

# The worries and needs of mothers while they are in prison

transforming corrections to  
**transform lives**



## The first few days in prison, women worry about:

- Where their children are, whether they are safe, and if they'll be taken care of
- What is going to happen to their stuff – her pets, home, car, furniture, clothes, photos, identification documents
- Where her medication is and when she will be able to access it
- Where she can get legal advice
- How to tell their children that Mum is in prison

## Over time mothers' worries and needs change:

- They worry about having enough regular contact with their children
- They worry that they are no longer thought of as mothers
- They worry about maintaining or rebuilding relationships with their children and emotionally supporting their children when they need it
- Mothers with babies in custody worry about being able to provide them with a good start in life
- Women who are pregnant, who have recently given birth, or who have miscarried worry about having good healthcare, nutrition and support



## While they are in prison, mothers need:

- To feel safe and treated with dignity
- More information about legal matters, such as sentencing, parole and release dates
- Help in dealing with Child Safety
- More information about prison services and support, less paperwork to make requests, and shorter waiting periods for responses
- More access to healthcare services to meet physical health needs (e.g., maternal health, substance use issues, dental health) and mental health needs
- Opportunities to learn skills that will help them manage outside (e.g., cooking, meal planning, budgeting, rental responsibilities, getting their IDs)

**How do we know this information?** This is a summary of what mothers told us in a series of workshops we held with 75 mothers from the four correctional centres in Queensland.

**Who were the mothers in the workshops?** Mothers were aged between 19-55 years. Between them they had 221 children. Of these mothers, 28% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women. Mothers had sentences ranging from 1 month to more than 5 years.

**When was the information collected?** December 2020.



## Maintain and build relationships with their children, through:

- More child-friendly facilities in prisons and opportunities to do enjoyable activities with children of all ages
- Help in maintaining relationships with children through cheaper phone calls and assistance in accessing virtual visits
- Provision of community-based residential units for mothers and babies
- Provision of support in the community for children and families while mothers are in prison

## Start healing and changing in prison, by:

- Training staff on trauma-informed principles and woman-centered approaches/needs
- Improving the capacity of staff to deliver individualised care
- Delivering gendered and culturally responsive services
- Ensuring continuity of support and treatment for women who are moved between prisons
- Facilitating access to job providers and training
- Providing access to support from women with lived experiences and hearing about relatable success stories



## Stay out of prison, by:

- Arranging a trusted and supportive person to pick the mother up at the gate after release
- Flexible parole conditions that support maternal roles and responsibilities
- Helping mothers to establish and maintain a healthy daily routine after prison
- Providing longer-term transitional housing (safe, furnished, child-friendly) with onsite access to support for parenting and other needs
- Providing woman-centred, culturally responsive, family-focused, and longer-term support in the community
- Providing continuity of support from prison into the community and across service providers (e.g., dedicated case worker) with one access point for each woman

"I've missed you"



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