

Fiona Begg

Serving Time on the Outside

A Survey of Visitors to Correctional Centres in the Wacol Region, Queensland



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The ACRO Family Centre and transport service are funded through the Department of Corrective Services and Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

The story which begins this report is offered as a snapshot of one family's experience of navigating what was clearly a long and painful process. There are many common threads in this story which staff and volunteers hear all too often from families visiting prisons. ACRO would like to acknowledge the significant degree of personal difficulty experienced by this family in reliving their experiences for the benefit of others.

2. A STORY: RECALLING THE SHOCK - THE EXPERIENCE OF A MOTHER VISITING HER SON IN PRISON

It was September 1, 1999. My husband and I are sitting at the back of the court-room with our daughter in law, their 6 month old baby is being baby-sat at home. Our son is in the dock facing some serious charges relating to drug trafficking (he'd been an addict at the time of the offences). He was 29 years of age. Nobody in our family, nor anyone we'd ever known, has been through this sort of experience. We have no idea what to expect and we've been living in fearful anticipation of this day. Earlier that morning we've visited the Solicitor's office. We've spent a lot of money and yet have not learned very much, but we're hanging on to one statement previously made regarding the possibility of a 'suspended' sentence. The words "don't worry – he'll likely be home for Christmas" were our lifeline.

Proceedings began and it did not appear to be going very well. The prosecuting Barrister is calling for an 8 year sentence and our Solicitor doesn't seem to be putting up the necessary fight. The Judge declared a recess to study the character references provided. During the recess, we talk to the Solicitor who is now telling us that we have to realise that our son will go to jail. He tells us that it's not that bad, a room of his own, plenty of food and a coloured TV!!! That's when we begin to realise that we've employed the wrong Solicitor¼¼too late, the damage is done and there's no second chance.

We return to the proceedings – the Judge deliberates and then pronounces sentence. Six years with a recommendation for parole after 2 years. The shock was indescribable – we had not been prepared for such a sentence – none of us were prepared – nor were any of us prepared for the look of sheer terror on the face of our son 'the prisoner' – a description that we really never got used to. We were not allowed near him as he was asked to divest himself of his tie, his belt, his watch and his wedding ring. His wife breaks down as he is handcuffed and taken away without any farewell.

I recall the Solicitor making platitudes afterwards, but we were not interested in his observations. He was to be paid his many thousands of dollars regardless of the outcome of the hearing so what did he care!

The rest of that day is something of a blur in my memory. It felt like a nightmare – a living nightmare – but the realisation that I would not wake up and find that it hadn't really happened was nevertheless apparent despite the trauma of it all. As a mother I could only think of him alone in a cell somewhere trying to come to terms with the length of his sentence and what that would mean to him and his little family, firstly in the short term, then in the medium term, and eventually in the long term. He had been working so successfully on getting his life back into order.

To say that I was devastated would be an understatement. I was 56 years of age and this was the worst day of my life. I speak not only for myself but for my husband. We all know how difficult it can be for a male to express his feelings. I remember thinking to myself that the emotional pain was so great that I would not be able to bear it, I would either explode or fall apart in some way. I felt not only my own pain, but that of my husband and that of my daughter-in-law who was now facing at least two years of her life

on her own to bring up their new baby. And then there was the pain I felt for our Son - for what he'd already been through up until this day, the strength of his resolution and all his efforts, and, more particularly, for what he was about to go through during the next several years. It was his 30th Birthday in a few days time.

At that time, on that day, and for quite some time after that day, I could not perceive that the pain would ever abate. On that day I was certain that I would never again have the motivation to get out of bed each morning to face the realities of each day – to speak 'normally' with others who led 'normal' lives. Everything felt 'abnormal' and 'unreal' as if it really couldn't be happening.

THE GOOD NEWS is that we, as human beings, are very robust and resilient and, with determination, we can subdue the pain and get on with our lives. Fortunately, with the support of other family members and some very close friends, we were all able to face the future – albeit one day at a time. We felt as though we lived a double life. Up in the morning and off to work – put on the workplace smile and function normally with this huge burdensome secret that we didn't talk to anybody about (outside of the family circle and a few close friends – thank God for supportive and compassionate friends).

So – that's the emotional side of my story – it could be longer and more detailed – but if you've been there yourself, there is no need for further elaboration and you will understand when I say that this event changed my life and that of my family, not to mention that of my son 'the prisoner'. Having a member of the family sentenced to serve time in jail is nothing more nor less than a sentence for the family. One person might have lost all his freedom and liberty on the 'inside', but the rest of the family 'serve time' in a different way on the 'outside'¼..I think that in some ways, for some people, the sentence on the outside might be even harder than that being served on the inside.

Necessarily, one of my early reactions was to find out what was going to happen. We knew absolutely nothing about the prison system. We quickly realised that we needed to know much more than we did. What would happen to our son, where would he be taken, when would he be taken to wherever he was going. What contact would he be allowed to have with his family and how often? Could we write to him? Could we send photographs? What happens at Christmas? What was he allowed to take with him? What did he do for money and the things that he would need? Would he be living with dangerous people? How would he spend his time? What would he be allowed to do? Who would explain to us all about what would happen?

Because we didn't know what we didn't know, it was a while before we knew to ask about things like sentencing plans, classification structures and procedures, the points system, the security classifications, compulsory education programs and their relationship to the points system, recreational programs, work release programs, home detention, and all of the necessary paperwork associated with all of the above.

We eventually learned that a prisoner needs to procure an abundance of accurate information in order to successfully navigate his way through a prison sentence. The amazing thing about this is that a first-time prisoner is more likely to learn all of this procedure from another more experienced prisoner than he is to learn it from the Authorities now responsible for him.

OUR FIRST PRISON VISIT (to Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre) had to be the most humiliating experience. We were obviously behaving like fish out of water because other more experienced visitors came to our aid. We did realise that it was necessary to register at the desk because there was a line of people doing this. We simply got in line and did the same. Luckily we'd been told by someone, probably our Solicitor, that we had to book in advance and take along three pieces of identification each. We each had to fill in a form, the usual personal details and outlining our 'relationship' with the 'prisoner' – 'mother' – 'father' – 'wife'. Our identification was scrutinised and the back of our hand was stamped with an invisible stamp that illuminated under an ultra-violet light. A plastic 'bracelet' was also placed around our wrists to be worn during the visit and cut off as we exited the visiting area.

The other more experienced visitors told me that I would have to take my ear-rings and my wedding ring off and my husband would have to take his belt off. I really wanted to protest about having to take off my wedding ring – how dare anyone make me do this! However, like all the others, I complied – probably because I was embarrassed about being there. They showed us the ropes regarding use of lockers and we came to understand what we could and could not wear into the visiting area. Bare feet on cold and dirty floors whilst waiting to file through the 'scanner' was a minor inconvenience in the scheme of things, but we were always anxious to get our shoes back on.

Despite the fact that we visited our son every weekend during the two years that he was incarcerated, we never really rid ourselves of that feeling of humiliation (though we understand the necessity for caution) – shoes off, legs wide, arms out – just in case we were carrying drugs in.

My mother-in-law who was 83 years old at the time was 'swabbed' for drugs – this was at Wacol. It was her first visit to her grandson, she was frail and nervous in this strange environment. She was taken from us into a private room and interrogated because the swab showed positive. Of course the swab showed positive for drugs, she was, of necessity, taking a number of prescription drugs for her various ailments. I suppose she could have been carrying illegal drugs into the inmates – what one might call a very game granny! Can you imagine her embarrassment at having been singled out, not to mention our concern for her and finally her annoyance at being late to see her grandson.

She did not visit him again – it was too much for her.

On another occasion, at Woodford, our daughter-in-law was randomly swabbed and her swab tested positive. She was taken away into a private room and tested further by an officer who told her there were traces of something in the swab and therefore she would not be allowed to visit. My husband and I were allowed through to the visiting area whilst our daughter-in-law sat outside in the car-park. She was so upset and angry at this false accusation that she visited her doctor the next day and asked to be tested and for the results of the test to be forwarded to the prison. Her doctor produced the report and at the next visit we were told that the testing equipment had been 'faulty'. Once again, the embarrassment and humiliation is not easily overcome.

FINDING INFORMATION throughout the entire sentence has been a challenge. I could not believe that getting answers to simple questions could be so hard. Each prison

has a different regime for visiting – times are different, what visitors are allowed to take in differs, the number of visitors allowed at each visit varies from prison to prison. The only way to find out is to ring the prison and ask the questions that you know to ask, then take account of the regime at your first visit. Some prisons have indoor waiting areas for visitors, others have visitors waiting out in the full sun until the electronic click of a game permits entry to the sign-in and locker area.

In my experience, over two years of asking questions of everybody including the Director of General of Corrective Services and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services, straight answers are not forthcoming. We received ‘patronising’ responses to our letters that always took the opportunity to reinforce the seriousness of the crime committed by our son – an issue that we all understood and that was never in question.

We simply wanted to know things like ‘how the classification structure related to the points system’ and ‘why did a medium security prisoner have to reside in a high security environment’.

We took the initiative to write letters, make telephone calls, ask questions and, through this process, we established a little knowledge. We know that there are prisoners (probably a great many) who do not have the confidence or the ability to seek clarity about issues that are affecting their sentences – the length of their sentence – their classification – even their parole dates. Who helps these people? The Department of Corrective Services would have us believe that all prisoners are supplied with all of the information that they need. I have reason to question that assertion.

THE OVERALL IMPACT of the whole experience has been significant within this family.

Our lives have been ‘on hold’ since the day of sentencing. Emotionally we have become stronger because the alternative was to crumble. The few close and trusted friends with whom we shared our son’s circumstance have been affected by our lack of interest in socialising and they have been loyal by maintaining confidentiality within our wider circle of friends. They have been amazed to learn what we have learned through the experience. Our practical plans revolved around the weekly visits and the working week seemed to be longer and harder than ever it used to be. I would say that the strain of the experience has aged both my husband and myself physically and drained us emotionally.

Happily, my son’s wife had been a tower of strength to him remaining supportive, loyal and loving throughout the whole ordeal. She never missed a weekend visit and they talked with one another on the ‘phone every single day (unless he was unable to call because of lack of funds or because he wasn’t allowed – apparently when the necessary administrative process of clearing security had not taken place). In terms of his relationship with his wife, there is no evidence of a lasting negative impact in our son’s case. However, my son tells us of other prisoners whose wives or partners did not remain loyal and their circumstances are very sad indeed.

THE OVERALL LEARNING EXPERIENCE has been extraordinary. Through personal experience with the Department of Corrective Services we have been exposed to a situation that many people would be totally unaware of. Never did we expect to become involved in the prison system to the point where we would be visiting our own son in jail. Only through this involvement does a person gain an insight into what goes

on inside.

Prisoners, by the very nature of their status, lack credibility and they become 'demoted' within society. This, in turn, transmits to a lack of self-esteem and a feeling of vulnerability. I am not a psychologist, but I suggest that this fact needs to be considered as a fundamental component of the 'rehabilitation' process.

Here we are all now – 2 years and 2 months down the track. Our son is living in his own home (on probation for the next four years) with his wife and children. At this point, with the initial pain of the shock and the prolonged separation behind us all, we are embarking upon a new learning experience. Once again, a whole range of facts are exposing themselves – facts that the unaffected in the community will not be aware of and facts that are only learned from experience.

Although our son is allowed to drive, he is unable to get insurance.

Not only is car insurance a no-no¹..home insurance¹..home contents insurance¹..these, too, are no-no's.

Although our son is a wage-earner and pays his taxes, he is unable to vote. (Author's note ¹) This raises a very interesting question. Is voting a 'right' or a 'privilege'. If it is a 'right' then who has the authority to remove that right? If it is, in fact, merely a privilege, one could more easily accept that privileges are removed from those who do not comply with the laws. Interesting !

