



**BEST PRACTICE IN PROGRAM DELIVERY FOR  
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
OFFENDERS**

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## **Program Development**

Interventions for Indigenous people in correctional and institutional setting are underpinned by acts of parliament, that transpire to operational manuals, regulations, procedures and rules.

The statute that underscores the delivery of programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders in Queensland is the Corrective Services Act 2000. The Department of Corrective Services Procedures for Offender Management refers particularly to Section 190 of the Act in it's "Services and Programs to Help Offenders".

### **Corrective Services Act 2000 s 190**

Services and programs to help offenders

#### **190.(1) The chief executive must establish services or programs –**

- a. for the medical welfare of prisoners; and
- b. to help prisoners to be integrated into the community after their release from custody, including by acquiring skills; and
- c. to initiate, maintain and strengthen ties between offenders and members of their families and the community; and
- d. to help counsel offenders who are subject to community based orders.

(2) The services and programs must take into account the special needs of offenders.

Example-

Whenever possible, female doctors must be appointed to corrective services facilities for female prisoners.

My argument is that to attain best practice in the delivery of program to Indigenous offenders the ethnocentric framework for programs development needs to be discussed, reviewed and challenged. As with Indigenous research where the overarching focus is on scientific research. Where the complexity of Murri culture and values is often misinterpreted by western researchers and educators (Foley, 2000: 17). Western researchers, as with program developers view Indigenous values from within a structured ethnocentric model.

As there are differing value systems between the correctional system and Aboriginal Australia, plus complexities amongst and between Murri people, development of programs and correctional interventions should take into account every facet of the Aboriginal perspective.

In developing the Ending Family Violence Program there were many components that had to be addressed. My particular task was to develop a "correctional, Indigenous, rehabilitative, educational, therapeutic program" that could be delivered to men and women, in a custodial and community setting, and that it was congruent and provided continuity for programs accessed by Indigenous youth. Yet remain aligned with the Offender Programs: Department of Corrective Services Procedures for Offender Management.

The framework that I had to align my work with was an accountability document/proforma that underpins a programs policy. This proforma strives to attain program integrity in all programs developed within the correctional system. It achieved the purpose of providing a base from which to work. In developing the Ending Family Violence Program there were several elements that needed to be outlined and addressed in addition to providing the normal accountabilities to make the program culturally appropriate.

Additions to the list included; Program Implementation, Evaluation - Offender Feedback, Indicators for Successful Learning, The Rationale for an evaluation instrument (pre and post test), Delivery - How to Use the Manual, Timing of Delivery in the Offenders' Sentence Plan, Required Attributes and Skills of the Facilitator, Participant Support, Recommended Group Mix, Concerns to Note, Linkages to other Offender Programs, Linkages to Community, Inclusion Criteria, Exclusion Criteria, Definitions in this Context, Resource Requirements - Built environment - culturally appropriate and conducive to learning, Factors Underlying Effective Programming for Indigenous Offenders, Key Principles in Aboriginal Adult Learning.

Below is an example of the proforma used to develop correctional programs

**Program Development**

**Name of Program Developer:** .....

**Position:** .....

**Location:** .....

**Type of Program:** .....

**a) Identify Source of Established Need:**

**b) List Resource Requirements:**

**c) Document research reviewed:**

**d) Identify (i) theoretical base and (ii) specify elements of Rationale:**

*(i) Theory*

*(ii) Rationale:*

**e) List goal/s of the program:**

**f) Specify objectives of program, including target behaviours/functions to be addressed:**

**g) Document expected outcomes:**

**h) Summarise content topics:**

**i) List specific strategies/techniques to be used in program:**

**j) Specify framework**

*(i) Format:*

*(ii) Duration*

*(iii) Selection criteria:*

*(iv) Exclusion criteria:*

*(v) Optimum number of participants and facilitators:*

*(vi) Referral process :*

**k) Identify Evaluation Process**

## **l) Approval of Supervising Manager**

**Title:** .....

**Signature:** .....

The additions to the program proforma included the following:

### **Program Development (2)**

#### **Additions**

#### **Program Implementation:**

#### **Evaluation**

- **Offender Feedback**
- **Indicators of Successful Learning**
- **Evaluation Instrument - rationale for pre and post test**

The purpose of the pre-program questionnaire is to assist with an overall evaluation of the Ending Family Violence Program, that incorporates a pre and post program test for participants.

