

Additional information on Newpin

(New Parent Infant Network) following the
Roundtable on 28 January 2011

To the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Inquiry into the Involvement of Indigenous
Juveniles and Young Adults in the Criminal
Justice System

February 2011

We would like to thank the UnitingCare Burnside staff who participated in consultations and made other contributions as part of the preparation of this submission.

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Introduction

Indigenous men and women experience significantly higher rates of imprisonment, comprising over 20% of the prison population (Quilty et al., 2004). In a survey conducted by Quilty et al. (2004) it was found that 49% of men and 57% of women in prison were parents to children under the age of 16 years. Significantly, more Indigenous men (62%) and women (79%) were parents than their non-Indigenous counterparts. In estimations conducted by Quilty et al. (2004), this accounted for 4.3% of all children and 20.1% of all Indigenous children in NSW. Quilty et al. (2004) also found that Indigenous children were 13 times more likely to have a mother imprisoned and 9 times more likely to have a father imprisoned than non-Indigenous children.

The over-representation of Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system has recently been demonstrated in a review of juvenile justice in NSW (Noetic, 2010). It found that Indigenous youth were referred to court more often than non-Indigenous youths (48% versus 21%). This disparity was also reflected in the sentencing outcomes with 48.5% of Indigenous youths sentenced to detention (Noetic Group, 2010). Indigenous youths also make up 35.8% of the remand population, providing further evidence of the disparity evident. The recent Productivity Report on Government Services (SCRGSP, 2011) identified that the national daily average detention rate for Indigenous youths aged between 10 and 17 years was 370.9 per 100 000 compared to 16.1 per 100 000 for their non-Indigenous counterparts. Considering the population of Indigenous people nationally is only 2.5% and 2.0% in NSW, the over-representation of Indigenous young people in detention and on remand is alarming (ABS, 2010).

At a recent Parliamentary Inquiry Roundtable into the 'Involvement of Indigenous Juveniles and Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System', the commission expressed an interest in interventions which break intergenerational contact with the criminal justice system. UnitingCare Burnside discussed the *Newpin Inside Parents* program in this context. Whilst the following review of selected research is not limited to Indigenous young people in the criminal justice system, the aims, objectives and results are worthy of consideration as an intervention.

Impact to children and families

The impact of the imprisonment of a parent is not limited to the imprisoned individual but can have negative consequences for the children and family. There is also the stigma of having a parent in prison that children must contend with. Often this is considered taboo and a subject that shouldn't be discussed with anyone outside the family, creating stress and anxiety for children who are faced with queries about the absent parent (Mazza, 2002). There are also significant economic consequences on the family when the predominant bread winner is imprisoned (Bushfield, 2004). Hoffman, Byrd and Kightlinger (2010) state that parental imprisonment can increase a child's risk of experiencing: behavioural and emotional problems; problems at school; substance abuse; and interactions with the criminal justice system.

Other significant impacts on children of parents in prison have been identified by the literature. Children with parents in prison were found to be accounting for increasingly more of the out-of-home care population (Bushfield, 2004; Mazza, 2002). There is also strong evidence emerging from the literature to suggest that children with parents in prison are at increased risk of delinquency with some sources estimating that children of parents in prison are up to five times more likely to also spend time in prison (Hoffman et al., 2010; Mazza, 2002; Parker and Benson, 2004).

Turner and Peck (2002) describe parent education of prisoners as a promising measure to reduce this trend. In a review of the literature, Hoffman et al. (2010) identified evidence supporting parental education in prisons. Outcomes included improved family cohesion and parent-child bonding, increased empathy to children, enhanced knowledge of parenting skills, child development, behaviour management strategies and the appropriate use of discipline.

According to Thombre et al. (2009) strong parent-child communication is a protective factor against delinquency in late adolescence. Therefore parent education programs could support this through the provision of communication skills. Additionally, a study by Parker and Benson (2004) found that adolescents experience less delinquency, drug and alcohol abuse and other behavioural issues, when they perceived their parents to be supportive.

Factors relating to recidivism and desistance

As outlined in Bushfield (2004) early evidence suggests that education programs in prisons, including parental education, could contribute to a reduction in recidivism. This is supported by Hoffman et al. (2010) who identified prison parental education as being associated with increased contact and attachment between parent and child may reduce recidivism and increase post release success.

In their examination of prisoner's family relationships, La Vigne et al. (2005) identified studies which found that family contact during imprisonment is related to lower levels of recidivism. The importance of maintaining these relationships when imprisoned was found to influence post-release relationships. La Vigne et al. (2005) also found that in-person or contact visits were more critical for relationships with partners and children. It was concluded that contact should be encouraged through programs which fostered closer parent/child relationships.

A factor that has been identified in the literature as important for promoting desistance is the development and maintenance of strong social bonds (Gunnison and Mazerolle, 2007; Hoffman et al., 2010; Laub and Sampson, 2003; La Vigne et al., 2005). Families are considered an integral part of the post-release process, with studies showing that a commitment to family roles

can have a positive impact on a person's social identity whilst conflict in families was found to have a negative impact on the post-release process.

