

REMANDEE RELEASE NEEDS
REPORT ON STRUCTURED INTEVIEW
July 2006

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REMANDEE RELEASE NEEDS

A structured interview was conducted at the Belconnen Remand Centre (BRC) on 28 June and 4 July 2006 to identify remandee needs. The interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis; remandees were asked if they consented to participate, no names were recorded and the results were entirely self-report. All participants were male as only two females were in custody at the BRC at the time. The structured interview is at Attachment A.

On 28 June 32 remandees were in custody at the BRC and on 4 July there were 36 remandees at the BRC. 11 interviews were conducted on the first date and 12 on the second occasion. 23 interviews in total were completed. Of an average of 34 remandees at BRC 68% participated in the structured interview, although one respondent was considered sufficiently unreliable to be excluded from the results.¹ This results in 65% participation.

General Conclusions

More than half of the remandees reported that they are parents. Most had not had their children residing with them prior to their incarceration and of those who resided apart from their children, the majority had restricted access or no access and no idea how to gain or improve their access to their children. 30% of respondents with children under 16 years of age reported that their children were living with a grandmother.

73% of respondents were reliant on Centrelink payments prior to incarceration; 23% of these were in receipt of a Disability Support Pension. Most did not know how much money they would be entitled to upon release or when they could expect to receive it.

Of those who had been employed prior to incarceration, their employment was generally casual or short-term.

77% of remandees reported outstanding debts, primarily for electricity and services, traffic fines and outstanding court fines. They generally offered either no or unrealistic solutions to addressing these debts.

¹ The respondent was receiving anti-psychotic medication and was apparently delusional.

The large majority of remandees either reported that they had inadequate housing before incarceration or that they were reliant on family or friends to provide them with accommodation. 36% of respondents stated they did not know where they would live when released and most others were reliant on family to provide for them.

The majority of remandees reported that their family and friends have both Internet and mobile phone access.

The most prevalent support needs as reported by remandees include: knowledge of and support to access Centrelink support; identification; secure accommodation; alcohol and drug counselling; financial counselling to address debts and budget; employment assistance and mental health support services.

Parents

Of the 22 respondents, 15 claimed to be parents. 2 respondents reported children of independent age (over 16 years) all others reported children under the age of 16, with the youngest being born two days after the father was remanded in custody.

59% of respondents are parents of children of dependent ages (under 16 years).

Of the 13 respondents who had children of dependent ages, four reported that their children had been living with them prior to their incarceration and an additional four reported that their children had been and continued to live with a grandmother.

30% of respondents with children of dependent ages had their children living with them prior to incarceration.

30% of respondents with children reported that the child/children lived with a grandmother.

Of the 9 respondents who reported their children were not living with them prior to their incarceration; four reported that they had unrestricted access to their children while of the remaining five respondents; three reported no access to their children and two reported restricted access due to Family Services involvement. The three respondents who reported no access to their children cited reasons of protection orders (2) and ex-partner won't allow access (1).

None of the five parents reporting restricted or no access to their children, none demonstrated a realistic understanding of how to improve their access or what assistance they might need to do so. Responses included “wait til the child is older” “don’t feel I’ll receive any assistance” “help with staying clean” “going to court” and “more consultation with Family Services”.

The parents were asked if they would like to add anything in relation to their responsibilities as a parent. Of the 13 parents with children under 16 years; responses included:

Better visits areas for children x 3

Parenting programs x 3

Counselling regarding separation x 1

Suitable accommodation on release for children to visit x 1

More assistance other than Family Services x 1

Nil response x 4.

Finance

Of the 22 respondents 5 (23%) reported being on a Disability Support Pension prior to incarceration. All 5 expected that the Pension would be re-instated immediately upon their release. Three of these expected to receive approximately \$500; one expected a one-half payment of approximately \$260 and one did not know how much money he would receive.

Eleven respondents (50%) had been in receipt of Newstart (1 Youth Allowance) prior to their incarceration. All expected that their payment would recommence when they were released, however, 6 of the 11 (54.5%) expected to receive payment on the day of their release. The remaining five ‘Newstart’ respondents were unsure as to when they could expect to receive a payment. Responses included: “that day or the next day,” “about one week,” “don’t know,” “not sure,” “ASAP”.

Six respondents (27%) stated that they had been employed prior to incarceration. Two of these had worked casually and their income was supplemented by Centrelink payments. One had been working for 1 week prior to arrest. All 6 expected to rely on Newstart payments upon their release. Five reported they would receive a payment on the day of release and one stated that the payment would be available the day after he was released.

Of the 17 respondents who expected to receive Newstart payments upon their release: 3 stated that they did not know how much money they were entitled to receive in their first payment; 2 x expected to receive \$180; 4 x expected \$200; 1 x expected \$280; 1 x \$330; 1 x \$350; 3 x \$400 and one respondent expected to receive \$410. The remaining respondent hedged his bets at either \$200 or \$400.

