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Prisoner re-entry to the community

Incarceration produces short-term reductions in crime because while in prison an offender simply cannot commit crime in the community. A longer-term crime reduction benefit is produced if those same offenders do not re-offend after they are released. However the experience of prison is often not a sufficient deterrent against future crime, and prison statistics show that in Australia and overseas, many ex-prisoners go on to commit new offences.

Managing a prisoner's return to the community can positively impact upon the likelihood of their re-offending. This is because for many, the social, economic, physical and psychological problems they confront when they leave prison can be substantial impediments to leading crime-free lives. Effective re-entry management addresses not just the moment of re-entry, but also the times leading up to and following release. It is best seen as a transitional process that can and should involve a range of stakeholders beyond correctional authorities and individual offenders. This is because prisoners' problems are complex, varied and often outside the scope of a single justice agency. Experience has shown that managing effective re-entry initiatives can be very difficult for the agencies involved.

A comprehensive publication recently produced by the United States Re-entry policy council details principles for planning and managing prisoner re-entry. It identifies the following components of the re-entry process:

- planning a re-entry initiative;
- admission to a correctional facility;
- prison-based programming;
- making release decisions;
- managing the key transition period;
- community supervision; and
- elements of effective social service systems.

The report's structure mirrors the stages involved in implementing re-entry initiatives, from overall program planning to actual prisoner re-entry. Policy statements are listed at each stage, and each statement is supplemented by a description of related research, statistics, theory and/or practice, and resulting recommendations. The report provides useful insight into prisoner re-entry issues that may be relevant to an Australian context.

Further reading

Re-entry policy council 2005. *Report of the Re-entry policy council: charting the safe and successful return of prisoners to the community*. New York: Council of State Governments. <http://www.reentrypolicy.org/documents/rpcreport.pdf>

Borzycki M 2005. *Interventions for prisoners returning to the community*. Canberra: Attorney-General's Department. <http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/WWW/ncphome.nsf/AllDocs/DAD69C1C8D3D5F28CA256FDB001DD4B4?OpenDocument>

Borzycki M & Baldry E 2003. Promoting integration: the provision of prisoner post-release services. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no 262. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi262.html>