

Developing a new model of support for incarcerated mothers and their children

Summary findings from Workshop Series 3

Overview

Transforming Corrections to Transform Lives (TCTL) is an innovative collaboration, working to transform the lives of mothers in custody and their children. Our vision is to co-create a new method of service provision for imprisoned mothers and their children, during custody and after release, that:

1. Creates conditions for families to thrive through a holistic system of practice that supports wellbeing and social inclusion; and
2. Demonstrates more effective and sustainable service provision that can be scaled up by governments.

The 18-month co-creation phase of the project commenced on 1 July 2020. Workshop 3 followed two series of workshops with mothers in prison and stakeholders in the community that were held between December 2020 and April 2021. These workshops focused on the needs of mothers before imprisonment, during custody, and after release¹, as well as the needs of children and young people who experience the imprisonment of their mothers².

This document reports on the outcome of our third workshop series, held in May 2021. Unlike the previous externally focused workshops, this workshop series was internal and included the ten members of the research team.

Workshop Aims

In this workshop, we aimed to:

1. Draw together our findings for mothers in prison to identify where and when mothers interact with existing services, programs, and systems and the extent to which mothers' needs are, and are not, being met.
2. Understand in which ways mothers' interactions with systems/programs/services impact their children.
3. Understand the extent to which children and young people's needs can be met with current services and programs.
4. Develop a draft model of support for incarcerated mothers and their children to address their needs and overcome current gaps in programs and services as well as barriers to accessing and receiving support.

The purpose for developing a draft model of support was so that we could take it back to the incarcerated mothers for feedback, modification, and/or validation³.



Workshop Methodology

There were three key bodies of work that were generated as part of Workshop 3. These were journey maps of mothers' pathways into, through, and out of prison; journey maps of children's experiences of maternal incarceration, system contacts and supports over time; and a stocktake of programs for incarcerated mothers and their children in Queensland. These documents, and the associated processes, provided the foundational information for building our draft model of support. To generate this essential information, we focused on the following areas:

1. Understanding the complex needs and histories of mothers in prison

We considered the key findings¹ from Workshop Series 1, which were that in prison, mothers need help to maintain or rebuild relationships with their children, support in their roles as mothers, and opportunities to start healing and changing; and that following their release mothers need support to participate fully in society and reduce the likelihood of returning prison.

We combined these findings from Workshop Series 1 with interviews with incarcerated mothers and caregivers of their children and data from life event calendars, both of which were collected through a separate project on maternal incarceration⁴. We then mapped the journey of four mothers and one of their children from the child's birth to the mothers' current imprisonment. These four cases were purposively selected to capture the diversity of pathways and experiences of mothers. This journey mapping was conducted to further identify the multiple needs of mothers over time, and included their relationship histories, psychosocial experiences, mental health issues, substance misuse, and offence histories.

"We mapped the journey of four mothers and one of their children from the child's birth to the mother's current imprisonment"

2. Understanding the complex needs of children affected by maternal incarceration

To develop a model of support for children, we reviewed the findings generated from the second series of workshops². A key finding was that during their mother's incarceration, children and their families need, and should be provided with, a central point of contact and navigation for support services. These services may be located within the child protection system, schools and education, police and youth justice systems, the health sector, and the correctional system, as well as services and programs offered by not-for-profit organisations. The journey mapping process described in the previous section also helped us identify the missed opportunities for interventions and support for children at different points in time.

3. A stocktake of programs and services for incarcerated mothers and their children

We conducted a stocktake of all available programs for incarcerated mothers and their children in Queensland⁵ to identify what programs and services are available and where the gaps in service provision are based on the needs identified in Workshop Series 1 and 2. The key findings from this stocktake identified that although there are a variety of programs available, many of them have not been rigorously evaluated. A second finding was that many mothers who may need these programs may not be able to access them because they do not meet



the eligibility criteria (for example, short sentence lengths and having remand status may preclude women from enrolling). We also found limited delivery of counselling services, healing programs, and general life skills training within correctional centres, despite mothers saying that these are the services they most need. This stocktake of available programs and services also informed the services we included in the draft model.

The Draft Model of Support

Drawing together our findings from Workshop Series 1 and 2, our journey mapping exercises, and our stocktake of available programs and services, we identified the different services and programs that could be provided to mothers and their children at different points in their lives to meet their changing needs and goals.