Newpin Inside Parents program

Newpin Inside Parents is a program designed specifically for parents in prison which offers a combination of therapeutic and education parenting groups. The program provides participants with the opportunity to learn about the emotional and practical needs of children and their role as a parent. *Newpin Inside Parents* aims to improve family relationship issues for mothers and/or fathers and to help break intergenerational patterns of offending. The program will give participants the skills to avoid repeating behaviours which contributed to their current situation.

There are a number of anticipated outcomes from participation. Parents will:

- gain insight about the impact of their own childhood on their criminal behaviour
- gain parenting skills
- gain improved self-esteem
- gain conflict resolution skills
- gain knowledge of child protection
- gain family relationship skills
- reduce their re-offending behaviour
- role model improved behaviour and lifestyle to their children.

These outcomes will contribute to strengthening the social bonds, particularly those with the family unit as a whole. As identified in the literature, in-person or contact visits with children was considered more effective in maintaining the family relationship than programs which did not include any parent/child contact component (La Vigne, et al., 2005). *Newpin Inside Parents* encourages this contact in the prison setting, as it enables parents to use the new skills and knowledge they have developed in a setting where they can be supported by the *Newpin Inside Parents* facilitators.

Evaluation of *Newpin Parents Inside* program for male prisoners

A small randomised control trial has been undertaken by Dr Ken Robinson (School of Psychology, Edith Cowan University) to compare outcomes for three groups of male prisoners (*Newpin Parents Inside*, Triple P and a waitlist control group) at the medium security Acacia Prison in Western Australia.

The evaluation was based on quantitative and qualitative data and the pre- and post-intervention measures used included:

- Being a Parent Scale (BaPS)
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS)
- Positivity and Negativity Affect Schedule (PANAS)
- Criminal Sentiments Scale - Modified (CCS-M)

The study findings will be published early in 2011 however a draft publication states that *Newpin Inside Parents* was a more effective catalyst for change in increasing participant's parenting competency, wellbeing (particularly lowering depression) and reducing their criminal attitudes relative to outcomes achieved by Triple P participants and the 'no treatment' group.

Newpin Inside Parents was the only program to significantly affect individual coping skills, relational skills and criminogenic thinking.

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UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF) Fact Sheet

Suspensions in NSW Schools

The NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) enables the school principal or relieving principal to temporarily remove a student from school for up to 4 school days (a "short suspension") or in instances of serious or sustained misbehaviour for between 5 and 20 school days (a "long suspension"). A summary of long suspension data only is published by DET on an annual basis.¹

Between 2005 and 2009, total long suspensions for NSW students across all grades (K to 12) have increased by 32.7% from 11,216 to 14,887. Physical violence and persistent misbehaviour have accounted for between 83 and 87 percent of long suspensions issued over the four year period. In 2009 the average length of long suspension was 12.6 school days.

Table 1: NSW DET long suspensions in year bands - 2009

Year	No. students receiving long suspensions	% of total long suspensions*	Long suspensions as a % of student enrolments
K-6	2,043	20%	0.7%
7-10	8,139	75%	4.9%
11-12	688	5%	0.9%
All grades	10,878		1.5%

Source: NSW DET (2010) *Long Suspension and Expulsion Summary 2009*.

* Total long suspensions include students placed on long suspension on more than one occasion.

Disaggregated long suspension data for 2009 highlights a number of issues of concern:

- As shown in Table 1, 2,043 primary school students (K-6) in NSW received suspensions ranging from 5 to 20 school days.
- In 2009, 26.6% of all students (K-12) long suspended (2,894 students) received more than one long suspension in a single year raising concerns about the efficacy of interventions.
- There are sharp variations in the number of students receiving long suspensions as a percentage of school enrolments across DET regions. For example, in Northern Sydney 0.4% of students were long suspended in 2009 compared with 2.7% in Western NSW, 2.6% in New England and 2.1% in the Hunter Central Coast region.
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students are significantly overrepresented in suspensions data. They are 3 ½ times more likely to be suspended than non-indigenous students and account for 22% of total long suspensions issued. In 2009, 2,286 or 5.6% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students received long suspensions.

The continued overrepresentation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students in school suspension data is of particular concern to UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families in the context of government commitments to 'Closing the Gap'. In 2006, an issues paper produced by the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) for the NSW Government drawing on 2003 data showed that for Aboriginal males in Years 7-10 there were 629 short suspensions for every 1,000 males compared with 188 suspensions per 1,000 non-Aboriginal males.

The AECG Paper pointed to worrying increases in the use of both short and long suspensions in the early years of school. In the years from Kindergarten to Year 2, the rate of suspension for Aboriginal females is 9 times higher for short suspensions and 6 times higher for long suspensions than for non-Aboriginal females. Aboriginal males in years K to 2 receive four times as many short suspensions and twice as many long suspensions as their non-Aboriginal male counterparts.

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¹ NSW Department of Education and Training, Long Suspension and Expulsion Summary 2009 https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/detresources/suspexpul2009_oEuDLGhsYu.pdf