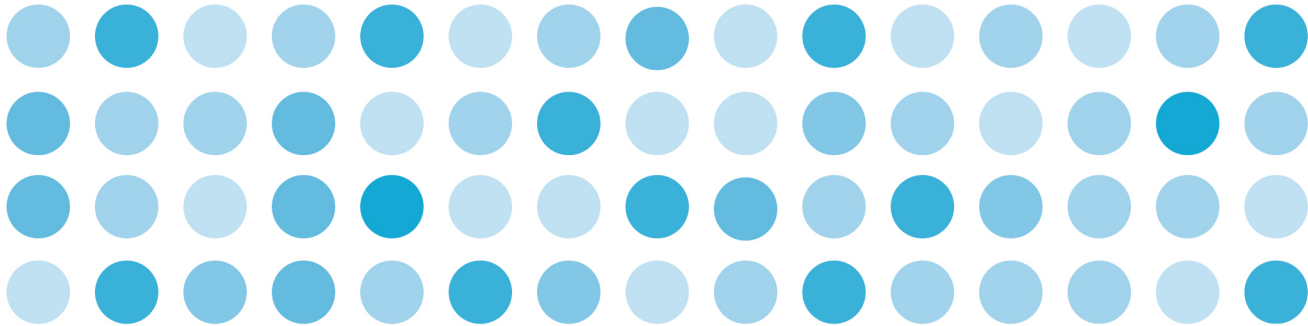


25-26 October 2010
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Anex 2010
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**Stories from the fringe: ex prisoners and
experiences of release**

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Anex Conference October 2010

Overview

- Study aims and methods
- Description of the cohort
- Qualitative findings
- Some conclusions and recommendations



Hit and Miss: A Study of Post-Release Support

Aims:

- Examine barriers/enablers linking people to health & support services post-release
- Examine post prison release risk behaviours in people with a history of injecting drug use
- Identify gaps where service system does not meet actual/perceived post-release needs
- Map Melbourne services available to post-release individuals



Methods

- Literature review
- Service mapping exercise
- Cohort of 150 recently released* ex-prisoners with IDU history, interviewed x3 over 6 months
- In depth interviews with members of the cohort (n=15) and service providers (n=10)

*Recruited within one month of release



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Demographics at baseline (n=141)

Sex	81% male (n=114)
Age	Mean: 31.7 years (range 19-55)
A&TSI	5% (n=7)
Country of birth	81% Australia, 11% Vietnam
NESB	23% (n=33), 12% Vietnamese
Main source of income	77% on Centrelink payments
Education	46% (n=65) completed Years 10-11 35% (n=50) Years 7-9 (82% didn't finish high school)
Incarceration history	86% with at least 2 incarcerations



Preparation for release

- 52% served full sentence (ie no parole)
- 43% parole or drug treatment order
- 4% released on bail
- 33% completed Transitional Assistance Program (TAP)
- 17% participating in Link Out/WISP/Konnect support programs

Social support and mental health

- Gradually increasing levels of social support
 - 50% with **little or no support** at baseline
 - 38% at 3 month interviews
 - 35% at 6 month interviews
- High levels of psychological distress
 - 54% with **high or very high psych distress** at baseline
 - 49% at 3 month interviews
 - 49% at 6 month interviews
 - Australian population norms = 13%

The enormity of release

'The three things that mattered to me most [getting out] were: social – so obviously having my friends and family around me, accommodation and a job so I had enough money to support myself so I didn't have to rely on anyone else...To deal with any one of those three things was a massive thing. To be able to get a job after spending six of the past eight years in jail and having no resume and no skills, it's very difficult. To have long-term accommodation you obviously need a job to pay the bills, it's very difficult. And to do all three at the same time it's really hard. And then to be attached to the same social circles.'



Drug use

- *'Well it's a bit overwhelming...you know, knowing that all my friends use heroin... I thought about it a lot [before release]. I got a friend to pick me up [from prison] who doesn't use, and I avoided the others for a few months.'*
- *'There definitely was concerns about, um, the same old people I would run into, and the same old crowds, or just places... if I walk down Footscray, I get this sensation like I have to go and get on...and I will do anything to get on, and it's horrible.'*
- *'My plan was to play up the day I got out, and then quit. Because I'd had three months clean, I thought, you know, playing up one day is not going to mess me up, but I was kidding myself really.'*



