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LIFE CHANGING

THE TRANSITION TOOLKIT

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The toolkit can be downloaded from the VACRO website at **vacro.org.au**.

PREPARING TO USE THE TOOLKIT

A NOTE FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH FAMILY MEMBERS USING THE TRANSITION TOOLKIT

The Transition Toolkit has been prepared to assist families who are soon to be reunited with a family member being released from prison; and who may be feeling anxious about what might happen when their family member comes home. It has also been developed as a tool for professional workers to provide relevant support and guidance for these families. The Toolkit does not have all the solutions. It has been designed to help begin conversations – sometimes about matters that are hard to talk about – and help work toward solutions for every member of the family.

The feelings and anxieties experienced by all family members can have an impact on the successful transition of the person being released. Additionally, while the family member who has been released from custody is usually determined to stay out of prison, often these good intentions don't turn out as imagined. This is often because insufficient thinking and planning was done in the time leading up to release and in the very early days after release. **A successful transition depends on everyone being aware of what some of the barriers to success might be and then planning how these barriers might be reduced or removed.**

The Transition Toolkit has been developed to assist people begin to think about what they have felt while their family member has been in prison, and more importantly, what the issues might be for everyone when their family member has been released. **We strongly recommend that family members are provided with professional assistance to work through the Transition Toolkit** as it contains some fairly confronting questions about some of the issues that may result in significant emotional turmoil. Ideally, all family members should be involved in working through the Transition Toolkit, as they will each have their own issues to discuss.

It may be that the ideas raised in the Transition Toolkit are not all relevant to everyone's situation, and that there are other issues that will be identified. The important thing is that family members are supported to think about and discuss them.

If the family chooses to do so, the Transition Toolkit can also be used to develop a Family Transition Plan which will help family members support each other and plan for the release of their family member.

WHAT IS FAMILY?

Every **family** is different, and the word **family** means something different to every person.

We can't tell anyone what it means to them. In reality, the notion of **family** is very flexible, and each person's situation will decide who it is that they call **family**. The only thing we assume is that the **family** who work together on the Transition Toolkit are the people who want good things for each other. They will be the people who are there for each other when things get tough and are the ones who put up with each other when no one else will! They are the people who want the family member's homecoming to be a success.

AS A FAMILY MEMBER WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO OFFER?

When you use The Transition Toolkit, the **family** involved will be the people who are genuinely interested in the successful transition of the person about to be released from prison. If you are reading this, you are probably one of these people. You may be married to the returning family member. Your family member might be the father or mother of your children. You might be a parent of the person coming home. You may just be a great mate.

Did you know that people released from prison are *most* likely to commit a new crime or breach their parole during the first few months after their release, and by doing so run a very high risk of returning to prison? Did you also know that research conducted in America concerning the success rates of men released from prison showed that the support received from their family and other social networks after they had been released was *the most important factor* in keeping them from returning to prison? (Bayse 1991:208)

You are one of those people who can help the person about to be released succeed in staying out of prison while getting on with the rest of their life! This makes you a very important person. But it is going to take honesty and hard work. It will require commitment and co-operation from family members.

Families are a huge natural resource as they look after each other when no-one else will. No one knows your family members better than you. What's more, families have a realistic, 'warts and all' understanding of each other and what is required to keep each other going. If you are serious about helping your family member stay out of prison and work toward a successful future, it's that strength and understanding that you will be drawing upon as you work through the Transition Toolkit.

Having said all of this, it is important for you to know that it is NOT your responsibility to keep your family member out of prison. You can provide support and help in whatever way you feel able to, to ensure the wellbeing of the whole family unit. The returning family member is responsible for their actions, and for the consequences of those actions. By remaining in the relationship you have shown you care and have provided a focus and a goal for that person to aim for when they are released. You can give love, support and security and help them on their way back into society. If they return to prison it is because they have made certain decisions. It will not be your fault.

AS A FAMILY MEMBER WHAT DO YOU NEED?

During the time your family member has been in prison, you and other members of your family have had to manage as best you can – often without much support or understanding from others about what you might have been going through. No doubt there were times that you would have felt as though you were on an emotional rollercoaster – with highs and lows coming thick and fast. The time leading up to the release of a family member from prison is also a particularly emotional one for all concerned.

