**Foreword**

This report describes the establishment of the Offender Programs Unit in the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services (DCS) as part of the policy to introduce evidence-based correctional programs.

After an overview of the literature that provides a context for this initiative, the report describes the structural changes in program delivery introduced since the 1990s. The creation of the Offender Programs Unit is then described, followed by an account of the unit's work to December 2006.

**Introducing Evidence-based Correctional Programs in New South Wales:**

**What worked**

Kevin O'Sullivan

The literature about re-offending and the NSW Strategic Accreditation Framework

For many years the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services (DCS) has provided group programs and one-to-one interventions in custody and in the community aimed at assisting offenders to change their offending behaviour.

In 2003, responding to growing international literature and to practice in other jurisdictions such as the UK, New Zealand and Canada, DCS adopted a Strategic Accreditation Framework (2003), setting standards for all program materials and for the sites where programs are delivered. The implementation of this framework has begun under the direction of the Offender Programs Unit, established during 2005-2006 (see [http://www.correctiveservices.nsw.gov.au/offender-management/offender-services-and programs](http://www.correctiveservices.nsw.gov.au/offender-management/offender-services-and-programs)).

The basis of the Strategic Accreditation Framework is the "risk, needs, responsivity" model as illustrated, for example, by Andrews, Bonta, Gendreau and others (e.g. Andrews et al., 1980; Andrews & Bonta, 1995; Bonta, 1996). A key to this approach is that correctional programs target "risk factors" that have been identified through meta-analyses as being implicated in re-offending. The context of this model is generally known as the "what works" literature which emerged in answer to the assertion by Robert Martinson that "nothing works" (Martinson, 1974, p. 25).

Briefly, studies suggest that programs based on cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) that address the individual's dynamic risk factors and are delivered in a way that maximises the individual's capacity to respond to them are likely to produce significant reductions in re-offending behaviour (see for example, Aos et al., 2006).

More recently, the responsivity principle, somewhat neglected by some authors, has been the subject of extensive research and comment by Tony Ward, Astrid Birgden and others in what is now referred to as the "good lives" model (Birgden, 2002; Ward & Stewart, 2003a, 2003b; Ward & Gannon, 2006; Eccleston & Ward, [in press]; Beech, Ward & Fisher, 2006). These authors emphasise the importance of motivation to change (McMurran & Ward, 2004) and argue that:

> an enriched concept of needs embedded in the notion of human well being can provide a coherent conceptual basis for rehabilitation and also avoid the problems apparent in the concept of criminogenic needs (Ward & Stewart, 2003a, p. 125).
Rather than examine the risk factors for re-offending, Shadd Maruna adopted a different methodology, interviewing offenders who had ceased committing crime or "desisted" from crime (Maruna 1997, 1999, 2000; Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Maruna & Immarigeon, 2004). Maruna examined the explanatory styles of active offenders and desisting ex-offenders. He found that active offenders tended to interpret negative events in their lives as being the product of internal, stable, global forces, whereas good events were the product of external, unstable causes. They found that desisting ex-offenders developed "narratives of desistance" attributing good events to internal, stable forces leading them to believe that a crime-free life was not only desirable but also possible.

The fourth area of enquiry that informs action on re-offending concerns therapeutic jurisprudence as "a framework for the study of the role of law" (Birgden, 2002) or "the use of social science to study the extent to which a legal rule or practice promotes the psychological or physical well-being of the people it affects" (Slobogin, 1995, p.196). It considers in what way the legal system contributes to a therapeutic intervention with the offender. "Therapeutic" here is used in the sense of being helpful to positive change.

It is the task of the Offender Programs Unit to ensure that programs that target the risk of re-offending are designed according to this literature, are delivered in a way that maximises program integrity and are evaluated as to their effectiveness.

Programs in NSW Prior to the restructuring of Offender Services and Programs

Generally speaking, prior to the late 1990s, correctional programs, especially in custody, were delivered in an environment characterised by considerable staff autonomy. Until comparatively recently the way in which programs were delivered in custody and the community also varied a great deal.

In custody, programs were delivered principally by alcohol and drug workers and, to a lesser extent, by psychologists and welfare workers. All these workers were recruited for their expertise and training. Therefore they brought with them into DCS a sense of what should be delivered and how it should be done. These staff were managed and/or supervised through Head Office and regional structures based on their disciplines rather than on their functions. These supervising structures communicated little with each other and there was little or no joint training, supervision and limited information-sharing. In the absence of a Department-wide strategic approach, local initiatives abounded.