This test will investigate any indicators of cognitive change by analysing word usage, the participants notion of responsibility and self reports on their view of violence and the cause of their incarceration. Analysing how participants construct their life experiences through the language they use may be useful as a strategy in changing the clients experiences or how they approach a problem area in their lives. The questionnaire is useful to gauge whether or not the participant is making a commitment to change.

It is the challenge of the facilitators to use these communications both written and spoken of the participant to reconstruct cooperatively the experiences and perspectives of the participant and thus create a therapeutic environment. This is a narrative approach to intervention. (Chen, Noosbond & Bruce 1998).

The pre-program questionnaire can be beneficial to the program is administered correctly. It can assist in raising motivation of participants and may have an effect of creating the beginnings of being insightful.

#### **Delivery**

- **How to Use the Facilitator Manual: Program Format**

The program consists of 10 modules which are called sessions. The sessions are packaged sequential to assist with a progression through the rehabilitation process. The program is targeting male indigenous offenders of violence towards a family or community member, but however concepts are mostly gender neutral allowing the program to be delivered to indigenous female offenders.

Two hours are allocated for each session but this can be used as a guide depending on the learning needs and needs of the group. The time span for delivery of each session may vary depending on the variations of individual attributes in the group makeup. There is no set timetable such a one or two sessions per week as the program is developed for a delivery framework that depends on the systems of target audience environment. In that in a remote community setting the program can be delivered over a period of one week given the logistics and economy of delivering in isolated and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Delivery should be as flexible as possible to accommodate the needs of the target audience.

Generally it is important to follow group energy and interest. Incorporation of energisers is best for lulls in energy levels. The program has basic concepts that can assist with transference of knowledge. For the program to be effective these basic concepts must be retained, however the mode of delivery is at the discretion of the facilitator who may have different strategies to approach teaching the concept. It is recognised that different localities may require adaptations of concepts and content to suit the environment of the target audience.

Facilitators are to note instructions in italics

- **Timing of Delivery in the Offender's Sentence Plan**
- **Required Attributes and Skills of the Facilitator**

An evaluation of the effectiveness of Corrections programs for Indigenous offenders found that facilitators identified certain characteristics that facilitators should possess in order for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders to benefit from programs.

The ability to motivate and be flexible were of equal and highest importance. The ability to build rapport, identify and communicate with offenders, and have a degree of community awareness falls into the attribute of being culturally aware. Program experience and group work is also of high importance.

It would be beneficial that facilitators have prepared appropriate group experiential activities to inject in the program to assist with learning and to combat attention deficits.

- **Participant Support during program**
- **Recommended Group Mix**

It is recommended that the group be restricted to 10 – 12 participants, with the majority of participants being from a common area of origin or from a common age bracket. However, older participants and participants from a different area of origin, who may possess insight and experience can be of benefit to the group in providing a different perspective of life conditions and events.

Look for the attributes, of heightened levels of self esteem, levels of motivation and levels of respect from peers as this may be a catalyst in forming good group dynamics.

### **Concerns to Note**

This program is a cognitive behavioural model that is aimed at behaviour change. It will raise issues that will need to be carefully and sensitively managed in a safe and trusting environment, that is why group building, dynamics and maintenance are an integral part of the program.

It may not be possible to meet the needs of everyone in every session, but however if participants presents themselves for further discussion and individual counselling or therapy, then procedures should be put in place to accommodate them outside of the program.