I FOUND IT REALLY HARD TO TELL ANYONE... I WAS SO WORRIED THEY WOULD JUDGE ME AND MY CHILDREN (PARTNER)

The emotional issues that you will have experienced during this time are very personal and frequently very complex. Everyone involved will have different feelings and issues that they need to think through and talk about. Members of your family may not have wanted to think honestly about what they have been feeling about the past and what might happen in the future. Ignoring these feelings doesn't make them go away. They will continue to be there, bubbling along just under the surface. They also might just pop out when least expected – and not always at a good time or in a positive way. As we all know, this can often cause us to do or say something that we regret, sometimes with unhappy consequences.

You may all be feeling very excited about the forthcoming reunion with your family member. You may have waited a long time for this reunion. What's more, your children will have their missing parent returned to them and no doubt you are all looking forward to moving on, together, as a family. That's the good stuff.

But, with every release, there are things that are not so good and quite a few things that need to be thought about and addressed if your family reunion is to really be a success – and we are assuming that this is your final goal. We will present some of these issues in the following pages of the Transition Toolkit and will be asking you to answer some fairly confronting questions about each issue with thoughtfulness and honesty.

To help you do this, we strongly recommend that you and your family seek professional help to assist you to work through the Transition Toolkit. This help can come in the form of a professional counsellor or psychologist, a support worker or social worker. This person should be someone you feel comfortable with, and someone to whom you can speak openly and with honesty. The benefit here is that this person has no emotional involvement in your family situation. It also means they will not always tell you what you want to hear. Instead, this person will help you to clarify and understand your particular issue or issues, and will then help *you* find your solution to the issue in question.

I WAS VERY NERVOUS ABOUT HIS RELEASE, MORE SO THAN DURING THE COURT PERIOD. HE WAS SO MOODY, IT FELT LIKE WE WERE WALKING ON EGGHELLS. (MOTHER)

In the end you and your family may choose to work through the Transition Toolkit on your own. If this is what you decide then just remember that honesty is *critical*. If you are not honest while working through the Toolkit then you are probably wasting your time. You must be honest about what you are feeling and be prepared to speak the truth.

Remember, if at any point you feel as though you are not making headway, or that you have hit a stumbling block there is always the opportunity to reconsider, and to ask for professional help. The most important thing is that you find the best way to help you to prepare for your family members' homecoming.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE TRANSITION TOOLKIT

If your family member genuinely wants to stay out of prison once released, they can't expect to just pick up where they left off. They can't walk back into your lives without understanding that things have changed for you, and without being prepared to change the attitudes, behaviours and habits that put them in prison in the first place (or that keep sending them back). That's what this Transition Toolkit is about. Getting you and your family to think about how things were, identifying what things will need to change and then helping you work out how you can make those changes.

YOU HAVE TO PUT THE PRISON STUFF ASIDE AND WORK ON REBUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP AND THE TRUST. THE REST WILL WORK ITSELF OUT. (MOTHER)

Communicating with each other

Communicating means talking, and getting your point of view across takes practice. When your family member comes home you need to talk about the things you've thought about while you've been separated, and while you have worked through the Transition Toolkit. Some of what you all have to say might not be very pleasant to listen to either. If strong feelings are involved this can lead to conflict. Below are some ideas about how you can reduce conflict when it arises and make your communication count!

- › *Really* listen respectfully to everything that is being said and let the other person finish, without jumping in. Talk openly and discuss fears and concerns frankly;
- › If you don't understand what was said or what they meant, ask them to explain further. Keep asking until you do understand;
- › You may not agree with the other person's point of view, but remember it is their view and should be respected;
- › Use "I" statements. They are honest, and no one can argue with what you feel. For example "When you did that I felt ..."