When asked if they thought they would have enough money to meet immediate needs upon release 7 respondents said yes because they had accommodation and 4 said no because their housing was insecure. 2 respondents stated they were unsure because they hoped to enter a rehabilitation centre and did not know if the money they received would be adequate to be admitted to the centre. Three respondents said no because they needed clothing food and accommodation; 3 said yes, two did not respond and one stated yes “if I don’t use” (drugs).

Debts

Respondents were asked if they had debts prior to incarceration or if they had incurred debts in custody. One provided a nil response, four said they had no debts and the remaining 17 (77%) listed a range of creditors and debt amounts described in the following table. Respondents were also asked how they planned to address their debts. The responses in the following table show minimal insight or financial planning ability.

Debts to	Amount	Means of address
Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) NSW	\$700	Ask court for time to pay or borrow from family
Associates and family, Telstra, Optus, ACTEWAGL	\$3000 to \$4000	Pay outright ²
Urban Service – traffic fines	\$7000	Bankruptcy application
Traffic fines	Unknown	Direct debit
Court fines	\$1000	Payment plan or call in ³
Optus, ACTEWAGL, finance company, fines	\$16,500	Bankruptcy application
RTA	\$500 - \$800	State debt recovery
ACT Housing	\$500	Payment plan
Centrelink	\$600	Payment plan
Bank mortgage	\$3000	Don't know
Court fines and victim compensation	\$28,000	Don't know
Friends	\$2,000	Find a job and pay back
Urban Services - traffic related	\$3,500 - \$4,000	Credit card or bankruptcy
Courts	\$1,000	Direct debit
Church	\$500	Get a job
Friends	\$60	With Centrelink payment
Centrelink and traffic fines	Unknown	Don't know, Centrelink takes sum out of my payment

² No explanation of how the debts would be paid was offered.

³ Call in fines – to serve time in custody in lieu of payment

Housing

Of the 22 respondents 9 (41%) reported that they did not have adequate housing prior to incarceration. Two had been living at Ainslie Village, one had spent most of the previous 20 years in prison; four had been reliant on others (non-family members) for accommodation; 1 had been in a caravan park with two children and a pregnant spouse and the other was in a government bed-sitter (unsuitable for his children to visit) which had been frequently burgled.

Seven respondents (32%) had been residing with family, either parents or siblings and considered this adequate. Of the remaining 6 respondents; 4 were residing in government housing, one was purchasing a home and one was renting with a friend.

Of the 22 respondents, 8 (36%) said they did not know where they would live when released and 3 of these were hoping to enter residential rehabilitation.

Of the 14 respondents who said they knew where they would live when released 8 (57%) were reliant on living with family members. Four of the remaining 6 hoped to enter residential rehabilitation; 1 stated he would reside with his partner and 1 said he “will return to my flat if I still have it, otherwise on the streets. I won’t live in a half-way house.”

Internet Access/ Mobile Phones

To assist in planning for communication with families and visitors, remandees were asked if their families and friends had access to the Internet and mobile phones.

Sixteen respondents (73%) stated that their family and friends had both Internet access and mobile phones. Of the remaining 6 respondents, four reported family and friends had access to mobile phones but no internet access; 1 provided a nil response and one stated no access to either.

General Comments on Support Needs

Respondents were asked what support needs they felt they or others would require upon release and if they knew how to access supports. The following represents the range of responses.

Needs	Know How to Access Support
Accommodation; finance; mental health	No
Getting away from associates; mental health	No
All you can; friendly employers	Yes
Someone who understands Centrelink before we leave custody; food clothing;	Wait weeks to see someone for employment assistance
Identification; Centrelink; Tax office; Licence; accommodation	No
Anger management; accommodation	Yes from being in criminal justice system
Financial; counselling; residential rehab	Yes
AOD counselling (institutionalised) budget; financial	Yes
Therapy; AOD counselling; AA	Yes
AOD counselling; Parole supervision; accommodation; employment opportunities; obtaining identification for release	No – prior release without parole support
Vocational and housing	Yes
Ongoing AOD counselling, employment assistance; family support	Yes - family and Parole
AOD counselling; employment; accommodation	Yes – remand staff have helped
Money; get job back; mental health; housing	No
Stability guidance; support like a sponsor	Yes
Housing; social worker before release; cognitive skills program	Yes – I’ve been in the system a while

Family support	Yes
Housing not half-way; independence and a roof over our heads; identification	No – frustrated with the system
Mental health clients are neglected	Yes – but I see it as scamming ⁴
Court to give a chance at rehab	Yes – but they won't help
Mental health	Mental Health Tribunal
No idea	Yes

⁴ Being manipulative; conning.