So, the message for me seems to be that once a person has dug a hole for him/herself by committing a crime against society, society will never lose sight of that fact and will ensure, through a range of channels, that the offender will never lose sight of it. Some might suggest that this is not a bad thing. Others, like myself who have been able to become part of the lives of offenders who are genuinely wanting to repair their lives and to become contributing members of the community again, would suggest that this very situation is likely to be contributing to the fact that 80% of prisoners find themselves back behind bars because it is too hard (some might say impossible) to break the cycle.

Consider this model of the cycle as I see it:

| |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Commit offence = jail term = broken relationship(s) = diminished self-esteem = 'socialisation' into prison system/culture = permanent record = difficulty finding employment = further diminished self-esteem = lack of funds = lack of adequate housing = inability to access funds because of record = despair and/or desperation = anger, frustration and strong possibility of re-offending ¹ ..to the tune of 80%. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

¹The electoral Commission advise that prisoners are eligible to vote if sentenced to less than five years and on the electoral role. Released prisoners may vote providing they are on the electoral role and have resided at that address for at least one month.

Might I suggest that the Government needs to see 'rehabilitation' as a longer process. It is not simply the period of time that an offender is behind bars¼..that is just the very beginning and it seems to set the scene for the foreseeable lifetime of the offender.

When considering the issues relating to offending and incarceration – I suggest that there are, in fact, 3 stages. The first stage relates to the sentencing process. The second stage is the incarceration period. The third stage is the post-incarceration period that imposes discrimination in a nation that promotes anti-discrimination legislation!! On second thoughts, perhaps there is a fourth stage – called re-offending.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In researching the issues and experiences of families of prisoners or visitors to correctional centres (prisons) in Australia it would appear that this has been a relatively limited research area to date.

However with an average of 21 138 people held each day in Australian prisons² one is talking about a considerable number of individuals and families throughout this country who are directly affected by the issue of imprisonment.

“ For most inmates who face a prison term, their families will also begin a sentence:of physical, social, and psychological hardship. They will do so, in most instances, with a minimum of resources to draw upon and with little power to meet the additional demands on their trouble-plagued lives”Jorgensen, Hernandez and Warren (1986:47)

Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation (ACRO) is a social justice organisation committed to the development of a safe and caring society. As such the organisation has been involved in delivering support services to prisoners and their families for over thirty years.

In 1988 the organisation conducted surveys with visitors to the now closed and somewhat infamous Boggo Rd Goal as part of a submission process for a government review into the prisons system of the day. Four hundred and eighty (480) respondents completed surveys. A wide range of recommendations were included in the subsequent report, including a complete overhaul of the manner and methods by which prisons were run and the ways in which prisoners and their families were treated. Significant changes were introduced across a wide range of areas in corrections in this State as a result of that inquiry.

In 2001 ACRO surveyed visitors to correctional centres in the Wacol area of Queensland. A total of eighty four (84) respondents completed the questionnaire. Surveys were undertaken at the ACRO Family Centre with persons visiting the following correctional centres :

- Arthur Gorrie Remand and Reception Centre
- Wolston Correctional Centre
- Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre
- Sir David Longland Correctional Centre (SDL)
- Moreton B (since closed)

This Report provides a snapshot of the experience of persons visiting correctional centres in the Wacol region; a region with the largest concentration of correctional centres in the State. In addition it provides background information about visitors such as their age, gender, income base and housing situation, enabling a general profile to be drawn. Added to this, the Report also provides a comparative analysis from survey work conducted with the same client group (persons visiting prison) in 1988. It is clear from the results of the present survey that for families/visitors of prisoners a number of

²Australian Productivity Commission Report on Government Services 2002

key issues remain unaddressed, issues which cause significant levels of difficulty and stress for people already in a difficult and stressful situation.

It is the intention of this Report to provide a window for persons involved in visiting a correctional centre to be able to view that experience in the context of being one of a significant number of people undergoing that experience; to reflect their views and opinions about their experiences, and for persons who have never experienced the corrections system directly to gain some insight as to the experience of visitors.

3.1 Key Findings

In considering the findings and recommendations contained in the Submission to the Committee of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland (1988) by this organisation and the findings of the current visitor survey (2001) there are a number of key findings:

In relation to the *profile of the visitor*, current research indicates that a greater percentage of the predominately female visitors are *younger* than in the 1988 study and that the majority of them identify as the *partner* (either married or defacto) of the person they visit. There is almost a twenty percent (20%) increase in the number of visitors *with children* in the current research and also a marked *increase in the number of children* which visitors have in their family. This is significant due to the consistent concerns raised in both the 1988 visitor survey and the 2001 survey in relation to regular visiting by children to the correctional centres and these concerns have been the subject of part of the recommendations by ACRO in both 1988 and the present.

Other significant findings with regard to the demographic profile of the families visiting is that current research indicates that standard of living factors may be declining for these families. There is a dramatic increase in the number of families dependent upon *Centrelink benefits*. There is also a striking decrease in the number of families who *own their own home* in the current research. A significant number of respondents also indicated they were unable to access *public housing* due to debts with the Department of Housing and unable to repay the debt due to high private rental costs. With the introduction of a real estate black list in Queensland for people who have in any way defaulted during their stay in *private rental* and the closure of several caravan parks, the *housing options for respondents are clearly reducing significantly*. Other economic costs for families of prisoners have also increased with current research indicating that families visiting weekly spend an estimated *16 - 25 % of their weekly income supporting their partner in prison* through transport costs and deposits to inmate trust accounts. It is clear that the social and economic costs of imprisonment for families (and the community at large) continues to increase.

It is evident from the current survey that the *provision of family support services* (The ACRO Family Centre) and visitor shuttle bus in the Wacol precinct has *impacted positively* on the visiting experience of families. Feedback from visits staff at the correctional centres in the region similarly reflected the positive impact of the service. Co-ordinated support services for families (incorporating drop-in centre and transport services) are not however evident in other regions which operate correctional centres and this clearly disadvantages families visiting them. Other key issues for visitors raised in the 1988 survey and subsequent recommendations which appear to remain an issue in the current research are :

- Respondents report an *inability to access adequate levels of information from correctional centres which is reliable, consistent, timely and accessible*.
- Respondents were specifically asked about information pertaining to visiting correctional centres but a general view has also been expressed about the difficulty in obtaining any information from the centres.
- Respondents report that information is different depending upon whom they

speak with on the day, which centre they are visiting, whether they can get a person or a recorded message, being provided some but not all information required before their visit and ultimately in most cases having to rely on information provided by other visitors.

From the feedback provided it would appear that there has been *limited progress* since the research undertaken in 1988. It is essential that visitors understand the rules and procedures which govern correctional centres. Given that this is the case and the large volume of persons requiring such information, it would seem that the development of more effective procedures to support and enhance the current system could greatly improve current practices. Providing information in writing prior to a first visit and reinforcing this through a video or power point presentation could greatly assist visitors. Two separate but important recommendations were included in the NSW Department of Corrective Services Studies conducted by Eyland (1996) and McHutchison (2000) respectively:

“A standard visiting package should be sent to family members and friends nominated by an inmate on his/her first entry into custody (including standard visitors handbook)” Eyland (1996:V) and

“Operations should establish a working party to investigate the value of replacing correctional officers with civilian clerical staff in performing admin tasks related to visitor processing.... and Corrective Services Academy include customer relations skills as an essential component of the primary training of correctional officers.” McHutchison (2000:viii)

The need for an *independent complaints or grievance process* has also been well documented in feedback from respondents. Whilst it is acknowledged that visitors have a right to complain to the State Ombudsman’s Office, respondents showed no knowledge of any such grievance procedures. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the lack of such a process for families compounds problems and issues which could often be resolved but have gone unchecked, often escalate into significant issues resulting in high levels of frustration and distress. Visitors also require access to an independent process which can review decisions made at the centre or departmental level in the interests of equity and fairness.

The current research also indicates that the many issues surrounding *children visiting correctional centres* continue to be of particular concern to families. Whilst most families indicate a wish to maintain links between their children and (in many cases their other parent) in custody, the survey results in both 1988 and the present indicate a range of concerns in relation to such visits. The *conditions and environment in which families visit* particularly in meeting the needs of young children is of high concern to visitors. It is also clear that many visitors would prefer not to bring their children on all visits but that due to non existent *limited hours child care* which is local and affordable, they have very few options. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that due to the circumstances which the families find themselves, they more often than not have little to no extended family support or social support networks to assist in the area of childcare. Such circumstances inevitably lead to concerns that young children may often be left at home without adult

supervision. In addition there are increasingly stringent security procedures operating in relation to visitors which are directly impacting upon children who do visit. In light of the length of time over which these issues have been raised but left unresolved, this issue needs to be examined thoroughly and addressed by the relevant government departments in partnership with community organisations as a *matter of urgency*.

3.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that when first visits are booked that written information be forwarded to visitors setting out the centre rules for visitors. This information should also include the location of the centre, visit times, visit duration, transport details and policy and procedures governing items which visitors can and cannot provide to inmates.

Recommendation 2

Since the ACRO bus service is funded by the Department of Corrective Services it is recommended that the bus service information be added to the standard information given to all visitors when booking their first visit at any centre in the Wacol area and that service details be included in any written information/ forms which visitors are required to complete.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that complaints procedures should be clearly outlined and displayed in all correctional centres including contact details for the Ombudsman. In addition it is recommended that the Ombudsman's office consider providing promotional material to all correctional centres outlining their role in the process for the benefit of visitors.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the Department of Corrective Services trial a properly constituted grievance committee to enable families to voice their concerns through a proper process which could significantly reduce the level of stress and frustration experienced by visitors.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a working group be established including relevant departments and stakeholders as soon as possible to determine the viability of community based versus on site limited duration child care for people with children visiting correctional centres. Such a process should include seeking funding for this child care initiative through a whole of government approach in recognition of the "shared mandate" for the client group across The Department of Families, Department of Corrective Services, local council, The Childrens Commission and Department of Housing (Community

Renewal program - Goodna/Gailes area)

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that a review and implementation committee be established including suitable representation from the Department of Corrective Services, correctional centre representative/s, an inmate representative, visitor representative, ACRO representative, Childrens Commission representative and Department of Families, Youth and Community Care representative. The purpose of said committee to review current visiting policy and procedures and implement appropriate changes to address documented concerns and therefore ensure progress on recommendations.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that the Family Centre support and Transport service model operated successfully by ACRO be continued and extended to enable an integrated support service for families visiting correctional centres across the State.

4. PURPOSE

Throughout 2001 ACRO staff and volunteers who work directly with families of prisoners through the Wacol Family Centre have increasingly reported concerns in relation to the families of prisoners who access organisational services. Major concerns relate to the perception that there is:

- a general lack of accurate, clear information provided to families by the Department or prisons;
- increasing anecdotal reports of a perceived unhelpful manner taken by some prisons staff dealing with families;
- perceived harsher/tighter controls being placed upon families as a result of new legislation (Corrective Services Act 2000);
- lack of information available regarding grievance procedures for families;
- lack of effective processes for families to express concerns and
- reported increasing levels of stress being placed on families (financial, emotional and social) through increasingly varying rules and regulations by government departments (eg Centrelink, housing, welfare etc)

As one of the only non government organisations which directly provides services to families of prisoners as their primary target group, ACRO has a responsibility to :

- provide a forum for families of prisoners particularly at a time when the system is imposing considerable levels of change which appear to be causing increased pressure.
- ensure that services provided to the client group are operating effectively and meeting identified client need.
- inform and advise the Department of Corrective Services of identified issues of

concern to prisoners and their families and provide recommendations which may improve existing policy and procedures.

Over the years ACRO has provided several opportunities for visitors to correctional centres to express their views through the utilisation of survey questionnaires. The first and largest of these visitor surveys was conducted in 1988 and formed part of a Submission to the The Committee of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland.