Personal self disclosures that are totally irrelevant to the session contents should be noted by the facilitator, and best discussed outside of the group. Any self disclosure can be used as a tool to effect reflective thinking by the participant, if reframed in a respective mode that challenges dysfunctional values and thinking.

## **Linkages to Other Offender Programs**

The Department of Corrective Services has programs that cover similar concepts and issues as the Ending Family Violence Program, such as Anger Management, Cognitive Skills, Substance Abuse, Ending Offending, Domestic Violence etc. This program provides facilitators with an opportunity to draw on insights gained through involvement in such programs.

## **Linkages to Community**

With delivery in a community setting, the inclusion of outside community organisation, community role models and respected community people is highly encouraged, as the department recognises the reciprocal benefits of community involvement in programs for indigenous people.

Community people are the experts at giving a community context to a program, as scenarios, self disclosures and points of relevance are more easily recognisable to the participant. Up to date information about community initiatives and services are vital in supporting participants post program and post incarceration.

## **Inclusion Criteria**

The following criteria should be used to include an offender in the program:

- Indigenous offenders with a criminal record that includes a domestic violence charge.
- Indigenous offenders with a criminal record as a result of a violent act towards other family or community persons.
- Indigenous offenders who have identified violence as an issue they want to work on.
- Indigenous offenders who are motivated to change

## **Exclusion Criteria**

The following criteria may exclude the offender from the program:

- Unmanaged psychiatric disorder or symptoms of severe depression, mania or anxiety.
- Those persons who do not identify or are not recognised as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait or South Sea Islander descent.

An applicant to the program in relation to the first criteria may participate if he or she are deemed to be suitable after consultation with relevant medical, psychiatric and community persons.

## **Definitions in this Context**

- **Family Violence**

When an adult or child is abused by another member of their family, who may not necessarily live in the same house. This abuse includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Due to the structure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems, Family violence may have ramifications throughout Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- **Rehabilitation**

To extinguish the drive or behaviour that caused the offence and has addressed other contributing factors that may have precipitated the behaviour or drive. (or) Restore the ability to cope effectively with life conditions and a life free from crime.

- **Reintegration**  
A pathway to bring or come back into the community
- **Restitution**  
Reparation to the victim of a crime. Victims include the offenders family and community, victims family and community and self.
- **Interventions**  
Any service, program, therapy, process, procedure, course, event, initiative, strategy, approach or purposeful interaction that facilitates a helping relationship or interaction between the offender and the service provider.
- **Culturally Appropriate**  
The proposition that the intervention or interaction is acceptable and aligned with the cultural practices of Indigenous Australian thereby ensuring effectiveness (or) Modes of suitable interventions that take into account the users culture which can be defined as a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, and any other capabilities acquired as a member of a specific society.
- **Gendered**  
Phenomena identifying the specific difference between genders

### **Resource Requirements**

- Built environment - cultural environment conducive to learning
- Area of room that accommodates 12 adults comfortably
- White Board
- TV and Video
- Pencils and rubbers

### **Factors Underlying Effective Programming for Indigenous Offenders**

It is recognised that the Ending Family Violence Program for Indigenous offenders should take into account correctional factors that underpin effective programming. These factors are: **the degree of risk for reoffending, the level of need, the responsivity factor and program integrity.**

In relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders determining effective programming by focusing on these factors is useful if cultural appropriateness is given due regard. The factors cannot be viewed as single instruments, but must be approached in an holistic manner, given the unique nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life conditions.

The risk factors states that the level of treatment should match the risk of re-offending to the level of service provide. With Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders who have committed offences of violence against their family and community, the risk of re-offending is high given that he or she will be returning to a community where the violence is prevalent. This means that the Ending Family Violence Program should be delivered with a high degree of intensity to Indigenous offenders who have violent offences against their family and community or breaches of Domestic Violence Orders.