- › If things become heated step back and call a break to calm down and think the situation through. You might only need half an hour, you might need until the next day – take however long you need for the heat to go out of the situation – then begin again;
- › Don't play power games. For example, contact with children should never be used. Children have the right to see their parents unless it is harmful to them. Relationships are not about power – about one person being the 'boss'. Successful relationships are based on mutual respect. If you find you can't agree, try to negotiate a compromise solution that has a 'win' in it for all concerned.
- › Don't use abuse or insults to try to force them to accept your message. Try not to become angry or raise your voice. Physical violence is illegal. If any of your family members communicate with violence, find someone outside who can help stop this destructive behaviour. You will never communicate openly while there is the threat of violence in the room.

TRY PROBLEM SOLVING

Sometimes when you are working on trying to change a situation you may feel as though you have hit a barrier that is impossible to get past. It might seem as though it is just too difficult to think about or talk about so you just ignore it. However, if you are serious about making changes, problem solving skills will help you and they are skills that can be learned by anyone! These are the key steps to follow.

1. IDENTIFY WHAT THE PROBLEM IS

It is important to identify what the **REAL** problem is. For example, the problem might appear to be that one of the children is uncommunicative and doesn't say much. You find yourself having to nag for answers to your questions. This makes you feel concerned or maybe even angry.

At first you think that they are just moody and it will pass, when perhaps the **real** problem is that they are anxious about their parent being released and coming home. They might be worried about how family life will be after prison, particularly if drugs, alcohol or violence were involved previously. The **REAL** problem then, is not that they don't **want** to talk to you; it's that they don't want to seem negative or put more stress onto you. Although it takes time and might be difficult, you must identify the problem before you can deal with it.

2. TALK ABOUT POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS WITH EVERYONE WHO IS INVOLVED

The only way to identify possible solutions to the **real** problem is for everyone to talk it through and come up with ideas about how to solve the problem or problems. Be open to whatever solutions are offered rather than discounting things that seem silly. Make a list that includes all the suggestions that have been offered. With the above issue it might be:

- › to write down everyone's fears (including the person about to be released)
- › to make some family pacts e.g I will tell you straight away if you upset me
- › we will have a family meeting if we think there are drugs being used

3. CONSIDER EACH SOLUTION

Seriously think about each of the solutions that have been offered. Think about what might be required to put that solution into practice. Is it possible? What resources might be needed? Is professional help required? What impact will each possible solution have on other members of the family?

4. DECIDE ON A SOLUTION

Having seriously considered each solution decide on what appears to be the best one and then think about how you can try it out. If it requires you to seek out professional support or assistance to put the solution into practice, do so. Give the solution a fair trial, and then think about if it is working.

5. EVALUATE

If the solution that you have tried doesn't work, go back to the list you prepared and select what appeared to be the next best solution and start again. Sometimes problem solving is a trial and error process. It is only by trying out possible solutions that you will solve the problem. In the process you might also learn a little bit more about the problem, so that you are able to make a more informed decision about the solution that will best solve it.

You will find that using the Transition Toolkit can help you talk about the concerns that you and your family may have. Using the example of the child, mentioned above, the Transition Toolkit provides the opportunity for you to talk to your child about their concerns, and to plan how you can help address those concerns.

THE TRANSITION TOOLKIT

MEETING OUR DIFFERENT NEEDS

1. THE ADULT RELATIONSHIP:

You may have mixed feelings about the return of your family member. This is understandable. As the partner it's been you who has kept things together during this prison sentence. Everyone's situation will be different. Some may have felt abandoned or have lots of unresolved anger about what prison has done to their relationship. Some may resent the financial drain on already scarce resources.

I CAN'T EVEN AFFORD TO BUY MY GRANDCHILDREN PRESENTS, AS I AM ALWAYS RUNNING BACK AND FORTH TO SEE MY SON. (MOTHER)

Or resent the fact that while your partner has been receiving three square meals a day you've been struggling to pay the weekly grocery bill and provide for your children. Others may be fearful of what might happen when your family member returns, particularly if drugs, alcohol, violence or abuse were part of your relationship before prison, or if you accepted certain behaviours before prison and you know your family member has not said they are prepared to change those behaviours post release.