This was less the case in community corrections where a limited number of standardised or "shelf" programs were in use. These programs were delivered either by probation and parole officers who were interested in doing so or by specialist facilitators recruited and paid on a contract basis. However, it was not unusual for these external facilitators to deliver program materials that they had developed themselves or had acquired from other sources. There was no oversight of such extraneous materials.

Local initiatives were often very creative and had the advantage of being tailored and responsive to local need. There was also a sense of local ownership of programs concepts and materials and an accompanying sense of empowerment for the staff devising and delivering the programs.

Perhaps one of the most significant disadvantages of this proliferation of local varieties was the lack of portability of programs. An offender could start an intervention available in one location that he or she could not continue or finish when moved to another. This led to a great deal of inefficiency with the program "wheel" being reinvented continually and offenders reporting that they had done, or at least started, what were apparently variants of, say, anger management or relapse prevention programs in a variety of locations. This was not an approach that facilitated Department-wide continuity in case planning or case management. It was also an approach that made program evaluation virtually impossible and this is borne out in the paucity of reports on program outcomes from this period. The evaluations that were written tended to be of process and to have little bearing on documenting a reduced risk of re-offending.

In an environment of such variety it was very difficult to report on what contribution programs were making to reducing the likelihood of re-offending for a given offender. This was as true between staff at different correctional centres as between custody-based and community-based staff. It was also difficult to provide accurate reports to bodies such as the Parole Board (now the NSW State Parole Authority) and the Serious Offenders Review Council.

In 1994, two positions were created within the Directorate of Psychological Programs to oversee the design and implementation of programs for sex offenders and violent offender respectively. These Statewide Clinical Coordinators had the task of designing programs based on the existing literature and best practice in their areas.

In 1998, the Probation and Parole Service (later called Community Offender Services) published a framework discussion document describing the importance of incorporating the findings of the literature into correctional program design and delivery (Caruana, 1998). Around the same time a survey of programs in correctional centres was carried out. This reported that many hundreds of programs were being delivered with no oversight of content, training or quality delivery. This highlighted the need for a coordinated statewide approach along the lines that had been taken in a number of other jurisdictions.

Plans were made for the creation of a Program Development Unit (later to become the Offender Programs Unit) and the publication of criteria for the accreditation of programs and the sites where they were to be delivered.

The Head Office structures that supervised the work of alcohol and drug workers, psychologists and welfare officers were also reconfigured with responsibility for programs strategy to be given to the Program Development Unit and responsibility for expert advice to be given to the newly created positions of Principal Advisor for Alcohol and Drugs, Principal Advisor Psychology and Principal Advisor Family and Community.

In 2001, DCS outlined a whole-of-government approach in its Corporate Plan:
A guiding principle of program development is a recognition of the need for integration between community based and institutional settings and the requirement for offenders to receive ongoing support if there is [sic] to be further significant gains in reducing re-offending. This process requires the building of strategic relationships with government and non-government agencies to enable offenders to access necessary services in a wide range of areas.

The approach provided a more fertile context for collaborative work. In 2002, DCS published the ‘Throughcare Strategic Framework’ describing the process by which staff could provide:

...a coordinated and integrated approach to reducing re-offending by people who are the responsibility of Corrective Services, from their first point of contact with the Department to the completion of their legal orders and their transition to law-abiding community living.

The establishment of the Offender Programs Unit

In 2003 the Department adopted the Strategic Accreditation Framework and in late 2004 the position of Manager, Program Development was created. Transition from the existing staff structures to the new model took around 16 months, with some positions being remodelled and others being created with enhanced funding from the NSW Treasury. By May 2006 the Offender Programs Unit was operational with a Manager, two Clinical Coordinators (for sex offenders and violent offenders), two senior program development officers (with special responsibility for staff training and quality services), and eight program development officers. Unit staff are drawn from a variety of backgrounds including alcohol and drug counselling, probation and parole, psychology, social work, teaching/adult education, nursing and welfare.

As a new unit within DCS, one of the first tasks was to clearly define the role and business and then to market these to the Department and to other stakeholders. With assistance from the Department’s Corporate Strategy staff, the unit identified its mission as a unit that:

promotes and ensures excellence in the design, production and evaluation of programs to offenders in the care of the NSW DCS.

In a presentation delivered many dozens of times across the Department, the unit outlined the principles under which it would work and what it would deliver to staff. The unit consistently marketed itself as an operation that would deliver services to colleagues across the Department in custody and community settings.