A further survey was conducted in 1994 after the commencement of transport services for families visiting in the Wacol region and the latest survey which was conducted in 2001. ACRO is uniquely placed to conduct such research since it is involved in direct service provision for persons visiting five correctional centres at Wacol (the only region where such concentration of correctional centres occurs in the State).

4.1 Goals of the Report

- To provide a snapshot of the experiences of families of prisoners visiting correctional centres, as a group in society who receive little to no attention as secondary victims of crime.
- To compare and contrast earlier findings contained in previously conducted surveys and independent inquiries.
- To provide a forum for families of prisoners to express their concerns, issues to both government and non government sectors.
- To enhance service delivery for the client group.
- To provide current and relevant information for community debate in the interests of an open and accountable society.

4.2 Scope

The Report is largely based on the views and opinions expressed by those visiting five (5) correctional centres in the Wacol region and the observations and experience of ACRO staff and volunteers. The survey questionnaire consisted of forty three (43) questions divided into sections relating to the general profile of the person visiting; detailed questions in relation to their experiences as a visitor to correctional centre/s and a series of questions where respondents were requested to evaluate the services provided by ACRO through the Family Centre and Shuttle Bus services. Due to varying literacy levels and concerns about confidentiality it was determined that the majority of the surveys would be administered by ACRO staff, a placement student and volunteers at the ACRO Family Centre on a random basis over a two month period in the latter months of 2001 with persons who presented as visitors to one or more of the correctional centres. Some respondents chose to self administer the questionnaire.

The Report also considered available historical data (Newspaper articles 1984 - 2001; Enquiry into the Management Practices Operating at H.M. Prison Brisbane by Sir David Longland 1985; The Committee of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland by Jim Kennedy 1988; Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia (1996) published by the Corrective Services Ministers Conference March 1995 Qld and the Corrective Services Act 2000; Corrective Services Bill 2000 Explanatory Notes and Corrective Services Regulation 2001).

Sample size : 84 respondents

Definitions: For the purpose of this Report “families of prisoners” is used as a generic term since the majority of survey respondents indicated some direct relationship to the person whom they visit eg family member, defacto, girlfriend.

5. LIMITATIONS

This research was conducted with visitors to correctional centres who accessed ACRO services primarily due to their lack of private transport, ie persons requiring transport assistance to access the centres. ACRO services in the region operate on two weekdays and weekends only. There are currently thirteen (13) custodial correctional facilities operating in Queensland. ACRO’s Family Centre services primarily families visiting the five correctional centres located in the Wacol region. The scope of the questionnaires were limited in the main to the respondents’ experience of visiting a correctional centre. A research project focussing on the overall social and economic experience of families of prisoners (particularly women with children) beyond their experience as visitors would be most beneficial. A detailed analysis in this regard is provided in the New South Wales study conducted by Aungles 1994 *The Prison and The Home*.

6. RELATED RESEARCH

In reviewing existing literature on the area of families visiting correctional centres in Australia there are three seminal works which have been undertaken in NSW and Victoria. In 1996 and 2000 respectively the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services commissioned research studies based upon surveys of visitors to NSW Correctional Centres. In 2000 the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) commissioned research in selected Victorian prisons with both prisoners and caregivers of prisoners children. Each of these studies specifies a quite specific aim of their research. In the case of Eyland (1996:4) the aim of the study is stated as:

“ The world of the “outside” being brought to the inmates on the “inside” through the visitor. Just who these visitors are and what they think when they visit correctional centres in New South Wales is the focus of this study”.

In McHutchison (2000:1) the aim of the study is stated as:

“ to obtain information which would assist the Department in providing facilities for visitors who visit inmates in the Department’s correctional centres “

The Tudball (2000: xi) study was conducted to:

“assess the needs of children of imprisoned parents in Victoria”.

These studies were seen as most relevant in terms of the focus of this report - the experiences and needs of families as visitors to correctional centres.

There is also a significant amount of mostly overseas literature in related areas, however much of the focus of this research appears to be on the wider context of prisoners as parents, impact of imprisonment on children and wider psychological implications of imprisonment. There are also studies which consider prisoners families as integral to the offenders rehabilitation such as that conducted by Holt and Miller (1972).

As Aungles (1994 :130) states:

“Although there have been several studies of the impact of imprisonment on children of prisoners, the work of the outside carers tends either to be a taken for granted, “natural” aspect of parenting, or the problems that they face are interpreted, in part as a consequence of their individual, social class, or family category or pathology. The literature focuses on either the needs or rights of the prisoner, on the penal system by constituting parenthood as a path to rehabilitation , on the general functioning of society when the “leader and breadwinner” in the family is removed, or on the needs or rights of the child. It is only in the recent feminist descriptions that the domestic labour of caring for children of imprisoned parents is constituted as a problematic aspect of social life.”

Key findings of this report have also echoed those of a number of other studies conducted as early as the 1960s in relation to issues for families of prisoners including Jorgenson, Hernandez and Warren (1986: 487)

“Perhaps most unsettling to the inmate’s family is the crisis of information that accompanies imprisonment. From the point of arrest ... through sentencing, institutionalisation and finally, pre release and parole, families experience a consummate lack of accurate information accompanied by a plethora of information that is confusing and, in some cases, unintelligible”.

The economic impact of imprisonment was also examined in a report conducted by Morris (1965:80) where

“over 78% of wives of prisoners in Great Britain became dependent upon public assistance as a result of incarceration.”

Morris (1965:215) also found:

“housing was reported as the most serious problem faced by families with over 28 per cent of the families reporting deterioration in this aspect of their lives”

(See Key Findings section of this Report)

In terms of a thorough sociological analysis which explores the dynamic between the inmate and home Aungles (1994) as quoted in Eyland (1996:9) clearly defines the:

“political, economic and emotional dimensions which women as carers of incarcerated men experience”

In reviewing the Australian studies completed in other states it is striking the consistent findings in each jurisdiction irrespective (it would appear) of the size of the sample involved in the study. However what is of most concern is the length of time that such findings have been documented, recommendations made and issues remain unaddressed. From the Begg and McKinnon (1988) visitor surveys conducted in Queensland, to the surveys conducted in NSW Eyland (1996), McHutchison(2000) and Tudball(2000) to this visitor survey, the findings and recommendations closely mirror each other. In the case of the studies conducted by Eyland (1996) and McHutchison (2000), this was research carried out by the Department of Corrective Services itself. Yet a close examination of the clearly defined issues requiring attention for visitors and the considered and practical recommendations contained in the 1996 report, appear largely to reoccur as still requiring attention at the time of the second commissioned report by McHutchison (2000). Whilst it is commendable that the Department has made a commitment in NSW to ongoing research in this important area, it is also clear that ongoing vigilance is required to ensure that recommendations are acted upon and maintained over time. Repeated issues of concern are also evident in the two studies completed by ACRO.

It is noted that the six major areas of concern identified by visitors to Correctional Centres in NSW were

“ the provision of information; the care of children; transportation issues; facilities provided in visiting area; visiting hours and treatment by staff “ (Eyland 1996 : II)

These concerns were also reflected in the research undertaken by Tudball (2000) in Victoria, Begg and McKinnon (1988) and the current results (See Recommendations)

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In light of the congruency of issues raised by research into the experiences and issues for families visiting correctional centres and the ongoing nature of the concerns, it would appear that whilst providing a much needed insight into the experience and concerns of visitors any future research should systematically revisit the findings and recommendations of prior studies, assess progress and impediments and develop practical solutions. In reviewing the literature and the studies conducted the most effective model for future research would appear to be an action research model undertaken in partnership between the responsible Departments and lead community based agencies working with families in each state jurisdiction. Such partnerships could build upon the clear benefits of collaboration evident in the NSW research conducted by the Department with the co-operation and support of the community based Justice Action

and Civil Rehabilitation Committee (CRC) Justice Support. It is evident that for real progress to be made in this area that a real acknowledgement is required by all stakeholders that persons visiting an inmate in a correctional centre should be included as an integral part of considerations and decisions made in relation to inmates. As Homer (1979:52) states:

“Instead of viewing the prisoners family as one or more problems, perhaps we can further the common, frustrating goal of rehabilitation by understanding the role the prisoners family can fill as one fo the most potent and practical tools we have available in the prisoner/criminal rehabilitation effort. “

In this research and other surveys conducted visitors have shown a clear willingness to co-operate with the correctional authorities and despite an expectation by some that such studies would simply provide an avenue for respondents to “ bag” the prison authorities, study results do not in fact indicate such an outcome. On the contrary many visitors indicate a willingness to concede the difficult jobs which correctional officers undertake, an acknowledgment of security concerns and the ability to offer constructive and practical suggestions for improvements (a number of respondents indicated a concern for the need of children visiting centres even when they did not have children themselves). As Eyland(1996:36) notes

“ That over 1100 fully completed questionnaires were returned is testament to a need by these visitors to tell someone in authority their feelings on having to visit a correctional centre... What was particularly surprising was that it is to be generally expected that those individuals who take time to respond to a questionnaire about service provision tend to be those who have the most to complain... this was not the case with the results for this survey”

It would seem that such research participation and stated willingness presents authorities with a unique opportunity to benefit from such insights and implement co-operative processes harnessing the knowledge and experiences of those most affected in devising workable, negotiated long term solutions.

Perhaps Eyland (1996:36) sums it up best when he states :

“ The reasons inmates are inside are all on the outside... The primary link between inside and outside is the correctional centre visitor. These individuals are a key to understanding what is happening with the inmate.”

8. BACKGROUND

ACRO has been providing services, support and advocacy to the families of prisoners since 1962. Initially the organisation was volunteer based and established as the Prisoners Aid Society. Subsequently it became known as the Prisoner and Family Support Association, The Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and ultimately as it's mandate expanded - ACRO Australian Community Safety & Research Organisation. Much of the early work of the organisation was carried out behind the

scenes by volunteers with little formal record kept of the range of clients or services provided. However with the establishment of the first family centre for families of prisoners in 1986 at Lochaber Cottage adjacent to the old Boggo Rd Jail site, ACRO established a visible and proactive role for families of prisoners who came to play a vital role in challenging and ultimately changing many of the draconian practices within the prison system which affected prisoners and ultimately their families.

The 1980s were a particularly turbulent time in Queensland prisons, a time when the system was still largely structured according to what was termed a military model approach adopted in the early days of penal settlement in Australia and a model increasingly out of touch with modern society. Organisations like ACRO were able to establish very effective networks not only with members of the prison population but with family members which in turn provided a strong advocacy base for ACRO to lobby other non government agencies to pressure the Queensland government to review and ultimately change many of the restrictive practices in the Queensland prison system of the day.

Complaints of serious problems within the system were raised by many inmates from within the prison system. These issues were taken up by families and lobby groups and ACRO (as the then Prisoner and Family Support Association) who were most instrumental in providing a high degree of media coverage about the serious issues of violence and mistreatment occurring in the system. (See Appendix A) These concerns were raised to new heights by the continued use of the infamous black hole at Boggo Rd Goal - an underground detention unit with no natural light or air which was used widely during this period by prison authorities anxious to quell the growing tide of discontent and outspokenness by inmates. ACRO spear-headed a public campaign with the help of a growing number of social justice organisations to close the Black Hole permanently. Public pressure mounted significantly during this time due to the inhumane conditions reported in the media in relation to the by now notorious detention unit The Black Hole was finally closed by prison authorities in December 1987.

However the significant level of discontent expressed by inmates, families and lobby groups continued to grow and ultimately the government of the day commissioned a committee of review into Corrective Services in Queensland headed by businessman Jim Kennedy in 1988. The then Prisoner and Family Support Association (Queensland) provided a detailed submission to the committee including wide ranging recommendations encompassing strategies to deal with the chronic problems within the existing prison system. These included front end community options and post release options for offenders, grievance procedures for prisoners, their families and staff and coordinated service provision for families of prisoners across the State.