It became clear that mothers require sustained, multi-modal support. It was also clear that mothers need continuity of care until they have sufficient stability and are sufficiently empowered to continue meeting their needs, improving their own lives, and supporting the positive development of their children. To ensure this, our draft model is underpinned by a strong therapeutic relationship between mothers and a case worker.

The case worker⁶ will:

- Provide individual and ongoing case planning for mothers and their children.
- Help mothers to build and repair relationships with their families, including their children, where appropriate, and support mothers to work with child protection services where needed.
- Identify opportunities to engage the mother in skill-building (including parenting programs, communication skills, resume and job interviews preparations, and general life skills training as needed).
- Connect the mother with individual psychological support to address trauma and mental health needs.
- Help to build a network of support (formal and informal) for the mother and her child or children.

In relation to the needs of children and young people, the case worker will also engage in individual case planning and be a central point of contact to help children and their families navigate and access support across systems. In particular, the case worker will work to address needs around trauma and other psychological support, children's interpersonal relationships, having a reliable child-centered network of support, and skill-building (i.e., cognitive, behavioural, educational, recreational).

The draft program model is illustrated in Figure 1. A circle in the draft model was included with a question mark to encourage mothers to tell us whether we had missed an important area of need or support.

Program Model Overview

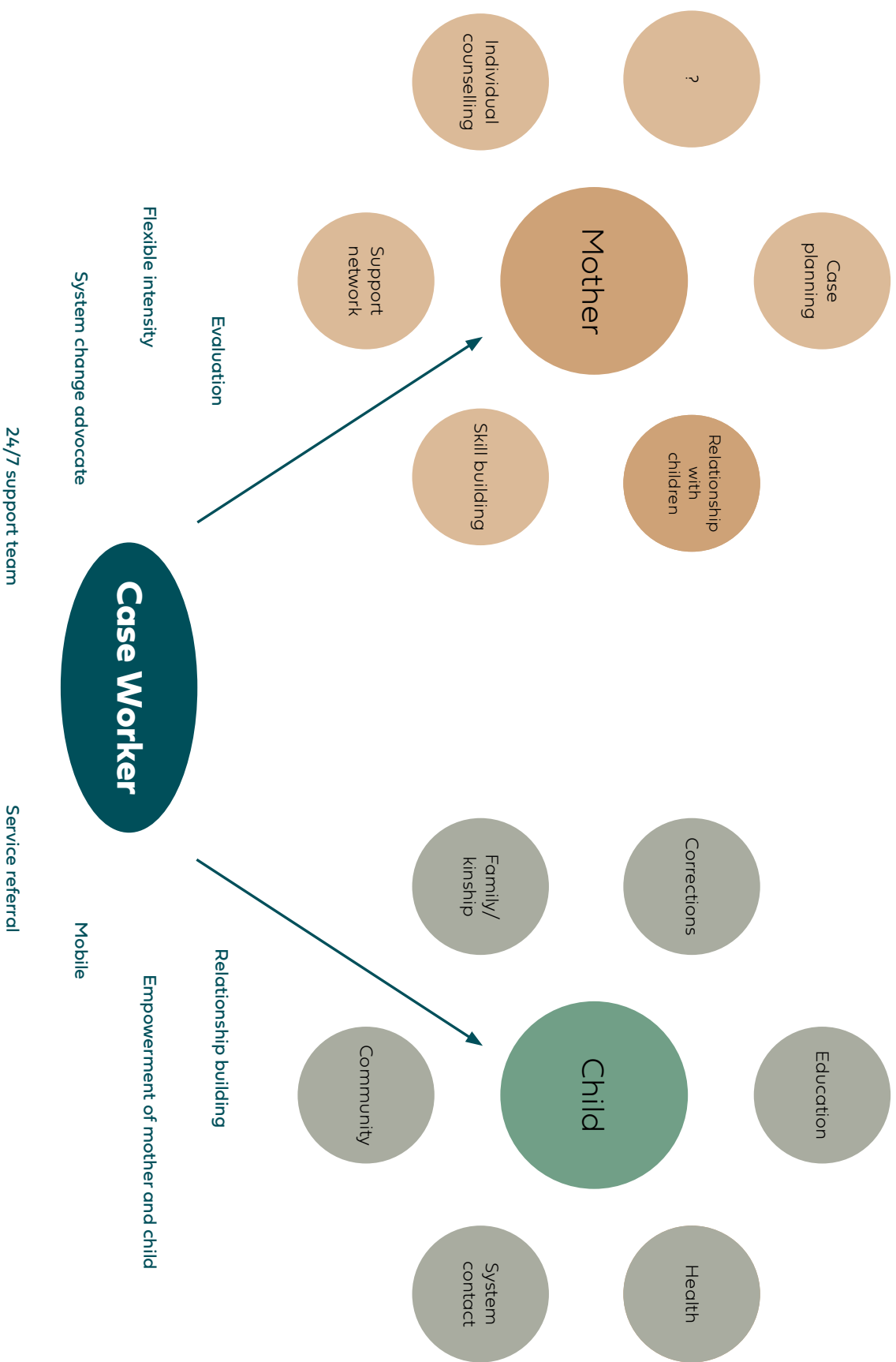


Figure 1: A draft model of support for mothers and their children

The program is aimed at breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and offending and achieving the following outcomes:

Intended outcomes for mothers include:

- Improved self-esteem and self-efficacy
- Improved capacity to engage in mothering
- Improved communication, interpersonal, and lifestyle skills
- Improved use of support services for wellbeing
- Improved connectedness and network of support
- Increased time to re-offend, reduced recidivism
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Engagement in education or training; improved employability
- Improved stability: relationships, financial, housing
- Ability to contribute positively to children's development

Intended outcomes for the children include:

- Increased engagement and attendance in school (or other educational settings)
- Reduced child protection system involvement for children
- Improved social support networks for children
- Reduced risks for youth offending
- Improved relationships between mothers and children

Update and Future Directions