Working principles

The presentation outlined certain working Principles under which the unit would operate:

1. The primary objective of delivering programs to offenders is to reduce the risk of re-offending. This distinguished the unit from the providers of educational or mental health inputs who have their own accreditation criteria and standards of service.

2. In the case of certain inputs that about the safety and well-being of offenders, the unit is also the arbiter of program standards, training and evaluation. The Department’s Health Promotion programs are an example of this.

3. In delivering programs, priority is given to servicing high risk, high needs offenders. As these can sometimes be the most difficult group to engage, it was not unknown for groups to cater for more willing, articulate, engaged offenders who were often not in the moderate to high risk category.

4. Program planning is driven by assessment of need rather than by the offender’s choice to participate. This seeks to ensure that the right offenders have access to the right inputs according to their case plan.

5. Program design is according to agreed criteria. This reflected the unit’s central function of implementing the Strategic Accreditation Framework with all that this entailed.

6. All program activities are accounted for in some form of evaluation. The unit maintained that no program input should go unexamined so that ineffective practices could be eliminated and effective ones be promoted.

7. Program interventions need to be well-articulated across custodial and community settings. This does not necessarily mean that the same interventions should happen in both settings, but that the offender is not disadvantaged in terms of access to programs by being in one setting or another and that information about programs is shared among all relevant staff. (This theme will be further developed in a Practice Development Report in preparation)

8. Program interventions need to be delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.

Initial tasks

The tasks confronting the unit fell into several general areas: the creation of a strategic policy framework within which to operate, a review of current program provision with a view to identifying gaps, the creation of program training procedures for staff, and the building of an evaluation framework to examine program outcomes. The main vehicles for the dissemination of this work were the Department’s intranet and internet sites as well as many presentations to staff meetings, departmental workshops and training events.

Policy framework

At the time of the unit’s inception there existed only the Throughcare Strategic Framework already mentioned and the Strategic Accreditation Framework. This latter consisted of three sections: A general introduction describing the genesis of the document and the need that it met, Section A
describing the criteria for program design and Section B describing the criteria for site accreditation. What was missing were detailed procedures as to how a program would be submitted for accreditation, what the steps and the time-frame might be, how the outcome of the accreditation process would be reported, who would sign off the accreditation panel’s findings and many other details. The language of the Framework also needed to be edited to take account of the changes to management structures across the Department.

There was no departmental policy that described the relationship between the Offender Programs Unit and the process of accreditation, nor was there a position on what should happen to programs that were provided and delivered by persons outside DCS, such as the Alternatives to Violence Project, the Enough is Enough foundation and others.

It was also urgent to describe in some detail the approach that the Department took to each of the main domains in which programs were in fact provided. These were alcohol, drugs and addictions, aggression and violence, cognitive skills, community engagement and sexual offending. “Community engagement” is a term used here to describe the process by which the ex-offender resumes his or her efforts to live in the community, accessing accommodation, income, employment, education, leisure pursuits etc.

With the assistance of the Principal Advisors and the Clinical Coordinators, strategic summaries were compiled describing the approach the Department adopted in each program domain. These were posted on the Department’s internet and intranets sites allowing them to be updated regularly.

With the assistance of the Department’s Corporate Strategy staff, a business plan was also formulated and duly posted on both sites. With the assistance of the Department’s Offender Policy Unit, a number of policy proposals were submitted to the Board of Management for approval. These are referred to below.

**Program Materials**

The unit undertook a review of existing program provision which resulted in the creation of the Compendium of Correctional Programs in New South Wales. The first two editions of this volume were merely descriptive of the data we had collected about program provision. The third edition became prescriptive of what programs were sanctioned to run across the Department.

The process of reviewing program provision meant that a gap analysis could be performed giving a clear view of the adequacy or otherwise of programs available. The principal findings of this analysis were: 1) that the vast majority of programs being delivered targeted low risk offenders in a short-term, low intensity format and, 2) that programs available that were suitable for higher risk offenders had unacceptably low throughputs annually in comparison to the numbers of offenders who needed to be referred to them.

On the basis of the gap analysis, the unit set about developing, purchasing and modifying program materials that are described below.

**Staff training**

Most staff training in the Department is provided by the Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy. This is a Registered Training Organisation fully accredited to deliver training and qualifications under the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB). Within the Corrective Services Academy a small unit called the Offender Programs Training Unit (OPTU) provides staff training on a limited curriculum to mostly community-based staff.