In the submission Begg and McKinnon (1988) outlined the most common grievances identified by families of prisoners:

- inappropriate management of the family visiting program
- attitudes of prison officers to families during the visiting times e.g. rudeness and arrogance;
- lack of information about prisons - prisoner welfare, health and transfers to other

- prisons;
- disregard for families needs in decision to transfer prisoners;
- refusal of visiting rights without reason or apparent justification;
- discrimination by prison officers against family members of particular racial or ethnic origin;
- undue and unjustifiable delays during visiting periods .

In response to these specific concerns Begg & McKinnon (1988) recommended the establishment of an independent grievance committee to receive and investigate grievances from prisoners, prison officers and families of prisoners concerning

- prison conditions
- exercise of administrative discretion (eg withdrawal of privileges, visitation of prisoners, transfers)
- management of prison or division
- assaults upon prisoners by officers and upon officers by prisoners.

Following the Kennedy Review many changes were introduced to the structure and functionings of the corrections system in Queensland. Several of the recommendations contained in the Begg & McKinnon submission were introduced in some form. An independent grievance committee was not established, however official visitors were introduced to investigate prisoner grievances. Families however had limited access to this mechanism and many concerns expressed in earlier surveys have recurred in the current research with visitors expressing the need for an independent process to investigate their issues and concerns.

8.1 “General” Procedures For Visitors To A Correctional Centre

For those persons who have not visited a correctional centre the following is provided as an overall guide to generally what happens when a loved one goes into goal. Each centre is permitted to operate “local procedures” and therefore this is only a general outline.

In South East Queensland when a person goes to prison (a correctional centre) either on remand (charged but awaiting court or sentencing) or after sentencing - they most often go to the Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre on Ipswich Rd at Wacol. This centre is also known as the Remand and Reception Centre. There are four correctional centres in the Wacol region (and a WORC program) where prisoners can serve their sentences. Eight other correctional centres are located throughout Queensland (and several WORC programs). Most families do not know this and may have to wait for the inmate to phone them and let them know where they are. For families visiting in the Wacol region ACRO is funded by the Department of Corrective Services to operate a courtesy transport service to and from visits. The service operates on two week days and weekends to correspond with the most common days when the majority of correctional centres in the region operate visits. Visits are offered on other days by some centres. Visitors on these days must make their own way to the centres. In other regions other community agencies provide limited transport services. As Jorgensen Hernandez and Warren (1986:48) conclude :

“ The adage “you can’t get there from here” aptly describes the location of many prisons, even the newer ones”.

The Wacol region is the only area where visitors can access the Family Centre and it’s services (funded through the Department of Families and Department of Corrective Services) as a resource.

Prison population numbers are usually measured by the Department of Corrective Services on an average daily number of prisoners in secure, open and community custody. The Annual Report 2000/01 indicates this figure was recorded as 4711. Figures as at 30 June 2001 indicate that approximately 43 % of prisoners were accommodated in the correctional centres in the Wacol region. A further 8 % were accommodated in the Rockhampton Correctional Centre also serviced by ACRO transport services. It is anticipated that on current figures for the increasing bed capacity to nearly 6000 across the state by 2002, nearly 2000 prisoners could be housed in the Wacol region and over 500 in the Rockhampton region in the future.

Many family members arrive at the Wacol train station or ACRO family centre only knowing they are visiting “the gaol at Wacol”. Inmates are generally allowed to make a phone call some time within 24hrs of their arrival at the prison. According to the Corrective Services Act as outlined previously prisoners are entitled to one visit per week. No standard time is determined in the Act but currently visits are usually up to two hours in duration. This means that if a prisoner has a mum and dad, sisters, brothers, extended family, wife/husband and or children - they must all work out how and when they will visit and book that one visit accordingly. Standard practice for correctional centres has been that up to four (4) adults and a reasonable number (undefined) of children may visit at one time. However the Corrective Services Act (2000:84) states

“ The person in charge may allow more than one (1) personal visitor to visit a prisoner at the same time, if it is within the corrective services facility’s operational limits.”

Persons under eighteen (18) who wish to visit without an accompanying adult must make application in writing to the General Manager of the correctional centre.

If family members live outside of the greater Brisbane area they must also work out travel arrangements and often accommodation. Correctional centres have often in the past allowed two visits over consecutive days if families notify them that they are coming from out of town. All visitors must telephone the correctional centre to book a visit (visits can only be booked at specific times during office hours and STD rates apply outside the Brisbane area). Anecdotal reports from families indicate they are often on hold for long periods of time. Some centres will allow visitors to have a standing booking after their security clearance which alleviates the issue of booking each week. When booking their first visit all visitors must submit their personal details to the correctional centre so that a security check can be conducted on their background. (See Appendix C Visitor Application Form).

On telephoning the correctional centre, visitors should be provided with standard information at the time of booking their visit including that they will need to bring a drivers licence or three other forms of ID showing their current address, date of birth and signature; the dress standard including closed in shoes; that no prams are permitted in the centre, they will be required to remove all jewellery and what if anything they are permitted to take into the visit (usually some \$1 or \$2 coins for use in vending machines) Children cannot take toys etc into visits and lockers are provided (usually at a cost of \$2) for all visitors belongings. A baby bottle and nappy may be permitted although security changes may now prohibit this also. It is important to note that this information is available in written form however is not forwarded to visitors. (Anecdotal reports have also been received that women have been told by correctional officers that they are not permitted to breast feed during visits or the visit is terminated but correctional centre staff have informed ACRO there is no policy in relation to women not being permitted to breast feed during visits).

Visitors must declare any and all previous criminal convictions and in most cases (although not all) will commence visits on a non contact basis for up to four to six weeks (until security clearance is gained). Note : This process may be repeated when a prisoner is transferred to another correctional centre where the centre will again request a security clearance on the visitor. If the visitor declares a previous offence and that record is held in another state the visitor themselves is required to make application to the relevant police force for a copy of the record for the correctional centre. Note : Anecdotal evidence suggests visitors are not always made aware of this resulting in long delays. If a person has a previous offence they must declare this and the General Manager will determine whether visits will be granted and on what basis - contact or non contact and for what period.

A non contact visit means that all visitors sit behind a glassed partition often referred to by visitors as a "box visit". All visits areas are monitored by closed circuit cameras and prison officers. All visitors are required to arrive at the correctional centre at least 45 minutes before the visit time (some centres one hour). Late comers are either offered a non contact visit or no visit. Visitors wait together for up to an hour before the visit before their names are called and they can proceed through the first secured entrance area. Before entering this area shoes are required to be removed and are returned to the visitor after they pass through the initial entrance area. Visitors may be subject to an ION scan which is a wand passed over the outside of your clothes (much like those used at airports). The ION scan is used to detect drugs and if the scan indicates a positive result then a general search may be undertaken. Under the section Temporary detention for security offences the Corrective Services Act 2000 states:

" if a corrective services officer finds a person committing a security offence or finds a person in circumstances that lead, or has information that leads, the officer to reasonably suspect the person has just committed a security offence - the officer may, using reasonable and necessary force - conduct a general or scanning search of the person and search anything in the person's possession, including a motor vehicle" The officer may detain the person until the person may be handed over to a police officer. The person must not be detained for longer than four hours. "

The Explanatory Notes on the Corrective Services Act (2000:7) outlines the definition of a search in relation to visitors:

“ A visitor may be required to submit to a scanning search or a general search... a scanning search may include but is not limited to a portable electronic apparatus which can be passed over the person; an electronic apparatus through which the person must pass; or a dog trained to detect the scent of prohibited substances. A general search is a search to reveal the contents of outer garments, hand luggage and pockets of a person without touching the person. “

The same applies to staff. There is no provision for any visitor to be strip searched by a Correctional centre employee. Strip searches, personal or body searches can only be carried out by police.

If a drug dog or the ION scan indicates a positive result for a visitor then the visitor can be refused access to the centre even if the visitor agrees to submit to a general search. The writer is unclear on what legal basis this access is denied particularly if no contraband is found. The Explanatory Notes of the Corrective Services Act suggests a non contact visit may be granted but in practice anecdotal evidence suggests in practice this rarely happens. The use of Ion scans and drug dogs has been extremely controversial as many visitors wish to challenge the findings however report that they are unable to “argue with a dog or a machine” and department staff appear to indicate an unwillingness to admit that either is fallible.

Smoking is not permitted by visitors and if the visit is a contact visit no member of the visiting party can use the toilet during the visit or the visit is terminated. This is clearly a considerable issue for women and young children however despite submissions by ACRO on the matter to both the Department of Corrective Services and the Childrens Commission to date no change in this policy has been considered. It is important to note that all prisoners are subject to strip searches after visits (and under the Act can be subject to body searches and breath and urine samples). In that prisoners and visitors are monitored both electronically and by prison officers throughout all visits, and that visitors can and are subject to high tech detection procedures on entering prisons, it is highly unfortunate (particularly in light of past enquiries into the prison system highlighting the need for family contact and quality visiting arrangements) that visitors to prisons in the twenty first century are subject to increasingly restrictive visiting practices which will almost certainly reduce the quality and quantity of visits undertaken. If granted a contact visit family members must sit at metal table and chairs which are bolted to the floor. Although visit areas are usually covered areas they are often large open areas which visitors report are very cold in winter or on rainy days. Some centres may have a small play ground area for children but no toys food etc can be brought in.

It appears from the reported experiences of visitors that a view may have persisted in correctional centres that visiting days are perceived only in terms of security and not in terms of the rehabilitative and support role for which they were intended. A recent example of this can be seen in the reported visit experience for families participating in a special “family day” held at one of the Correctional Centres. These are days where visit

hours are extended and families can partake in more relaxed atmosphere around an organised lunch or BBQ. Families look forward to these events being held each year for obvious reasons. At a recent family day visitors reported delays for security procedures were up to two hours for families with young children leading to increased stress levels for visitors, inmates and visits staff alike. Police were also in attendance. Visitors reported feeling “harassed” and “treated like criminals”. Eyland (1996 :9) discusses the experiences of visitors in this broader context stating :

“As forcefully stated by Aungles (1994), there has been an extension of penalty, no matter how hidden, to the carers of those in custody. There has been an incorporation of control over the inmate through the use of the family. The family is reconstituted as a “reward” for the inmate. Control is, in fact, extended over the carers themselves”

Whilst it could be argued that such experiences are an “unintended consequence” of such events being so security focussed and unfamily friendly it is likely that in future some families will almost certainly “choose” not to participate and it is not beyond the realms of possibility that such events will eventually be cancelled due to lack of participation by families. Clearly security is an important focus for the safety and good order of correctional centre facilities. However it is also clear that families play an important role not only in the rehabilitative sense whilst offenders are in custody but also in the post release phase of a prisoner’s release. Increased family breakdown has a direct correlation to an increased burden on the public purse through additional services required for housing, health, welfare support and counselling support. Experience also indicates that inmates in such circumstances are also more likely to reoffend.

For those persons who have not experienced visiting a prison it may seem a peripheral part of a person’s life. However in practice this is not the case. As Aungles (1994:117) correctly identifies:

“ The usual connotations of “visiting” are that it is a marginal, usually pleasurable part of social life. This image has to be reprocessed in the case of the work of prison visiting. It involves women in extensive time and labour and, even though the visit might only be for an hour, the work involved in preparing for, travelling to, then waiting for the visit dominates the day to day life of women outside”

9. RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

9.1 Profile of the Visitor - Comparative Findings 1988 and 2001

The Begg and McKinnon (1988) survey was conducted at the Boggo Rd visiting area and was a comprehensive questionnaire with a sample size of 480 respondents.

