the new PPOA YouTube channel - just go to YouTube and search for ‘PPOANSW’.

Community Corrections Officer Handbook

Each officer should by now have received a copy of the Community Corrections Officer Handbook. This new resource outlines the key theory and skills needed to effectively perform the role of a Community Corrections Officer, and gives an overview of the current priorities and directions for Community Corrections operations. The purpose of the handbook is to provide a basic understanding of the core skills and concepts that underpin policy, the Standards and the KPIs. The handbook has been developed to be used as a development, refresher and quality improvement tool. It is expected that all Officers, Unit Leaders and Managers become familiar with the material in this handbook.

A further document, the Community Corrections Practice Guide, is currently being developed to provide practical exercises and examples that can be used in interview to apply the principles outlined in the Handbook.

New Legislation

**Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Amendment (Smoke-free prisons) Regulation 2014**

The Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Regulation commenced on 10 August 2015. The 2015 Regulation makes it an offence to be in possession of tobacco or tobacco related accessories and to smoke or use tobacco or e-cigarettes in correctional centres or residential facilities. This regulation also requires staff to refrain from smoking on correctional centre premises.

**Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Regulation 2015**

This Regulation replaces the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Regulation 2009. This Regulation has been amended with several new provisions. Of relevance to Community Corrections is Part 5 Reporting requirements of the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Regulation 2015.

Recent Memoranda

- 2015/14 Community Corrections responsibilities in relation to delivering programs in the community
- 2015/16 Implementation of text messaging system for offenders
- 2015/17 CCCPPM 2015/07 Updated contact details for submitting breach and update breach of juvenile parole reports to Juvenile Justice
- 2015/18 Change of contact details regarding contract management of PEET
- 2015/20 Expression of interest – Development opportunities
- 2015/21 Forthcoming commencement of automatic transfer of data from Justicelink to OIMS
- 2015/22 CCCPPM 2015/08 Updated procedures for referring supervised sex offenders to a CSNSW Psychologist for assessment
- 2015/24 CCCPPM 2015/09 Updated procedures regarding pre-sentence consultation for sex offenders
- 2015/25 Update to Drug Summit Funded Emergency/Crisis Accommodation Guidelines
- 2015/26 CCCPPM 2015/10 Undertaking joint home visits with the NSW Police Force.
Transitional Supported Accommodation

Background
Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) provides funding to Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) via the Funded Partnership Initiative (FPI) to deliver support services to higher risk parolees in the community. The FPI is monitored and managed by the Partnerships and Community Engagement (PACE) unit. One service offered under the FPI is Transitional Supported Accommodation (TSA). TSA commenced in October 2014 and a main objective is to assist with community reintegration for offenders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in order to reduce the risks of reoffending.

TSA is provided for 12 weeks in regional and metropolitan areas. Four of the six funded services are AOD/rehab focussed and ComCorr officers manage referrals and identify focus support areas / tasks to ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to case management, linked to the CSNSW case plan.

TSA in action – Nowra
St Vincent’s de Paul John Purcell House (JPH) is a TSA service provider working in partnership with the Nowra ComCorr Office. There are 5 beds allocated to ComCorr/FPI male clients and nil specific AOD eligibility criteria.

Case Study: Tom*

Situation (S):
Tom is an older male who has been incarcerated for more than half of his adult life. Tom is being supervised on Parole for numerous convictions related to Break and Enter including Handle Explosives. Tom has significant mental health issues and whilst incarcerated had been assessed by a psychiatrist. Tom was at high risk of homelessness and difficult to place. JPH accepted Tom into the TSA service. Tom is a T2 M-H risk offender with prior revocations of parole in his history.

Task (T):
Tom arrived at JPH presenting with a range of symptoms associated with his mental health issues. Tom has a history of being highly resistant to mental health interventions. Tom was a recipient of New Start upon his release and he had a number of debts with the State Debt Recovery Office (SDRO). Tom required assistance in some areas of daily living and required a high level of support to secure long term, stable accommodation.