However, it became clear that the OPTU did not have the resources nor the mandate to deliver the kind of program-related training that was needed. One of the Senior Program Development Officer positions in the Offender Programs Unit was therefore designated as Training Coordinator with the task of assessing training needs for program delivery staff across the Department and coordinating the work of the other unit staff, and others as required, to deliver this training. As part of this effort, all staff of the unit completed training in the Certificate IV course in Workplace Training and Assessment. At the same time, negotiations began to consider how the training activities of the Offender Programs Unit could usefully link to those of the Brush Farm Academy.

The unit has also supported and participated in the “planning-training cycle” for locations that deliver programs. Briefly, this means that by December of any given year, locations identify which are the programs they wish to deliver between July and December of the following year. The Offender Programs Unit Training Coordinator can then plan staff training for field staff in the six months between January and June so that all staff are prepared by the July deadline. This cycle is repeated for the following six month period, with managers submitting their next six-month program plans by June, so that training can take place for these in the July to December period.

The unit has identified core training modules that are prerequisites for all staff delivering programs. These are 1) An introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, 2) Motivational Interactions and 3) Group Process skills. Summaries of each of these are found on the unit’s website and they are further described in Practice Development Reports in preparation.

**Program Implementation and quality**

Implementing well-designed programs with well-trained staff in a way that preserves program integrity is beset with a variety of operational challenges.

These can include such simple issues as public transport for offenders and the availability of a suitable space. In the early stages of the unit’s work it was important to acknowledge with managers and staff in the field that they were being asked to do something different with regard, for example, to the intensity and length of programs and the thoroughness of pre- and post-assessment.
The unit staff needed to identify sites where managers and staff grasped the imperatives of the best practice described by the literature and were willing to work collaboratively to overcome implementation difficulties. This is a work in progress and relies on a genuine consultative process so that field staff do not feel their needs and constraints are being disregarded. Regular site visits by unit staff is crucial in establishing this working relationship.

The task of setting up a regular program audit process has begun, and this will be fully reported in a later paper in this series.

Program evaluation

The Department’s Corporate Research, Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) branch collects data on a variety of parameters mostly to do with the operations of the Department. CRES publishes an annual Research Program and posts a number of studies and summaries of their output on the Department website at www.dcs.nsw.gov.au.

Relatively little work has been done until recently on the outcomes of correctional programs and their links to re-offending. As noted above, the unit espoused the principle that every program activity should be accounted for by evaluating its effectiveness. The unit has embarked on several initiatives both within and outside the Department to promote, conduct and publish accounts of the implementation of programs and of their outcomes. Progress to date is described below.

Outline of Progress to December 2006

1. Policy Framework

The language of the Strategic Accreditation Framework has been revised and the Framework re-issued. Procedures have been written to facilitate the submission of program materials for accreditation and a progress chart has been developed to monitor the progress of all programs through the accreditation/approval process. By June 2007, all programs for moderate, medium-high and high risk offenders will have been submitted to the accreditation process.

Policies have been endorsed by the Board of Management concerning the role of the Offender Programs Unit and the provision of correctional programs by external providers. A policy on the provision of programs to Aboriginal offenders is currently under development. The unit has also contributed to the creation of National Standards for Correctional Programs.

Below is a list of all documents that are available in the unit’s newly designed internet site:

Policy resources on the Intranet
- Strategic Accreditation Framework
- Criteria for Programs
- Criteria for Sites
- Progress chart for the accreditation process
- Procedures for submitting a program
- Policy on the role of the Offender Program Unit
- Policy on external program providers

All these documents are now available on the unit’s newly designed intranet site and most are also available on the Department’s internet site.

Internal strategic partnerships are also being developed with units such as the Aboriginal Support and Planning Unit, the Community Offender Services Program Development and Implementation Unit, the Young Adult Offenders Program, the Throughcare and E-case Management Project and others.

2. Program provision

A review of the Department’s program provision has resulted in the publication of the Compendium of Correctional Programs in New South Wales. This publication lists the programs authorised for delivery to offenders and is updated regularly.

A detailed account of the Department’s strategy for each program domain has been developed. These include the areas of: aggression and violence, alcohol, drugs and addictions, cognitive skills, community engagement, sexual offending, female offenders, health promotion. These documents are all available on the unit’s intranet site and are reviewed periodically by the Principal Advisors, Statewide Clinical Coordinators and other Offender Programs Unit staff.