Profile of “the visitor” developed indicated :

- The visitor is a woman (69%) who is either a family member (68%) or friend (including finance - 30.6%) aged between 16 - 22 or 42- 46.

- ❑ Of those who visit 72.5% go to the prison with others including children (26.05%), other relatives (32.7%) and friends (13.33%). However those who have children are more inclined to not allow the children to visit the prison because of the general environment, the negative impact on the child/ren and restlessness caused by long waiting period.
- ❑ Visitors are either wage/salary earners (41.88%) or government pensions and payment recipients (48.32%). The former group are generally home owners whilst the latter are renting privately or boarding.
- ❑ Both groups contribute to the trust fund of the inmate visited at the rate of approximately \$20 per week. Respondents visit the prison weekly (55.8%) at an approximate cost of between \$5.00 and \$20.00 each occasion (71.04%) and with a travel time associated with the visit of between 15 and 60 minutes (75%). The relocation of prison facilities will impact in respect of the cost to visit inmates and length of time spent in travel.
- ❑ On the issue of present visiting arrangements respondents commented on the need for longer visits, more frequent visits, more privacy during visits, family days, telephone contacts, conjugal visits, night visits, more visitors per visit, providing of a canteen/refreshment service, more information on rules and procedures, visit appointment, more pleasant surroundings, less waiting time for visitors with children, visits on public holidays and leave of absence. It is noted that visitors had conflicting views on the behaviour of prison officers ranging from good to bad impressions. Most felt that specialised training in public relations was required and that staff should be accountable and wear id. Others felt that uniforms were unnecessary at this section.

ACRO Survey 2001 - Visitor Profile

- ❑ Average visitors are women (88.1%) aged 18 - 33 (59.5%) 15.5% are in the 34 - 41 age range who lives in the post code areas of 4300 - 4305 (Carole Park, Gailles, Goodna, Dinmore, Riverview, Booval, Ipswich areas).
- ❑ The visitor identifies as the partner of the person visited (either married, defacto, fiancée) 51.3% ; 23.8% identified another familial relationship eg parent, sibling, other relative) and has children (63.1%).
- ❑ Of those with children 47.17% indicated they usually visit with children, 16.98 sometimes and 35.8% indicated they do not . Reasons provided for why they do not were that they believe it is a bad environment for children, the lack of facilities for children and that they are unable to due to non contact visits.
- ❑ 83.3% indicated their main source of income is Centrelink benefit with only 4.8% indicating a regular wage as their main source of income.
- ❑ 55% indicated that they are in private rental (a significant number indicated this is due to a debt with the department of housing); 17.9% were in public housing, 10.7 % living with another family member, 10 .7% owned their own home
- ❑ 64.3 % of respondents visit weekly most commonly to The Arthur Gorrie Remand and Reception Centre or Wolston Correctional Centre.
- ❑ The visitor contributes weekly to the inmate's trust account (40.51%) on average between \$20 - \$30 and catches public transport, (although it should be noted that

the survey was conducted from the ACRO family centre which provides transport to the centres from opposite the Wacol train station).

- It takes either up to two hours round trip (37%) or up to four hours round trip to visit (31%) and costs an average of between \$5 and \$10 (63%). The maximum indicated was \$80 - \$150 round trip but these visitors indicated they could not afford this weekly and thus visited less.
- 53.6 % indicated that they felt public transport was convenient and affordable and 34.51 % felt it was inconvenient and too expensive
- The main concerns expressed by respondents in relation to visits were :
 - visits are not long enough
 - wait time (up to two hours from arrival) too long and centres often run late
 - insufficient facilities for children
 - inconsistency of application of rules and regulations by visit staff
 - rules too restrictive particularly re use of toilets during visits (particularly for children).
 - A number of respondents also stated that they believed they should be allowed to smoke during visits.
 - 50 % of respondents felt that privacy was an issue in relation to visits with many commenting on the high level of scrutiny i.e. security cameras and prison officers 'standing over' visitors.
 - Many respondents said they felt security procedures were often too invasive and made them feel like criminals.
 - Respondents also commented on the harshness of some officers in relation to not allowing any touching during a visit 'not even a cuddle'.

9.2 2001 Survey Results and Discussion

PART A

General Profile of Respondent Information

Age

From Graph 1a, the majority of visitors were between 18 and 33 years (the two youngest age categories). There were 31 visitors in the 18-25 year age group (2 male) 19 in the 26-33 (including 2 males) 13 visitors in the 34 - 41 age range (including 2 males), 7 in the 42 - 49 age range (no males), five (5) visitors in the 50 - 57 age range (including 1 male), five (5) visitors in the 58 - 65 age range (including one male), two visitors (one female, one male) in the 66 - 73 age group and two (2) females in the 74 and older age range.

Of interest in comparing the data from 1988 (Graph 1b) is the fact that the secondary age node apparent in 1988 (that of those aged 42-56) is not evident from the latest Survey results. This would seem to indicate that inmates are no longer primarily visited by older family members (mothers, fathers) and that the support base for currently imprisoned persons is much younger - a matter borne out in other sections of research discussion (consider, for example; housing, income and relationship data.

Gender

An overwhelming majority of visitors were female. 74 of the 84 visitors were female, only 10 were male. This is a consistent pattern that can also be seen in the Begg and McKinnon (1988) report into visiting conditions at Boggo Road Gaol.

Postcode

The largest numbers of visitors came from two general postcode areas, 4300 (Goodna/Gailes area) and 4305 (Ipswich), with the general 4300-4500 area being the most common of the postcodes. 10 respondents did not indicate their postcode. For full details of all postcode areas indicated see Appendix B.

Relationship to inmate

The distribution of relationship types between inmates and visitors was spread fairly evenly, with an indication of an established relationship for most. 14 of the 83 visitors who answered the question identified in a marital relationship while another 24 identified as de facto, 5 identified as fiancée and 7 boyfriend/girlfriend, 13 nominated friend, 8 nominated other relative. There were also 11 people who identified as parents and one daughter visiting a parent.

Main source of income

Of the 75 visitors who answered the question regarding their main source of income, 70 indicated they received Centrelink benefits while 4 indicated a regular wage as their main source of income. 9 people chose not to respond to this question. Graph 4 compares the income situation for respondents from 1988 data to that of the 2001 respondents. As discussed previously, the changes to income, particularly in relation to disclosure about wages, indicates a significant shift between the two data sets. This should be viewed in the context of relationship and housing information in particular.

Number and age of children

Fifty three (53) respondents indicated that they had children.
Five (5) respondents did not answer as to the number of children.
Thirty four (34) respondents did not complete the age of their children.
26 said no children (30.95%);

pregnant /one child :

15 respondents had one child or were pregnant (17.9%)
two respondents had none but were pregnant; one respondents had 1 baby; three respondents had 1 child two years old; three respondents had one child 3 years old; one respondent had one child 4 years old; one respondent had one child 13years old; two respondents had one child over 21; two age unspecified.

Two children:

16 respondents or 19% had two children.
Four respondents indicated 2 children but no age; one respondent had a child 3years

and a child 5yrs; one respondent had a child 2years and a child 3years; one respondent had a child nine years and a child five years; one respondent had a child 9years and a child 10years; one respondent had a child 4years and a child 6years; one respondent had a child 4years and a child 7years; two respondents had a child 5years and a child 8years; one respondent had a baby and a child 2 years; one respondent had a child 13years and one 17years; two respondents had two children over 18.

Three children:

11 respondents (13.1%) indicated they had three children.
Five respondents did not indicate the age of their three children. One respondent had children aged 3years, 2years and one year; one respondent had children aged 8years, 10years and 13years; one respondent had children aged 3years, 2years and 7months; one respondent had children aged 9years, 11 years and 16years; one respondent had children aged 10years, 7years and 6years; one respondent had three children over 18.

Four children :

Six respondents (7.1%) indicated they had four children.

One respondent indicated they had twins aged 10years, a nine year old and 6year old; one respondent had a child six years, 3 years, 5 years and 19months; one respondent had two aged 6years, child 4years and 2years;two indicated they had children over 18; One ages unspecified.

Five children :

Two respondents(2.4%) indicated they had five children.

One did not indicate ages; one had children aged 6years, 5years, 4years, 3years and 10months.

Six children:

One respondent(1.2%) had six children with four being over 21 years of age, one 18years (the inmate being visited) and one 8years.

Seven children:

Two respondents (2.4%)indicated they had seven children but all were grown up.

The comparative analysis between the 1988 figures and those of 2001 clearly indicates that the number of visitors who have children has increased over the period. The number of children per family has also increased significantly.

These findings are particularly important when viewed in the context of the income, housing and financial contributions to inmate trust account sections.

Current housing situation

Regarding housing situations, 46 of the 83 visitors who answered this question were in a private renting situation, many indicated because they have debts with the Department of Housing and therefore cannot get public housing. Of the remaining 37, 9 owned their own home, 15 were in public housing, 2 in crisis housing, 9 staying with another family member and 1 boarding.

PART B

Visiting Information

Frequency of visits

Frequency of visits most commonly hovered around the weekly mark, with 54 of the 83 respondents stating that they visited the inmate weekly. 18 respondents indicated they visited fortnightly, 3 whenever they were able and 1 said monthly, two said twice weekly and two indicated it was their first visit.

Table 1: Frequency of Visits to Centres Compared 1988/2001 (as percentages)

| | Weekly | Fortnightly | Whenever able | Monthly | Twice Weekly | Other | n/a | First Visit |
|------|--------|-------------|---------------|---------|--------------|-------|------|-------------|
| 1988 | 55.83 | 15.21 | - | 9.38 | - | 13.95 | 5.63 | - |
| 2001 | 64.3 | 21.4 | 3.6 | 1.2 | 2.4 | 3.6 | - | 2.4 |

N(1988) = 480

N (2001) = 83

How long been visiting

Respondents were also asked how long they had been visiting for, with options from first visit through weeks, months and years. The shortest length of time was first visits, with the longest being 13 and a half years. But the average visit time falls within the month category, with 28 of the 84 respondents having come for at least a month up to 11 months.

Prior association

Of the 83 visitors who answered the question regarding prior association with the inmate, 74 stated that they were acquainted with the inmate prior to their imprisonment. Of the remaining 9 respondents, 4 met through mutual friends or family, 2 through letter writing and 1 through the prison fellowship and 2 being approached by the inmate when visiting someone else.

Which centres visited

Arthur Gorrie (the remand and reception centre) and Wolston received the largest number of visitors (26 each) followed by SDL with 18, Brisbane Women's 5, Moreton B with 3 (this centre has since closed). 2 no answer, 4 who visited more than one centre. See Graph 4. Although there is only one Womens Correctional Centre in the region and that overall the number of female inmates in custody is clearly lower than that of men,

it is noted that the number of visitors to the Womens jail is significantly lower. The majority of those visitors to the Womens jail were also parents of the inmate.

How do you get to your visit?

97.6 % of respondents indicated that they use public transport to reach the family centre. Since the train station is directly across the road from the family centre this is not an unexpected result. Of the 84 who responded to the question regarding transport, 33 nominated the train, 3 the bus and train, 1 the bus and 1 walked. The other respondents did not specify a particular form of public transport although it is expected that most would have caught the train. One person indicated they drove.

Is this a satisfactory method?

29 respondents stated that they felt the form of transport they took (almost always the train) was either too inconvenient or expensive, but also acknowledged that they did not have many alternatives. Alternatively, the 45 other people who responded to this question found their chosen transport quite convenient and affordable. 10 people did not respond to this question.

On average how much time and money spent on transport?

