



**Inquiry into Community Corrections**  
**ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**  
**17 February 2022**

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Asked by Dr Marisa Paterson MLA on 17 February 2022: Caroline Doyle on behalf of Prisoners Aid (ACT) took on notice the following question(s):

[Ref: Hansard Transcript – 17 February 2022, Page not yet available]

In relation to:

The special needs of women and transgender people in corrections system

Caroline Doyle: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

***Special needs of transgender people in corrections systems.***

Prisoners Aid has limited contact with people who identify as transgender whilst they are incarcerated and post-release in the ACT. We are therefore unable to provide insight into their special needs in corrections systems, we do however encourage future research to be undertaken into this area. It is possible that one of our interns this year might consider the topic suitable for their research project.

***Special needs of women in corrections systems.***

In the 2020/21 reporting period, almost 50% of our clients identified as women. Below, we provide some of the special needs of women in corrections systems and a case study of a woman we assisted in 2020. We also advocate for the need for a women's support worker based at the Prisoners Aid office at Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC).

**Compared with men, women face specific issues during incarceration and post-release.** For example, during incarceration, women often have limited access to services and programs, such as educational and work opportunities, and the mixing of remand and sentenced, as well as minimum- and maximum-security detainees (Easteal et al. 2015; McAllister 2019). *This is in part due to the relatively small number of women detainees and the difficulty of providing facilities equal to those provided for men.*

**Women tend to commit less serious offences and to commit them less frequently** (Baldry & Vinson 2000; Chesney-Lind 2000). Women offenders are more likely to be

motivated by factors related to gambling, alcohol or other drug misuse (Bloom 1999; Forsythe & Adams 2009). They are also more prone to perpetrate offences while under the influence of drugs and/or for the purposes of sustaining their drug use (Chesney-Lind 2000). *Such problems can be effectively dealt with if offenders can be placed on suitable rehabilitation regimes and supported during this time.*

**Women detainees have higher recorded levels of mental illness, trauma and substance misuse** (Allegritti 2000; Forsythe & Adams 2009), higher levels of physical, psychological and sexual abuse (Allegritti 2000; Bloom 1999; Corston 2007). Post-release, women generally have a greater level of care responsibilities and single parenthood is common (Allegritti 2000; Bloom 1999; Corston 2007; Bartels & Easteal 2019). For example, a recent report presenting the stories of 11 women detainees in the ACT identified the adverse effects on women who have their children taken into state care and feel strong need to reconnect with them (Women's Centre for Health Matters 2019). *Provision of close, ongoing support for women with such difficulties can be expected to improve their prospects of recovery.*

**The value of gender-responsive approaches that address the needs of women both during incarceration and post-release has been supported by research findings** (Andrews & Dowden 1999; Forsythe & Adams 2009; Turner 2010). Sydney (2005) argues that gender-responsiveness for women offenders requires a corrections environment that reflects an understanding of the realities of women's lives. Day et al (2018) recommend that policy-makers and practitioners should develop specific support services for women whilst they are incarcerated. Lack of post-release support and service is one of the major factors for women, and detainees in general, falling back into offending and returning to prison (Borzycki 2005). *There is a strong case in existing research findings for recognising the specific needs of women detainees and upon release.*

### **Case study**

- KK was referred by another organisation.
- Attended the Prisoners Aid office in the Magistrates Court. We assisted with food, clothing, transport and encouragement via mentoring.
- We also assisted KK with a letter of support for urgent housing via ACT Housing, Christmas Hamper, Food Bank cards, bus tickets, a woman's toiletries handbag and a range of presents for her children to open on Christmas day.
- Follow up phone call – KK had been granted a Housing ACT property and was in need of furniture and other household items.
- We sourced, picked up and delivered a queen bed frame and mattress, single bed frame and mattress, 2x single mattress, a bunk bed, 10 new pillows, towels, sheets, blankets, dining setting, lounge suite, coffee table and new cake/bread maker/mixer to cook with her children over the Christmas period. These items were sourced from Givit.
- KK was very emotional and appreciative of the support provided.

***The case for a Prisoners Aid women's support worker***

Given the unique challenges women face both in-prison and post-release we have advocated for a full-time women's support worker based at the AMC to provide support and assistance to women during their imprisonment and post-release. The support worker will make contact with a woman before she is released (up to three months beforehand) to ensure she has a suitable reintegration plan, including supports outside the prison. The Prisoners Aid staff member will continue to work with the women post-release for up to six months to provide moral support and to assist with any issues encountered post-release. We estimate that this position would require around \$110,000 of additional funding per annum.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Signature:

Date: Response received 22/02/2022

By Dr Caroline Doyle (President, Prisoners Aid ACT)