

Broken Families: The Children of Women Accessing Melbourne Citymission Prison's Programs

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The Melbourne Citymission Women's Prison's Programs provide pre and post release support for women to stabilise their accommodation, reunite with their children and families and resettle back into the community. The programs also provide intensive support in the areas of drug and alcohol treatment, employment and education programs, health services and other issues relating to family reconciliation.

The aim of this project was to gather information relevant to the situation of the children of these women, as there is currently no data collected to record this upon entry or exit from the prison system. This client 'audit' was also intended to provide 'raw' data to the Department of Justice for use in policy formation and as the basis for further research in this area.

The project's objectives were to answer the following questions:

- How many children do the women have?
- Whose care are they in while the woman is in prison?
- Did the women re-gain the care of the child/re post-release?
- How many of the children had involvement with the Department of Human Services?

The findings of this research have illustrated that the movements of the children are difficult to follow, not only a consequence of their mother's incarceration, but also a by-product of the circumstances of economic and social marginalisation that may have characterised their lives prior to this.

Without effective data collection systems and further research, these children will remain largely invisible as a group, particularly as in Victoria there has been no recognition of their complex needs at a policy level. The development of comprehensive support for the children and their extended families is necessary to attempt to break the cycles of disadvantage and marginalisation that lead to intergenerational involvement with the criminal justice and prison systems, and a sense of dislocation from the wider community.