Regarding average money and time spent travelling to and from the prisons, 29 people spent up to \$5 per visit for transport. A further 25 people spent between \$6-\$10, and 20 other respondents spent over \$11 with extreme amounts including \$80 and \$150 costs for return trips. 6 people did not respond to this part of the question. Regarding amount of time travelled, the \$150 respondent also spent the most time travelling with an average of 12 hours each way. For those who lived closer to the prisons, 31 travelled up to an hour each way to get to their visit. Another 26 travelled between 1 and 2 hours each way and the remaining 10 respondents travelled anywhere from 3 to 12 hours. 17 people did not respond to this section of the question.

Length of sentence of inmate?

The largest numbers of inmates being visited were on remand (23), often for unknown periods of time. (refer Graph 5). The next largest number was found in the 4 - 10 year sentence, with 18 visitors giving responses in this range. 16 were visiting those with sentences between 1 -5 years and 10 were visiting inmates sentenced up to a year. 5 were visiting those committed to a life sentence. 4 people did not respond to this question and 8 were unsure of sentence length and thus could not be classified into any of the above categories. A significantly higher proportion of inmates appear to be on remand in the current survey

How much and how often contributions to trust account?

Table 2a Financial Contributions by Visitor to Trust Account - 2001

| Amount (\$) | 0 | 5-10 | 11-20 | 21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61-100 | n/a | TOTAL |
|-------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-----|-------|
| %age | 10.7 | 9.5 | 21.4 | 27.4 | 2.4 | 15.5 | 1.2 | 8.3 | 3.6 | 100 |

Table 2b Financial Contributions by Visitor to Trust Accounts - 1988

| Amount (\$) | 0 | 5-10 | 11-20 | 21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | 61-100 | n/a | TOTAL |
|-------------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
| %age | 4.17 | 16.26 | 18.96 | 2.69 | 1.46 | - | 1.88 | 0.2 | 54.38 | 100 |

The comparative figure clearly indicate that visitors are contributing significantly higher amounts of money to inmate trust accounts since 1988. In the recent analysis the most common amount of money deposited was between \$21-\$30 closely followed by \$11 - \$20 per week. Figures did range from \$5-\$10 up to \$180, with regularity ranging from once a week (34) through once a fortnight (18 people) and once a month (9 people). Twenty three (23) respondents indicated they deposit an amount greater than \$30 each week in an inmate’s trust account, average \$50. Eight (8) respondents indicated they deposit \$5 - \$10 per week in inmate trust accounts; 18 indicated they deposit \$11 - 20 per week in inmate trust accounts; 23 indicated they deposit \$21-\$30 per week in inmate trust accounts. Nine (9) respondents said they did not contribute to the trust account and three (3) did not respond.

Author’s Note : Financial commitment indicated by visitors/family per week average (including transport and trust account deposits \$40 - \$50 from their weekly budget, in some cases much higher. Since the majority indicated Centrelink benefit either as single or sole parent rate (estimated to be between \$400 - \$600 f/night) then it would appear that visitors are contributing 16- 25 % of their f/nightly income to maintaining links and the well being of the inmate whom they visit.

The Corrective Services Act 2000 Section 237(1) (2) states:

“The chief executive may invest amounts held in the prisoners trust fund in a financial institution.

“ The chief executive must apply any interest earned on the investment for the general benefit of prisoners and report annually to the Minister on the application of interest.” (Corrective Services Act 2000 :135/136)

The Annual Report for the Department (2001:76) indicates a figure of \$795 000 for Offenders Trust Fund. However the Report does not appear to indicate whether such funds are invested as per the Act, any level of interest earned or the application of such

funds for the “general benefit of prisoners”.

Do visitors come alone?

Regarding visiting procedures, visitors were asked whether they visited most often alone or with their children, with a friend or with another relative. 40 respondents indicated they visited alone while 25 indicated they visit with their children regularly, 15 with another relative and 4 with a friend.

Do they bring their children?

Of the 53 people who indicated they had children, 25 said they had brought their children with them to visits regularly, 9 said sometimes and 19 did not. The most common reason given for not bringing the children was the fact that the jail was not seen as a good environment for children to be in. 26 visitors indicated they did not have children. 5 did not respond.

Who takes care of children while you visit?

Many did not answer this question. Of those that did the majority said a relative or family member looked after the children. Several said the children were at school. Reasons given for why visitors do not bring children to the visit were that it was too difficult, a bad environment, bad conditions and the attitude of prison staff to visitors.

Views on visiting

44 responses received to this question indicated that they felt current visit arrangements were ok (29) 10 said good, 3 said fair and two said very good. Of those responses (Thirty-five) did not raise concerns re the present visiting arrangements. Six respondents did not answer the question. 43 responses received indicated a range of concerns re current visiting arrangements indicating negative aspects of their experiences. Responses ranged from upsetting or stressful, to concerns about the visits environment and overly strict conditions. Table 3 indicates identified visitor concerns divided generally into four categories :

Table 3 Concerns by Visitors by Category

| Time issues | Issues for children Visiting | Inappropriate conditions | Restriction of toilet access | Other |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Visits not long enough (4) | Bad for children (4) | SDL is dirty in the visits area (2) | Should be able to use the toilets during visits. (2) | Wish we could smoke (2) |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wait time (up to 2hrs before getting in, prison run late but we can't even be two minutes late or not allowed in (3) | Children should be allowed to eat (2) | Visits area is really cold in winter and seats are metal. (2) | Really hard for children and older people. (2) | Prison is too inconsistent with rules and regulations. (2) |
| Going out for half hour and then going back in for hour is ridiculous (2) | Children need to be able to go to the toilet during visit (2) | Visits area is open to the rain – (Arthur Gorrie) (1) | Women need to be able to use the toilets without visit being ended. (2) | Non contact visits are really awful (2) |
| Need greater choice of days and times (2) | No play area for children (2) | | Pregnant women and women with periods can't even go to the toilet during a visit. (2) | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Prison mix up bookings and times (2) | Not allowed to take in prams and then prison doesn't supply enough so have to hold baby. (2) | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|

* Some respondents expressed multiple concerns regarding the visiting arrangements.

How does the family feel about visiting?

In response to a question regarding how the wider family feels about visiting, 29 people responded that their families did not visit but approved. Seven (7) said that their families approved of the visits and visited with them, another 4 reported mixed emotions and 6 stated that the families did not know about the inmate being in prison. Nine (9) respondents indicated their families disapproved. 29 did not to respond to this question .

Visiting day was always a very important time for the family. We always looked forward to it despite the fact that we hated the process we had to go through. We also hated having to say goodbye at the end of the visiting time.

How does the inmate feel?

The majority of visitors believed that the inmate was grateful for the chance to visit with their families and friends and have some contact that wasn't related to the prison. Of the 70 people who responded positively to this question, 42 specifically said that the inmate really looked forward to the visits and that they were grateful for the opportunity. The other 28 also responded positively but did not go into detail with their responses. Another 11 responded with mixed or negative emotions from the inmates regarding visits. Examples of this were responses such as stressful, upsetting, frustrating and annoyed. Three (3) people chose not to respond to this question.

Attitudes of staff

Forty six (46) positive responses were received in relation to the attitude of staff towards visitors. These ranged from ok/ good (17) to Helpful and polite (24). Other positive comments also included friendly(1) and relaxed (1) and very nice (3).

Twenty one (21) mixed responses were received with respondents indicating it often depended upon which staff they had contact with. Examples of mixed responses received were some polite, some rude (5) some helpful, some rude (5) most ok but some treat us like criminals (5).

Fifteen (15) negative responses were recorded in relation to staff attitudes to visitors with the most common being rude, inconsistent and judgemental "treat us like criminals". Two people chose not to respond to this question.

Privacy during visits

Privacy had been highlighted in previous surveys as an issue of concern for many visitors. Respondents were asked their views about privacy within the prison during visits and whether visitors and inmates felt there was sufficient privacy provided. Of the 78 people who responded to this question, 36 (42.9%) felt that there was enough privacy afforded by the prisons while 42 (50.%) felt that the security procedures taken were often too invasive and made them uncomfortable.

Improvements to visiting

Improvements suggested for the visiting procedures appear to cluster around particular areas of concern. For example, quite a large amount of people wanted longer visits, more often with more privacy. Other issues identified included the need for entertainment for children and to allow breaks in visits to go to the toilet. Smoking was also an issue, with people suggesting that smoking be allowed during visits and that they be allowed to bring in their own cigarettes.

Firstly make information available to visitors. Visitors are the family and friends of the inmate, all of whom are thirsty for knowledge about what to expect. I had to learn from other more experienced visitors and processes were different at each of the centres. I wish there was more consistency.

Provide undercover waiting areas where they do not currently exist (Woodford and Borallon) Many visitors are waiting with babies and or young children. Some visitors are elderly and frail... they need shade and seating.

I can't understand why at Sir David Longlands we go in for half an hour and then have to go out again and then go back in for another hour

Have you ever been strip-searched?

The issue of strip searching has been raised by families in the past however in light of the clarification provided in the new Corrective Services Act in relation to what a search consists of, reported instances appear to have declined significantly. The survey results reflect this with only 8 of 81 respondents reporting being subjected to one. The most common circumstance surrounding a strip search was suspicion of drugs, usually picked up by one of the drug dogs on the way into the centres. Several other respondents stated that the searches had been random or that no reason had been given at all. 3 people did not answer this question.

Have you ever been refused a visit? Under what circumstances ?

17 of the 81 who responded to the question regarding refusals of visits stated that this had happened to them. Of these 17, the majority indicated that they were refused because they were running late for their visit (most said less than five minutes). Other reasons included mix-ups within the centre regarding transfers, names not on visits list, insufficient ID, wrong foot wear, prisoner transferred to detention unit, visits office being closed on public holiday and then saying it was too late to book next day, and suspicion of drugs either from the sniffer dogs or from a positive ION scan.

If yes, were you offered an alternative? Eg non contact visit.

One (1) of the 17 respondents who said they had been refused a visit was offered an alternative eg non contact visit .

What information were you provided when booking your first visit? Was this information sufficient? Why/Why not?

Thirty one (31) or 36.9 % of respondents indicated that they were provided the basic information that they needed before their first visit. The most common information provided related to rules regarding clothing and shoes, ID required and the need to turn up a half-hour before visits. It would also appear that the consistency of the information provided varied considerably, possibly because the information was provided verbally over the telephone and visitors were unable to remember it. Thirty two (32) or 38.1% of respondents indicated they did not receive sufficient information from the prisons. The most common information which respondents said they required that was not provided was : transport information including the existence of the ACRO bus; the location of the correctional centre and the duration of visits. Several respondents also expressed the view that they found out only what they asked about. Dress code regulations were also noted as information which visitors said they were not told about. Twenty one people did not provide a response to this question. Of those surveyed who indicated they did not receive sufficient information an the greater proportion of respondents indicated they were visiting Arthur Gorrie (14) and Wolston (12). Four (4) respondents indicated Sir David Longland (SDL) and one respondent from Womens and Moreton B respectively.

Whilst it may be expected that those centres processing a greater number of visitors may

reflect a higher number of persons indicating they did not receive sufficient information, it is none the less of concern that Arthur Gorrie as the first point of contact for most visitors should record such a significant level of perceived insufficient information for visitors.

Are you aware of complaints procedures for visitors?

Of 80 respondents, only 18 had any idea about complaints procedures for visitors. Of these eighteen (18), less than half were able to state that they knew they were able to make a complaint through contacting the general manager and moving up the chain of command from this point. Several of those who stated they did not know the correct procedure also stated that they would not take action even if they did as they believed complaining may make things worse for them or the inmate.

Do you receive contact/non-contact visits?

Of the 81 who responded, the majority had experienced both types. 65 had received contact visits and 54 non-contacts. 25 had not received any non-contact visits while 16 visitors had not received any contact visits. When asked to indicate under what circumstances non contact visits were undertaken 20 indicated these were whilst awaiting security clearance and ranged from 1- 2 weeks to 6 weeks to complete. 10 respondents indicated it was because of previous criminal convictions, six indicated they or the inmate had been accused or tested positive for drugs, several stated they were unaware of the reasons and two stated they had had to use the toilet during a visit and been then put on non contact visits.