In each of these areas, the focus of program provision has been shifted to higher risk offenders. This has been achieved by the purchase, internal development or adaptation of program materials and by working in collaboration with the newly-established Offender Assessment Unit.

Programs that do not meet standards for effectiveness as described in the literature are being progressively withdrawn from use. For example, short-term alcohol and drugs programs with a heavily educational focus are no longer offered except as part of a readiness process. The same applies to short-term psycho-educational anger management programs.

Much greater attention is now being placed on motivational and other preparatory programs in order to maximise readiness for the offender about to engage in behaviour change.

The Compendium of Programs is now available for inspection or as a download from the intranet site. A summary of the Department’s activities in each program domain is also available as are more detailed descriptions of programs along with relevant reading materials. Where possible, given copyright issues, program materials are available on the unit’s intranet site.

The unit has also explored the delivery of programs through media other than traditional session plans in paper-based manuals. With assistance and advice

Program resources on the Intranet
- Compendium of Programs
- Program domain summaries
- Program matrix by risk level
- Related readings
- Who to contact in the Offender Programs Unit
- Policy on external program providers
from the Department’s multi-media unit, innovative approaches have been devised using PowerPoint, video and voice-over. This is particularly important to address the issues of program access in remote community locations or to allow materials to be streamed into cell when differing activities compete for the offender’s time.

3. Program training for staff

All staff of the Offender Programs Unit hold the Certificate IV in Workplace training and Assessment and have access to other training as required. The Training Calendar is published and updated regularly. In 2005, Offender Programs Unit staff provided training to 161 staff across the department including probation and parole officers, custodial officers, alcohol and drug workers, welfare workers and psychologists. In 2006, this increased to 12 programs provided to 353 staff.

Of particular significance has been the creation and roll-out of training in the basics of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) which, with Motivational Interactions and Group Work Skills have become core prerequisites for program delivery. The development of each of these programs is the subject of further Practice Development Reports in preparation.

Training in group therapeutic process has also been a priority for development and the first training group is due to commence by the end of the 2006-2007 financial year.

Unit staff have used video conferencing technology successfully and effectively to enhance training events with the virtual, interactive presence of remote experts. This has proved to be a cost-effective means of delivering training of the highest quality and is set to play an important part in future training.

Strong partnerships have developed between the unit and the Regional Project Officers responsible for staff training. This ensures an efficient use of resources and avoids duplication. The unit is also building a strategic partnership with the Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy to explore initiatives in the training of staff who deliver group programs. This may entail the extension of the current Certificate IV in Correctional Management to include these staff.

Training resources on the Intranet

- Training Calendar
- Online Training
- Introductory Sessions

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4. Program data collection

The unit has participated since September 2005 in a major project to create an efficient system of collecting data about participation in group programs. Beginning with paper-based records in October 2005, the project progressed through spreadsheet versions to a dot.net version shortly to be trialled. The program currently records only throughput data but will be enhanced to records qualitatively data also. Summaries of program activities will be posted on the unit’s intranet site from July 2007.

Reflective Practice resources on the Intranet

- Participation data for group programs (July 2007)
- Practice Development Reports
- Outcome Studies
- Links to relevant studies / sites

5. Community – custody links

The linking of program provision in the community and in custody is vital for many reasons. It avoids duplication and ensures continuity, it ensures that the offender has access to the to program participation in the most suitable location. These links will occur in a number of ways:

- Links through sequencing of programs: where one part of a program is delivered in custody followed by the next part delivered in the community (e.g. Drug and Alcohol Addictions program in custody followed by Relapse Prevention in the community).
- Links through the continuation of programs: where a program is commenced in one setting and finished in another (either one on one or in a group) following the manualised material.

6. Quality monitoring services

To guide the establishment of consistent quality monitoring procedures, a Senior Program Development Officer in the unit has been designated Quality Services Coordinator. Considerable progress has been made to date towards a set of standards and a process for audit, and this will be the subject of a further Practice Development Report.

7. Program evaluation

Program evaluation is planned is three stages:

1. preparation of commentary articles to describe the choice, accreditation, staff training and implementation of each program
2. collection of pre- and post-program data where possible to evaluate outcomes using proxy measures
3. assessment of the relationship of program participation to re-offending.

The unit is currently at Stage 1 in the case of most of the accredited and approved programs. Certain programs such as Think First, the Violent Offenders Therapeutic program and the Sex Offender Programs are at Stage 2 and outcomes from these are documented on the unit’s intranet site.
Introducing Evidence-based Correctional Programs in New South Wales: What worked...


REFERENCES