"I KNOW THERE ARE PRESSURES FOR HIM, BUT IT SEEMS EASIER FOR HIM. THE CHILDREN NEVER SAW HIM BEFORE – HE WAS ALWAYS AT WORK. NOW, HE CAN READ THE PAPER EVERY DAY, PLAY TENNIS, RELAX. I HAVE TO MAKE ALL THE DECISIONS FOR THE CHILDREN – I'M A SOLE PARENT. WE HAD TO MOVE HOUSE AND THE CHILDREN HAD TO GIVE UP SO MANY THINGS, INCLUDING CHANGING THEIR SCHOOL. I LIVE WITH MY PARENTS NOW AND IT'S REALLY HARD. I'LL GET USED TO IT, I SUPPOSE." (PARTNER)

Some of you will have lost friends or had to deal with anger, resentment or rejection from other family members because you have chosen to maintain your relationship with your partner. There may have been intrusive, unfair publicity and your children might have faced bullying or ridicule at school. There may be anxiety about all the triggers that could cause your family member to re-offend. What are you going to do when the drinking, gambling or drug use starts up again?

As a family member you may have had to deal with some or all of these issues and possibly more, so it's understandable if you feel anger and resentment toward your family member and anxiety about the reunion. You have both changed too. Family life has changed. Children have grown, parenting roles have changed and family members have assumed roles and responsibilities that they might not want to now give up.

You have both been living without the other person for some time. When your partner is released, no doubt intimacy will be high on the reunion agenda. You need to think carefully about contraception, particularly in the early post-release days. Will a new baby make matters any easier? Also be aware that in prison, the risk of contracting a blood borne disease is greatly increased as infection can occur through drug use or situations such as acquiring a tattoo while in custody. This is a potential risk for any partner. It is really important that if you have any concerns about potential health risks to you from infections or viral hepatitis (for example) that you talk about your concerns with a medical professional *before your reunion as a matter of priority.*

The rules that apply in prison don't apply on the outside. In prison days and nights are regimented and filled with demands and routines. It's likely that there will be tensions and interpersonal difficulties as your family member acclimatises to a life on the outside that is free of rules about what to do when, and where everyone is responsible for their own actions and routines. For a successful transition to take place there will need to be some serious thinking and discussion about each family member's feelings and emotions. You may have all shut down emotionally during this prison sentence, slipping into survival mode – a bit like being in a war zone, perhaps ignoring feelings and emotions with the plan of dealing with them after release. Resentments and anger will need to be talked about openly, and really listened to.

The best way to do this is to talk as a family, so that all family members understand how each other is feeling. While it is hard, exploring emotions is actually therapeutic and really useful. If you listen and use the problem solving steps mentioned earlier to find genuine solutions, you can build trust and help to strengthen the family relationship.

Checklist of some family relationship issues/questions to think or talk about. You may not see these issues as relevant to your family situation, and have other relationship issues you feel are important. Just remember to speak openly, with respect and to listen to what is being said.

- › What was your relationship like before prison? What do you want from your relationship now? Is it different?
- › Has time in prison harmed the relationship? Is there unresolved anger or resentment that needs to be worked through? How can this be done?
- › Is it clear what you really expect of each other?
- › Do you really talk to each other about your problems? Are you all able to talk honestly and listen to each other respectfully, with the goal of resolving everyone's concerns?
- › Even if you don't agree are you each willing to accept another person's suggestion if this is what the rest of the family wants, or do you feel as though you need to win every argument? Are you able to 'agree to disagree'?
- › Should you be seeking professional help or counselling for relationship issues?
- › Does everyone feel that their emotional needs are supported by the family?
- › Do you trust each other or do you sometimes feel lied to or deceived? How can this be changed?
- › When was the last time you said 'sorry' to your family member/s and really meant it? Is this an issue?

2. THE CHILDREN:

Children with a parent in prison are more likely to experience low self esteem and exhibit troubled behaviour both at home and at school. With this comes a significant risk of school achievement being impacted or aggressive classroom and schoolyard behaviour being exhibited.