Which words best describe how you feel before and after a visit?

Respondents were provided a series of eight (8) words to describe their feelings before and after visits. Before visits thirty two (32) positive expressions were recorded (happy, excited, relaxed), eleven (11) expressed impatience. Twenty seven (27) negative responses were recorded (anxious, worried, sad and depressed) An additional category was added by several respondents - nervous. Twenty five (25) mixed responses were recorded prior to a visit - the most common being anxious and excited. Four respondents did not provide an answer.

After visits fifty eight (58) negative responses were recorded the most common description being sad and depressed. Twenty two (22) positive responses were received the most common being happy and relaxed. Ten (10) mixed responses were received.

Have you noticed any differences between centres regarding visits?

Many of the respondents had in fact only visited one correctional centre and were therefore unable to assess the situation at other jails. Thirty one (31) respondents reported some differences ranging from issues with staff to facilities available. Specific examples of differences raised include different instructions and requirements and different levels of strictness.

I got a security clearance at Arthur Gorrie and then when he was transferred down the road to Wolston I had to have non contact visits again whilst they did another security

Any discrimination resulting from a loved one being in prison?

In answer to the question regarding discrimination as a result of their association with the inmate, more than half of the 71 respondents (47 or 56.1 %) stated that they did not believe they had ever experienced such a situation, although some of them had avoided telling other family members. The other 24 respondents (28.6%) stated that they had experienced some discrimination, ranging from snubbing by friends and family through to more extreme experiences such as refusal of housing on the basis of a loved one in jail. 13 did not respond.

PART C

ACRO Services Feedback

Do you attend the family centre?

Of the 79 respondents to this question, 76 stated that they did attend the family centre, while 3 indicated that they did not and 5 people did not respond to this question.

How long have you been attending the Family Centre?

The majority of the visitors had been visiting for at least several weeks, with the largest number (28) having been utilising the services for at least a month. The second largest group were those that had been visiting for at least a year (18), with the longest amount of time being 10 years. 22 people had been visiting for 3 weeks or less while 6 were there for their first visit. 10 people did not complete this question.

How did you become aware of the Family Centre and bus service?

The greatest number of the respondents to this question indicated that they had learned about the family centre from friends or family (21.62%). 9.5 % indicated they had found the service themselves (eg observed the bus dropping off or picking up passengers). An equal number (9.5%) indicated they had been advised by the inmate or found out through ACRO either by direct contact or through signs promoting the service at Wacol Train Station. 8.3 % of respondents indicated they became aware of the services through other visitors or word of mouth. Several indicated that either Queensland Rail staff, local shop or local bus service had informed them. 15.5% indicated they had been informed by prison staff however 4.8 % of those informed by prison staff indicated they were only informed when they asked specifically about transport. Ten people did not indicate how they found out about the service.

Has the family centre helped make visiting easier?

71 of the 75 who responded to this question stated that the family centre had made the visiting process a much more pleasant experience. Most of the respondents indicated they

appreciated the opportunity to have a cup of coffee and a friendly ear before the emotional experience of a visit. 9 did not respond.

Used to have to walk through the bush to the prison - it wasn't safe

The family centre people have helped in every way... I come from Sydney, am alone and they have really helped me

I didn't know where to go and they found out for me and take me there safely

How would you rate the shuttle bus service?

77 respondents rated the shuttle bus service ACRO offers between the family centre and the prisons out of 10. 73 gave the service a 9 or 10 rating, two scored it as 8, one as 6 and one as 5.

Improvements to the shuttle bus service?

While most people stated that they had no improvements to suggest, several did suggest that the service be run more than the four days a week it is currently offered.

What do you like best about the family centre?

Most of the respondents stated that what they liked most about the family centre was the friendly and supportive staff and volunteers. Other positive aspects identified about the family centre included the fact that it was a relaxing and non judgemental atmosphere where there was always someone to talk to and help with problems.

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>Free tea & coffee</i> | <i>free bus</i> | <i>too far to walk</i> | <i>good people to talk to</i> |
| <i>shuttle bus is a life saver</i> | | <i>so welcoming</i> | <i>good to talk to people in same boat</i> |

What do you like least about the family centre?

The majority of the respondents to this survey either left this question blank or wrote that there was nothing they did not like about the family centre. Three suggested the centre needed a face lift.

Which ACRO services do you make use of?

The shuttle bus service is by far the most utilised of the ACRO services on offer at the family centre. 70 visitors responded to this question with all stating that they utilised the bus service. In addition respondents nominated the following services accessed through the family centre.

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------|-------|-------------|--------------|
| Transport | Information | Support | Referrals | Other | Youth camps | Food Assist. |
|-----------|-------------|---------|-----------|-------|-------------|--------------|

| | | | | | | |
|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|
| 70 | 13 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|

General Comments/Suggestions

- The service they have provided to me is support, comfort and thank you so much.
- I would like the bus service extended.
- I bought my son a computer for study but the prison won't let him have it.
- I live in NSW and their jails have no services like this to help families
- This is a very good way of helping families to get to the jails
- The jails should give the kids stuff to play with, we have to wait too long and the visits are too short.
- Baby facilities at the jail are dirty and not allowed to take in enough stuff for babies.
- It would be good if ACRO could do childcare at the prison
- Need counsellors at the jail to be available for visits.
- The people at the family centre are good and helpful especially when in doubt what to do they make you feel at ease and easy to talk with.
- I wish they would make Wolston more children friendly and not be so hard.
- Drivers and volunteers do a great job
- The family centre is great for the kids - they are never bored when they come here.
- Thanks a million for the great work you do
- I think ACRO is a great organisation based on people with golden hearts.
- A friend visiting at Borallon and then Woodford added up costs after six months - covering transport (\$40 petrol) and inmate trust account (\$50/wk). Turned out to be \$2 500.
- You run an excellent service for those with partners, friends and family members in jail.

9.3 1988/2001 What's Changed For Visitors?

The surveys undertaken indicate that over time most visitors to correctional centres continue to be women with an established relationship with the person they visit identifying

as wife, partner, fiancée, mother, sister, girlfriend. The majority of these women indicate an age range between 18 - early 40s and have children. Of these a significant number indicated in both surveys that they do not take their children on visits for a number of identified reasons, most commonly the continuing lack of facilities for children and belief that it is not a suitable environment for children. One of the clearest differences between the profile of visitors in 1988 and 2001 is that of income source and housing type. In the latest survey 83.3% indicated that they are Centrelink benefit recipients with only 4.8% indicating a regular wage. This is a significant change from 1988 where the split was 41% wage earners and 48% who received a benefit. The present survey also indicated that the majority of respondents were living in private rental as opposed to the 1988 survey which indicated a significantly higher level of respondents as home owners. The percentage of persons living in public housing had increased however from 11.6% in 1988 survey to 17.9% in the current survey.

A review of the issues highlighted in the research conducted by ACRO in 1988 and the present indicates some key areas for families which remain either unaddressed or in some cases have seen some changes only to have things revert to the past. As part of the organisation's submission in 1988 it was recommended that all correctional centres should establish a visiting centre separate from the secured area of the prison and staffed by non government sector personnel to assist visitors. Whilst ACRO has successfully applied for funding to establish such a facility in the Wacol region applications to establish such facilities at many other correctional centres have been unsuccessful and still do not have such a support mechanism for families. Visitors who attend the Woodford Correctional Centre for example (one of the largest correctional centres in the State) report being dropped off on the road outside the facility and having to wait in all weather conditions for entry to the facility.

There are also significant issues highlighted in relation to the increasing financial burden placed on families not only in transport costs for visits but in providing funds to inmate trust accounts for buy ups, telephone calls etc. As noted in this report the interest on inmate trust accounts is invested by the Department. The proceeds of these investments should be clearly documented in Department reports and since the majority of visitors contribute to these trust accounts, a proportion of the funds should be applied for visitor purposes with consultation with visitors as to the most productive use of these funds. Whilst Corrective Services do provide funding to non government agencies for limited transport services to the State's prisons, these are localised services and for families visiting from out of the metropolitan area the costs can be significant. It should be acknowledged however that Corrective Services have ensured through sufficient funding levels for the ACRO transport service in the Wacol region that this service remains free of charge for all visitors.

It is a paradox which perhaps can explain many of the difficulties in the system where the majority of inmates in prison are men and therefore the system has primarily been designed to cater for a male client group, however the majority of visitors to correctional centres are women and children and the system has yet to address many of the needs of this client group.

In some jurisdictions issues such as those raised by respondents to the ACRO surveys appear to have been addressed in various programs approaches for visitors, particularly children. Some recent innovative visitor programs examples are documented in Bilchik,

Seymour and Kreisher(2001) including the Sesame Street program run by the Families in Crisis (FIC) agency and operating at two Connecticut state prisons targeting young and school age children under 12 visiting their parents in prison.

“FIC operates a walk in centre adjacent to the visiting rooms.. in a non threatening environment, children can participate in therapeutic or educational sessions with program staff” (Bilchik et al 2001:108)

In New York the Rikers Island prison with 17 000 inmates also operates a visitors program taking into account the needs of children:

“Now, when children come to Rikers, they are brought to a child friendly area. Although they must pass through metal detectors, correctional officers try to make security measures quick and unthreatening. Also the Department of Corrections eliminates any waiting time for children by having their parents in the visiting area when they arrive. Rikers also makes exceptions to rules prohibiting anything from being brought into the visiting rooms by allowing children and their caregivers to come in with personal items such as food and diaper bags. The facility also gave a large locker for toys”
(Bilchik et al 2001:108)

This system at Rikers is reported as operating as a joint initiative between the Department of Corrections and City of New York Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) in recognition of a “shared mandate”.

Eyland (1996) acknowledges the delicate balance required of correctional administrators in considering issues surrounding visits and the issues of security and good order for the centres. However he clearly articulates the benefits of implementing program such as the Childrens Visitation Program (CVP) operating in Michigan and quotes Jose Kampffer (1991:133) who argues:

“children’s visitation programs can be put in place in prisons at almost no cost. They must, however, involve the inmates, the institution and the community”.

Eyland (1996:13) outlines the CVP program as described in Kampffer (1991):

“a visiting centre where there are no uniformed officers present, the visit lasts for three hours, the children are not accompanied by other adults so that they get to spend time alone with their parent, there is an extensive range of toys, games, art, reading and other educational materials provided and the governing body is comprised of ten inmates elected by the other inmates”

As Jorgensen;Hernandez and Warren(1986:47) conclude:

“It would be easy enough to dismiss current efforts to assist families of inmates as “too little too late” or as “do-gooder” projects. Even if that were true, we can only suggest that doing good and doing little are better than doing nothing”

Based on the findings of this ongoing research ACRO propose the following recommendations:

10. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUPPORTING STATEMENTS

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that when first visits are booked that written information be forwarded to visitors setting out the centre rules for visitors. This information should also include the location of the centre, visit times, visit duration, transport details and policy and procedures governing items which visitors can and cannot provide to inmates.

Provision of information to first time visitors

36.9 %of visitors indicated they received sufficient information prior to their first visit. Clearly there is room for improvement in this area as failure to have sufficient information often means being refused a visit or being unable to access visits. Visitors to Arthur Gorrie and Wolston reported the highest level of not receiving sufficient information. Whilst it would be expected that since these centres record the highest number of visitors that this may be the case it is none the less an area where improved information provision could be implemented.

It would be acknowledged by all parties that when booking their first visit families may be in a distressed state and even if staff provide information over the telephone it may not all be able to be taken in or remembered. Written information would help ensure that visitors are all provided with consistent and clear advice and assist visits staff in processing visitors more smoothly. A video or power point presentation for visitors may also assist in this process to reinforce information provided. It should not be left to visitors to seek out this standard information.