The draft model with detailed program activities was presented to mothers across the four prisons for their feedback in Workshop Series 4 (June 2021)³. In the process of developing the draft model we also noted system-wide changes that neither the proposed program model nor Queensland Corrective Services could address on their own. These changes would require strong collaboration across multiple sectors including government departments, not-for-profit organisations, and cultural organisations. We saw a potential role for the TCTL project to facilitate and convene the multiple sectors for ongoing engagement (as has been done with Workshop Series 1 and 2) and to respond to capacity gaps by providing training to partners and stakeholders who work with mothers and their children. These and other system-wide change opportunities were explored further and were incorporated into a final model after Workshop Series 4. Further information on this final model and next steps will be forthcoming.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following groups for their contributions in the workshops that laid the foundation for the developmental work described in this document:

- Mothers in each of the four correctional centres in Queensland who shared their personal stories with us, supported each other through difficult conversations, and told us what needs to change and why.
- Individuals from each of the organisations that participated in the community stakeholder workshops who shared their valuable insights, frank observations, and ideas for improvements.
- The multitude of staff in Queensland Corrective Services who facilitated our access to the correctional centres, assisted in moving us and the women around the centres, provided spaces and resources for the workshops and shared their enthusiasm and support for this project.

References

¹**Workshop Series 1 conducted in December 2020.** For the summary report visit: <https://www.transformingcorrections.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/TCTL-Fact-Sheet-updated-final.pdf>

²**Workshop Series 2 conducted in April 2021.** For the summary report visit: <https://www.transformingcorrections.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TCTL-Summary-of-Findings-from-Workshop-Electronic-version.pdf>

³**Workshop Series 4 conducted in June 2021.** For the summary report visit: <https://www.transformingcorrections.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/TCTL-Summary-of-Findings-from-Workshop-4-web-version.pdf>

⁴**ARC Discovery Project (DP170100649) Maternal incarceration: Mechanisms of risk and resilience in children.** (CIs: Dennison, S., Broidy, L. & Bijleveld, C.) 2017 – 2020.

⁵ The list is available on the following website. Note that this is a living document and will be updated over time. <https://www.transformingcorrections.com.au/queensland-programs/>

⁶ Also referred to as coach in later refinements of the model.

Contact us:

For more information on the Transforming Corrections to Transform Lives project, and to stay up to date with progress, please visit our website www.transformingcorrections.com.au

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