WE REALISED THAT THERE WERE A LOT OF PROBLEMS AT SCHOOL, HE WAS REALLY STRUGGLING AT HIS HIGH SCHOOL, GETTING PICKED ON A LOT. (PARENT)

During the time their parent was in custody some children may have had a change of caregiver, a change of address and a change of school! No wonder they might be feeling insecure, or become withdrawn, isolating themselves from their friends. Some will have experienced anxiety or depression, have worried about the absent parent and may even have felt in some way guilty for what has happened. Others may have been present at the time of arrest, and were traumatised by what was seen or heard.

THE CHILDREN ARE VERY WORRIED ABOUT WHERE THEIR DAD IS AND WHAT IT'S LIKE IN PRISON – IS HE OKAY? (PARENT)

They may have been bullied or as a means of self-protection they may even have become the school bully. Sadly too, the child or children may be feeling the increased stress or anxiety of their parent or caregiver during this time.

On the other hand some children may not know where their parent is; only that the parent is gone. This uncertainty and lack of information can further undermine their ability to cope and cause them to become more anxious and fearful.

IF YOU LIE TO YOUR CHILDREN YOU ARE DESTROYING THEIR TRUST IN YOU, WHEN THE OTHER PARENT HAS ALREADY LET THEM DOWN.
(PARTNER)

If their absent parent has been away for a number of years, during that time the children have continued to change and grow. Children in this situation sometimes worry that their absent parent won't know or understand them now.

There is also a significant fear of the unknown for many children who have a parent returning home after time spent in prison, particularly if they have been in the care of another family member in a safe and tension-free environment. The children will now have formed loving relationships with the new caregiver that neither they nor the caregiver want to end completely.

If the parent's sentence involved drugs or alcohol, the child might become very anxious that their parent will be returned to prison if they see the parent continuing to use or abuse drugs or alcohol post-release. Raised voices or conflict may trigger all sorts of memories and terrors for them, if family violence occurred in the past. A misplaced toy might trigger a fear in the child that their parent has once again begun selling off household items to make enough money to buy their drug of choice.

Remember that children copy other family members. A research survey recently found that of 568 boys already involved with Youth Justice Services between the ages of 10.7 – 13.9 years, nearly 32% had an arrested father or stepfather (Farrington et al, 2001). We all have done things in the past that we regret, however it is up to adult members of the family to try to give their children good examples to live by. If the adults treat each other with trust and respect it is far more likely that the children will grow up to do the same thing. If children grow up in a family where one member is a repeat offender, regularly returning to prison for another sentence, there is the chance that child will also spend some time in prison during their lifetime too. It's scary but true. Think about your role as a parent. What are the important things that you as a parent want to teach your children?

Checklist of some issues/questions relating to your children that you may wish to think about. You may not see these issues as relevant to your family situation, and may have other issues relating to your children that you feel are important. Just remember to speak openly, with respect and to listen to what is being said.

- › Do the children know that their family member is in custody and why? If not, how do you plan to deal with questions they might ask in the future? Are you ready to deal with trust issues if they find out you have not been honest with them?
- › How did the children react to this incarceration? Do they have issues of unresolved anger, confusion, resentment or even guilt that need to be worked through?
- › What kind of parenting do you practice? What do you think needs to change (if anything?) about your parenting skills?
- › How do the children feel about their parent's return? Are they happy or anxious about it?
- › Are there new parenting rules that need to be developed and agreed upon? Do you need to develop a parenting plan and/or do you need professional help to formalise parenting arrangements?
- › Is the returning parent ready to fit in with new rules?
- › What is happening at school? Is there evidence of troubled behaviour, withdrawal, reduced achievement, bullying or other problems? What can be done about these things?
- › Are there child custody, foster care or access visit matters to be considered? Have the children been told about these, or if they are old enough, been included in the decision making, so they are not worrying about what will happen to them? How will co-operative parenting solutions be developed that put the best interests of the children first? Do you need to speak with a relationship mediator or counsellor?
- › If the children have been looked after by another person, what will be that person's role now? How do the children feel about this, and are the future needs of both the children and the other caregiver being considered?

3. OCCUPATION AND FINANCES:

One of the things that really helps achieve successful transition for your family member after a prison term is legal paid employment. With a regular income family expenses can be met, and bills can be paid! Other positive benefits are the stability and routine that regular paid employment brings, and the boost to self esteem in knowing that an employer is prepared and willing to give them an opportunity to prove themselves.