Achievement (A):
JPH supported Tom to engage with a local GP, Community Mental Health Team and be assessed by a psychiatrist within days of his release. Tom was supported to engage with the Centrelink social worker and consequently receives the Disability Support Pension. This change enabled Tom to secure longer term housing in his preferred area. JHP also referred the offender to Partners in Recovery and assisted Tom to attend ComCorr appointments. In addition, JPH linked Tom in with Salvation Army for support to address financial debt.

Result (R):
Tom continues to reside in the housing secured through the support of Nowra ComCorr and JPH staff. Despite a minor transgression during his period of supervision, Tom remains in the community and his parole order expires next month.

*The offender’s name has been changed

For more information on TSA or other services offered under the FPI, go to the Community Corrections intranet site, and select Partnerships and Community Engagement Unit.

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1 Parolees are prioritised however people on other orders can be referred. Refer to intranet/criteria.
Probation and Parole Officers Association

“Defining the Role of Community Corrections in 2015 and Beyond” was the inaugural collaboration between CSNSW and PPOA NSW to present a two day professional development seminar. Keynote speakers including Professor James Ogloff, Dr Guy Bourgon, The Honourable James Wood, Dr Chris Trotter and Dr Don Weatherburn. The seminar was attended by nearly 300 staff from across the state, with equal representation from regional and metropolitan areas. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet and catch up with colleagues from other locations.

The AGM was held directly after the seminar. Several long serving executive members stood down including Malcolm Pearse, Ingrid Pedersen, Alison Roberts, Christie Lanza, Stephen Kleboe and Jeffrey Kramaric. We thank them for the extensive work and effort they have contributed as executive members over several years.

The AGM saw the election of the new Executive team for the forthcoming year. The following people make up the executive team.

- President, Rhys Jones
- Vice President, Julie Cannon
- Secretary, Stacey Deller
- Treasurer, Naomi Cheetham
- PACCOA Delegate, Lacey McMillian
- PACCOA Sub Delegate, Yolanda Sanders
- Public Officer, Stuart Davidson
- Executive, Jamie Buck
- Executive, Jason Hainsworth
- Executive, Amy Manuell
- Executive, Sue Mitchell
- Executive, Jaemi Templeton

The Association’s 40th Anniversary celebratory dinner was held at the Menzies on 16 October 2015. This event was attended by some 100 PPOA members and distinguished guests including Commissioner Peter Severin and A/C Commissioner Rosemary Caruana. Outgoing President Stuart Davidson spoke of the work the Association has achieved over the past 12 months.

The First Year Officer Award recipient was Peter Russell from Mt Druitt Community Corrections. Assistant Commissioner, Rosemary Caruana said Peter was nominated for his outstanding demonstration of professionalism, spirit of inquiry and learning, ability to organise, prioritise and meet case management objective consistently and contribute positively to the workplace.

Commissioner Peter Severin presented the Alan Brush Award to Maree Cousins from Cessnock Parole unit. She was recognised for the excellence in the quality of work she has produced, her professionalism and integrity, and the contribution she has made to many Community Corrections workplaces for more than 20 years.

Overall the Development Seminar, AGM and Awards Dinner was a resounding success. It is hoped that members continue to support such events by making nominations for the annual awards and attending such events to develop professional skills, network and enjoy the company of their peers.

For more details please visit www.ppoansw.com.au, and follow us on Facebook for updates.

Video of the development day is now available. Search for ‘PPOANSW’ on YouTube to find our channel.

Public Service Association

The CC(VB)AG continues to work with CSNSW on a range of issues including Home Detention / Extended Supervision Order workload and service delivery standards, and a re-visit of general workload issues such as unit leader workload and accounting of manually recorded hours.

The CC(VB)AG look forward to working with CSNSW over the next 12 months to address some of the ‘big ticket’ items that affect the membership on a wider scale. Members are reminded that the CC(VG)AB is always available to provide advice where appropriate in respect of individual matters. Please contact Secretary Ben Gilles at Bathurst Community Corrections for a comprehensive contact list of delegates in your area.