Finances

- *'They call it a crisis payment but then, when you get out, you can't claim until a fortnight and a week later for a full cheque, so...all that money would go onto [rent], then they'd have nothing, so I think they'd start rorting and stuff like that, do you know what I mean?'*
- *'If someone could've given me a kickoff – paid my rent for two weeks, given me a couple of weeks worth of food, not a \$20 voucher ...a decent amount of food to kick me off so that you're not sitting there with your dole cheque thinking I've gotta pay rent, I've gotta buy food. In the end you're just like fuck I'll have a hit.'*



Accommodation

- *'They put you in accommodation with other drug users and criminals, other tenants steal from you ... it's hard not to use when other tenants do ... the place isn't secure ... I have contacted many housing services but they keep putting me in these hostels.'*
- *'This time it's been ok, but after previous sentences it's been very hard ... boarding houses are often worse than jail ... filled with drunks and drug addicts ... you set yourself up for failure straight away.'*



Relationships

- *'Just having that family support there, who's straight and basically live the life that I want to lead, it's just a good example, and it's always good to be around good influences.'*
- *'I was terribly lonely as I had to cut away from everyone I knew for the last 15 years.'*
- *'It's hard to make friends with straight people...you can try but you've got nothing in common, once you get away from the drugs you've got nothing in common with anybody... so you feel a bit stupid, you can't knock around with straight people and if you do you're the centre of attention... you can imagine as soon as you've walked out the room they're talking about you.'*



Employment

- *'Because no one's going to hire me because I'm a jailbird and I'm not smart enough ... being a heroin addict I'm not reliable enough.'*
- *'No one can help because no one's willing to employ me because of prison'.*



Stigma and marginalisation

- *Because you feel like a loser, like people look down on you when you're a junkie...you know? I used to go into the methadone shop, and they wouldn't even realise I was there. Do you know what I mean? We're humans, we have feelings, we're not like, rubber.'*
- *'You're looking at people your own age with families, houses and cars and you think 'how in the hell am I ever going to catch up with them?''*



Crime

- *'Would have been better if I didn't pick up that first hit, 'cos I got hooked straight after that first one and then I started doing criminal activity to get money for drugs.'*
- *'Without money you're living a shit life and that drives you back to crime to get the money that you need to be happy.'*
- *'The minute I was in the area scoring I caught up with old friends and then the jail talk started and I was back into the old routine.'*



Life changes

- *'Took me about three months and I could just see myself going down the same path and you know I got in trouble with the law and stuff like that which made me go into detox and get clean and straight into rehab from detox... which was a good thing because I'd forgotten how good it feels to be straight 'cos I can still have fun without being substance affected.'*
- *'I'm just sick of it [using] really to tell you the truth. I've been doing it since I was 12 or 13 and doing crime since earlier. I'm 26 years old, I've just had enough. I'm trying to move on in life and settle down. And every time I go to do right the police come to my door and try to charge me with something from years ago. I'm sick of it.'*



Life changes 2

- *'I think this was the turning point...this time enough was enough.'*
- *'I'm 43. I've got no chance in court anymore, judges don't see me as being able to be rehabilitated ... there's no giving me chances when you've got a record a mile long.'*



Getting the right kind of help

- *'A half hour appointment once a week is not going to cut it. For a person who basically doesn't know how to live out here, who's never paid a bill before, who wouldn't know how to apply for a job, who wouldn't have a resume, wouldn't have clothes to go to an interview, let alone deal with the stigma of having done time.... To me, the assessment process needs to be looked at; they need to assess people properly and then attend to [their] needs, so that a comprehensive plan with a timeline and accountability to someone is achieved... I think there needs to be a system where somebody is responsible for you and they are responsible to someone else – for it to work. I'm not saying it's a perfect world, but if I were to put a system in place, that's how I'd like to see it work.'*



Summary of results

- Ex-prisoners with a history of IDU are a vulnerable population
- Rapid return to IDU
- Limited financial resources
- Difficulty accessing stable accommodation
- Low levels of social support
- Difficult to gain employment
- Experiences of stigma and marginalisation
- Return to crime common
- Making life changes is challenging
- Sub-optimal service system



Summary of recommendations

- Improvements in transitional services, more services, more tailoring to individuals
- Better access to prisons for community based organisations to enhance throughcare
- Better case management and service coordination
- Facilitating access to *appropriate* accommodation
- Counselling on strategies to prevent return to drug use
- Employment programs for post-release prisoners
- Review of Centrelink crisis payment
- Emphasis on mental health support
- Overdose awareness programs and naloxone provision

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