Having a criminal record **does not mean** that employment will be impossible to find. There are jobs that can fit around difficult parole or other post-release conditions. The most important part is having a positive attitude to seeking employment.

IT'S EASIER FOR ME TO BE IN PRISON. I DON'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT HOW I'LL GET A JOB. I DON'T HAVE TO MAKE DECISIONS FOR MYSELF – MY LIFE IS MAPPED OUT FOR ME IN HERE.
(PARENT IN CUSTODY)

In the early days after release, it is probably wise not to aim too high as any interview for a job is stressful and we all hate rejection. Your family member should part-time or any work, even if it feels below them. *The most important thing is to get a job.*

Once a job has been found, it can then be used to show future employers that the family member is able to hold down paid employment. This means turning up on time every day, being reliable and trustworthy, and doing the best that can be done at all times.

Your family member may not be able to return to work after release, due to health concerns. It might be that you as a family decide that you will change roles, and another member of the family will return to the workforce instead. Remember, family roles can be varied to suit whatever situation or arrangements suit you best.

With or without employment, it will also be important to reintroduce your family member into the family budget. This will require ongoing discussions and agreements in spending priorities and who manages the money. These can be difficult discussions when your returning family member finds funds are limited, so seek help if needed.

Checklist of some employment issues/questions that family members might wish to think about. You may not see these issues as relevant to your family situation, and may have other issues relating to employment and finances that you feel are important. Just remember to speak openly, with respect and to listen to what is being said.

- › Is the returning family member healthy and able to return to work, or will that family member remain at home, while another person returns/stays in the work force? What arrangements need to put in place for this to happen?
- › Was the family member in legal, paid employment just before going to prison?
- › Did the family member have a history of regular employment in the past? If not, why not? What can be done about this?
- › Did the family member rely on illegal or criminal activities for income in the past? If so, how can this change in the future?
- › Does the family member have a trade or other qualification that will make re-employment into that field easier?
- › Does the family member have contacts or a network within their field of employment that can be called upon to assist in getting a legal, paid job?
- › Does the family member have a comprehensive and current resume? If not, how can one be prepared?
- › Are there outstanding financial obligations that the family member is required to meet after release, apart from normal family ones, e.g. fines or restitution? Will a financial counsellor be able to help?
- › Does the family member know how to prepare a budget and then stick to it?
- › Did the family member begin education programs while in custody? Does the family member need to return to education to continue with this study or further improve employment prospects?
- › Does the family member need assistance in finding employment? Where can this assistance be found?
- › Does the family member have suitable clothing to attend job seeker interviews? If not, what does is needed?

4. THINGS THAT INFLUENCE BEHAVIOUR

If **drugs or alcohol** were a problem, your family member has now had the opportunity to get clean or sober up while in prison. They may be 'getting to know themselves' as a clean, sober individual for the first time in years. Staying this way takes incredible determination.

Life under the influence of an illegal substance or seen through the haze of alcohol would probably have been chaotic and fraught with danger for the user, and for everyone else involved with that person, particularly if there was violence. Your children would really feel this!

If it was drugs or alcohol that landed your family member in prison, you can be fairly sure that without a commitment to stay off them, that's where they may end up yet again.

I'VE BEEN COMING TO VISIT THESE PLACES [PRISONS] FOR YEARS. I VISITED HIS DAD BEFORE HIM. HE'S NOT GOING TO CHANGE – WE JUST GET ON WITH IT. I BRING THE CHILDREN BECAUSE THEY SHOULD HAVE A DAD, BUT HE DOESN'T TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY.
(GRANDMOTHER)

If your family member is really serious about successful post-release transition then they need all the support they can find to stay clean. If you drink or use drugs, then you need to think seriously about making your own commitment to staying clean and sober yourself!

Support can assist in identifying and dealing with what may have caused the addiction in the first place. There are many such support groups and programs in the community, and your returning family member (and maybe others in the family) should think about signing up. Family support will make it easier to commit to doing this.