The accessibility of this program, or to be eligible, is dependent on the assessment instrument (ORNIA) Offender Risk Need Inventory Assessment, which is a comprehensive assessment of an offender's risk of general criminal re-offending and match these criminal needs to appropriate rehabilitation programs. The ORNI even though there are discriminatory elements, still assesses the needs by also using a cultural emersion instrument, through a discretionary component.

The need factor is based on the idea that interventions should target known predictors of criminal behaviour. It is arguable that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander would fall into the category of prediction for criminal behaviours given the likelihood of exposure to, experiencing, vicariously experiencing the predictors both dynamic and static. In that if companions, interpersonal conflict, social achievement, substance abuse, and family factors were used as indicators for offending then the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be offending.

The Ending Family Violence Program is targeting males with the objective of instilling raised levels of self esteem. Even though self esteem is weakly related to reoffending, in relation to Indigenous offenders, it is a more holistic approach to changing thinking patterns and empowering.

The Ending Family Violence Program is a cognitive behavioural program that is responding to the specific needs and characteristics of the target offender population. This is the responsivity factor of the program where the intention is to develop and deliver a culturally appropriate program that might enhance its effectiveness. It is recognised that the attributes of the offenders, their learning styles, levels of motivation and cognitions needs to be a component of the delivery mode. The program facilitators are encouraged to be flexible in the delivery of the program, yet retain the major concepts and learning material. The uniqueness of the target audience sanctions the reliance on professional judgement in program delivery. The integrity of the program may be questionable, under the precept of professional judgement, however, the program is structured to follow departmental requirements.

### **Key Principles in Aboriginal Adult Learning**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander because of the diversity in social backgrounds and very different upbringings from non-indigenous Australians have unique ways of learning that should be noted in program delivery. These are briefly outlined:

Based on an informal learning approach: (Andrews & Hughes, 1993:21)

- Learning is through observation and imitation rather than through verbal instruction, oral or written.
- Learning through person trial and error as opposed to verbal instruction accompanied by demonstration.
- Learning is achieved through real life performance rather than through practice in contrived settings.
- Learning is on mastering context specific skills rather than teaching abstract context-free principles which can be applied in new previously inexperienced situations.
- Learners are more person orientated rather than information oriented. Meaning that Aboriginal learners assess and respect the teacher more on the basis of how they relate as persons, rather than according to how they perform as teachers.

Summary of useful strategies:

- Develop a strong pupil - teacher relationship.
- Use the out of doors environment wherever possible.
- Employ learning through practical experience
- Suit the curriculum to the environment
- Use travel as a means of education wherever possible.
- Encourage the development of powers of observation.
- Use repetition with careful variations
- Present a challenge to the learner
- Involve members of the community wherever possible

## **Conclusion**

Correctional Educational and Therapeutic programs are often modeled upon the western ideal of what is beneficial and what works in a correctional setting are underpinned by a western paradigm.

An example being literacy programs which are localised programs with their own literacy assessment tool. The Ending Family Violence Program even though using the department's framework for program development is taking into account the cultural differences and diversity between and amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offender populations.

The correctional system should put more of an emphasis on correctional education rather than developing just therapeutic interventions. The task is to not develop educational and therapeutic programs that fit all Murri offenders, as there are specific needs that are localised and gendered and often forgotten in program interventions.

It is recognised that there is a need to develop further, review by community and corrections and maintain "Maintenance Programs". \* Programs that maintain life and emotional well being.

Even though there are programs frameworks that are ethnocentric in nature, in a culturally tolerant organisation that has policies on interactions and relationships between workers and for the management of "special needs" offenders, navigating of complex accountabilities is achievable if you ask for clarity, acknowledge others skills and roles, acknowledge your skills, become knowledgeable of rules (written and unwritten), and not to work antagonistic to systems, but work within them to achieve change.

## **References**

Foley, D. 2000. *Indigenous Research*. The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education. Vol 28 1 (2000):17