Recommendation 2

Since the ACRO bus service is funded by the Department of Corrective Services it is recommended that the bus service information be added to the standard information given to all visitors when booking their first visit at any centre in the Wacol area and that service details be included in any written information/ forms which visitors are required to complete.

Transport information to be provided as standard practice to all visitors

In a related matter only 15.5% of respondents indicated that they had been told about the ACRO bus service by correctional centre staff and 4.8 % of those respondents said only because they asked staff about transport to the centre. Clearly this is not an effective process as the majority of respondents (48%) had found out through friends and family, other visitors, word of mouth or pure luck. 9.5% did indicate they had been told by the inmate however this was often after they had been visiting for some time. 9.5% also indicated they had found the service directly through ACRO signs at the train station or contacting ACRO directly.

ACRO endeavours to ensure the centres and visits staff have good communication processes with the service through annual meetings with centre staff and regularly

providing fliers and brochures promoting the service. (ACRO signs are also erected at the Wacol train station). ACRO has also requested that all visitors be told of the service when booking visits and has requested that information about the service be included on or with the form which all visitors fill out when visiting a correctional centre. No written material produced by centres to date appears to include this information. At a meeting with centre staff in July 2001 Arthur Gorrie staff also agreed to include ACRO services in their power point presentation for visitors (to date visitors indicate no power point presentation for visitors).

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that complaints procedures should be clearly outlined and displayed in all correctional centres including contact details for the Ombudsmen.

In addition it is recommended that the Ombudsman's office consider providing promotional material to all correctional centres outlining their role in the process for the benefit of visitors.

Complaints/Grievance Procedures

It is of concern that 73.8% of respondents had no knowledge of any process by which they could make a complaint in relation to any concerns they may have in relation to visiting at the correctional centres. As large institutions dealing with the public (visitors) on such a considerable scale, it would seem prudent to ensure that all persons should be made aware of the complaints or grievance procedures to be followed. Anecdotal evidence indicates that prisoners are informed of grievance procedures during their induction process yet families/visitors receive no such information. ACRO has endeavoured to address this issue over the last few years by ensuring that complaints procedures for visitors are included in brochure material however this is not viewed as sufficient.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the Department of Corrective Services trial a properly constituted grievance process to enable families to voice their concerns through an appropriately structured and representative committee which could significantly reduce the level of stress and frustration experienced by visitors.

It is acknowledged that many visitors will not make a formal complaint in relation to issues or concerns they have simply because they perceive rightly or wrongly that the inmate will suffer as a result of any complaint. It is however essential that visitors are provided with the option.

It would appear from a review of the issues raised in the surveys conducted in 1988 and since that many of the issues raised by visitors could be dealt with most effectively through some form of grievance committee as recommended in this organisation's submission to the Kennedy inquiry. As recommended in that submission the committee would need to be properly constituted and establish clear processes to ensure that complaints were dealt with in a proper manner. Assessments would also need to be made as to the substance of grievances to ensure that frivolous and vexatious complaints do not tie up the time of such a committee. Such a committee could also make recommendations to the Department in relation to possible changes which would reduce the level of frustration often experienced by visitors. The Committee should report to the Minister for Corrective Services and produce an annual report. It is the experience of this organisation that in many cases

visitors are most often seeking accurate, factual information from a reliable source to assist them and those in custody to navigate the system. Such a process would also be an invaluable tool to the Department as there would be a single complaint mechanism rather than people being directed from one level of the system to another.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a working group be established including relevant departments and stakeholders to compare and determine the viability of community based childcare with on site limited duration child care for people with children visiting correctional centres. The process should include seeking funding for this child care initiative through a whole of government approach in recognition of the “shared mandate” for the client group across The Department of Families, Department of Corrective Services, local council, The Childrens Commission and Department of Housing (Community Renewal program - Goodna/Gailes area).

Limited Hours Child Care

It is clear from the survey results, anecdotal evidence collected through the Wacol Family Centre and from informal discussions with visits staff across the correctional centres that there is a high degree of support for the need for affordable limited duration child care services to be available for women visiting the centres. Such a facility, particularly if available on Saturdays as well as weekdays would significantly reduce the stress associated with visits for prisoners, visitors and correctional centre staff. Due to the increasingly stringent security measures being implemented in centres which include the prohibition of any toys, food or drinks being allowed to be brought in to centres it is becoming clear that correctional centres are increasingly not seen as environments where children can comfortably visit on a regular basis.

Submissions for such a centre to be established are not new. Such a recommendation was included in the 1988 visitor survey conducted by ACRO and other organisations including the Ipswich City Council have undertaken community consultations in relation to the need to establish such a facility in the past. Whether such a facility should be located in a near by local community setting or within the correctional centre setting needs to be established through effective consultative processes. However this is now a matter of urgency.

It is noted that the issues of child care and services for families of prisoners are prioritised as high need areas in the current community action plan devised by the Goodna/Gailes Community Renewal Reference Group.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that a review and implementation committee be established including suitable representation from the Department of Corrective Services, correctional centre representative/s, an inmate representative, visitor representative, ACRO representative, Childrens Commission representative and Department of Families, Youth and Community Care representative.

Establishment of A Representative Review and Implementation Committee

Rules governing visits

Survey findings indicate a number of concerns which visitors have highlighted in relation to the policies, practices and procedures which govern visits to correctional centres.

The Corrective Services Act (2000:83-84) defines the "Entitlement to visits" as follows

" A prisoner at a corrective services facility is only entitled to receive a visit from a personal visitor once a week and a legal visitor....A personal visitor must be a non contact visit, unless the person in charge otherwise approves that the visit be a contact visit"

Section 127 (7):86 of the Act states:

" The length of a personal visit is to be decided by the person in charge"

In the report conducted by Sir David Longland (1985:25) it was highlighted that there was:

" very limited access by prisoners to visits where a prisoner and his family may sit at a table without a physical barrier between them"

In the Kennedy Review (1988:178) a similar concern was raised:

" The QCSC³ must work at involving the families in corrections. There needs to be a careful balance between security of the prison during visits and the needs of the families. At the moment neither need is well met... In the longer term there needs to be re think about how the visiting areas operate in order to provide a high level of *family contact* . The system must positively encourage and welcome visits. Staff need to be specially selected and trained to operate in this area.. Visiting areas need to be friendly places where children can be accommodated in a family group contact"

Kennedy (1988:177) went further saying :

" Generally the over riding principle for corrective staff is that the families of prisoners are not being punished by the Crown for any crime and are entitled to be treated courteously and efficiently, and to be provided with any information they are entitled to receive. The denial of family visiting rights should rarely, if ever, be used"

In the current survey 20.2% of respondents indicated they had been refused a visit. Reasons ranged from arriving up to five minutes late for a visit, inmate transfers, their names not being on the visits list, insufficient ID, wrong footwear, (visitors are required to wear closed in footwear) and suspicion of drugs due to sniffer dog or positive ION Scan. Of those refused a visit none reported that they were offered a non contact visit as an

³Queensland Corrective Services Commission.

alternative. In light of the clear concerns raised in government funded enquiries into the prison system and recommendations particularly in relation to visits and families, it is of continuing concern that so many issues for visitors/ families appear to remain either unaddressed or in the case of contact visits actually appear to have reverted to a system clearly criticised by former independent inquiries. It is hard to envisage that those enquiries which speak of the need to improve visiting procedures for families would support the present situation where for example women and children cannot use a toilet during their visit for fear of having their visit cancelled.

It is clear from an examination of the literature in other jurisdictions that there is a significant amount of material available outlining practical strategies to address many of the concerns raised in this report. What does seem to be sadly lacking however in many cases is a body responsible for the implementation of the strategies, even in circumstances where government departmental staff have conducted the research and crafted the recommendations themselves. In the interests of ensuring action in relation to the findings of this research and that undertaken in other jurisdictions it is essential that such a committee for established.

The mandate for the committee would be to examine the series of common concerns expressed by visitors, develop balanced, workable action plans to address the identified needs and monitor progress on the following :

- Clear and comprehensive written information provided to all visitors to correctional centres (whenever possible) prior to their first visit.
- Transport services to correctional centres (particularly those funded by the Department of Corrective Services) included as standard information to all visitors.
- A grievance committee established to enable visitors access to proper complaints processes with it's role clearly articulated and well publicised.
- Limited Hours Child Care trial based on working party recommendations for either on site or local community setting
- Review of current visiting procedures, particularly in relation to those concerns highlighted by visitors (and in light of overseas visitor programs discussed), to ensure the implementation of a balanced approach to visits which demonstrates consideration of both security issues and the needs of visitors (particularly women and children).

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| Recommendation 7 |
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| It is recommended that the Family Centre support and Transport services operated successfully by ACRO be continued and extended to enable an integrated support services for families visiting correctional centres across the State. |
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It is evident from the survey findings that visitors accessing the family support and transport services operated by ACRO in the Wacol region value the services provided and consider that they significantly contribute to reducing the emotional and financial stresses on families. 84.5 % of respondents indicated that the service had helped make visiting easier and 89.2% rated the service 8 or higher out of ten. It is also clear however that for families visiting in other areas such facilities are not generally available and that visitors to correctional centres in those regions are more likely to be experiencing higher levels of

emotional and financial stress.

“Having a member of the family sentenced to serve time in jail is nothing more nor less than a sentence for the family. One person might have lost all his freedom and liberty on the ‘inside’, but the rest of the family ‘serve time’ in a different way on the ‘outside’¼..I think that in some ways, for some people, the sentence on the outside might be even harder than that being served on the inside”.

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Appendix B.

Table of postcodes, suburbs and tally of people from each.

| POSTCODE | SUBURB | TALLY |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------|
| 4011 | Clayfield | 1 |
| 4012 | Toombul | 1 |
| 4017 | Bracken Ridge/ Sandgate | 1 |
| 4032 | Chermside | 3 |
| 4051 | Enoggera/ Newmarket | 1 |
| 4053 | Everton Hills | 2 |
| 4054 | Keperra | 1 |
| 4065 | Bardon | 1 |
| 4074 | Jindalee/ Mt Ommaney | 1 |
| 4075 | Oxley | 1 |
| 4076 | Darra/ Wacol | 1 |
| 4077 | Durack/ Inala | 2 |
| 4101 | West End | 1 |
| 4112 | Kuraby | 1 |
| 4113 | Eight Mile Plains | 2 |
| 4114 | Woodridge | 3 |
| 4131 | Loganlea | 1 |
| 4132 | Marsden | 1 |
| 4133 | Waterford | 1 |
| 4157 | Capalaba | 1 |
| 4160 | Wellington Point | 1 |
| 4170 | Cannon Hill | 1 |
| 4171 | Hawthorne | 1 |
| 4207 | Beenleigh | 3 |
| 4210 | Oxenford | 1 |
| 4215/ 4220 /4225 | Gold Coast | 3 |
| 4228 | Tallebudgera | 1 |
| 4300 | Carole Park/ Gailles/ Goodna/ Camira | 8 |
| 4303 | Dinmore/ Riverview | 1 |
| 4304 | Booval | 3 |
| 4305 | Ipswich | 5 |
| 4341 | Hatton Vale/ Laidley | 2 |
| 4350 | Toowoomba | 1 |
| 4455 | Roma | 1 |
| 4500 | Bray Park/ Strathpine | 1 |
| 4510 | Caboolture | 3 |
| 4558 | Sunshine Coast | 1 |
| 4605 | Cherbourg | 1 |
| 4005/4006 | New Farm/Valley | 2 |

| | | |
|------|-----------------|---|
| 4702 | Baralaba | 2 |
| NSW | New South Wales | 1 |

4 other (4151 (1)) 4103 (1) 4127(1) 4061(1) unidentified. 10 did not answer this question.