Post-release relapse frequently goes hand in hand with reconnections with **past associates** who also use drugs. Often it just seems too hard to try to make new friends. It's easier to go back to mixing with the same crowd and doing the same things. Unfortunately these friendships will also have played a role in your family member going to prison. If your family member still has these connections, it's often in their interest to get

your family member back into substance abuse, or crime. They may be envious if your family member has managed to break free of the abuse 'stranglehold', and may perceive that they have lost a customer or a partner in crime. They generally do not have the best interests of you or your family in mind.

Staying clean and sober needs other interests or activities to fill the place that drugs or alcohol used to. It also needs motivation. Without these there is a strong risk of relapse – maybe from loneliness, maybe from boredom – and usually from lack of support.

HIS GIRLFRIEND REALLY STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND WHY HE DIDN'T WANT TO GO OUT, AS HE USED TO BE QUITE EXTROVERTED.
(MOTHER)

There are many community groups, hobby groups, opportunities for volunteering, sporting opportunities, or whatever else that might appeal, which may be used to take the place of drugs or alcohol. At these groups there will be new and positive people, with no connection to prison or crime. They don't have to know about the past but can be part of a new and interesting life that is drug and alcohol free.

Checklist of some substance abuse issues/questions that family members might wish to think about. You may not see these issues as relevant to your family situation, and may have other issues relating to substance abuse that you feel are important. Just remember to speak openly, with respect and to listen to what is being said.

- › Was your family member using drugs or alcohol before being sent to prison?
- › Has your family member used drugs while in prison? What does this mean for successful transition?
- › Does anyone else in the family drink or use drugs?
- › Do parole conditions require your family member to stay drug or alcohol free? How can this be supported?
- › Has the family member made a commitment to stay clean or sober once released? If so what can be done to support that commitment? If they haven't what does that mean, and what can be done about it?

- › What can you do to support family member to stay clean and sober?
- › How can you find out about community or hobby groups that the family can attend and use to fill the place that drugs or alcohol used to?
- › Were other family members affected by your family member's drug or alcohol abuse? How do they feel about the family member's return? What can be done about this?
- › Will your family member be coming back to a home where there are other family members who are currently using drugs or alcohol? Do family get-togethers or celebrations always involve drugs or alcohol? What can be done about this?
- › Have you stayed in touch with associates of your family member during this sentence? Are your only friends those who regularly included drugs or alcohol in your social interactions? What can be done about this?
- › What are you going to do if the offending behaviours start up again or if behaviours that you know can trigger their involvement in offending behaviours start again?

IMPORTANT:

Write down below the issues relating to substance abuse, reoffending and associates that have come up after discussion and that you believe are the ones most important to your family members:

5. RETURNING TO THE COMMUNITY

Has it been hard for you during your family member's prison sentence? You might have had to find employment to help support the family, thus doubling your work load. Bills had to be paid, the shopping, cooking and cleaning was always there, and the children's needs kept coming. During this time you might have learnt all sorts of new skills; from cooking healthy meals with limited resources, to being a single parent, perhaps changing from grandparent to caregiver, entertaining children with little spare cash, and making new friends! Maybe you feel stronger, smarter, wiser, more resilient, more independent and better at keeping your family together. Maybe you just feel tired.

OUR NEEDS ARE SIMPLE – WE HAVE A ROOF OVER OUR HEADS, FOOD TO EAT AND OUR PHYSICAL NEEDS MET. IT'S NOT THE SAME FOR OUR FAMILIES. MY FAMILY HAS HAD TO MOVE HOUSE, STRUGGLE FINANCIALLY AND COPE WITH WHAT OTHERS THINK. IT'S TOUGH FOR THEM, PARTICULARLY THE CHILDREN. AND IT'S MY FAULT.
(FAMILY MEMBER IN CUSTODY)

If your family member has been in custody for any length of time, their ability to do many of the things that you do now almost without thinking, may have reduced or vanished completely. This is called being 'institutionalised'. They have had to conform and adapt to the rules that govern them. Those serving long sentences often grow to feel more at home in prison than out of prison. Even if your family member regularly attended work and education programs, the sentence will still have had a negative effect on their self esteem, motivation, initiative and ability to make decisions.

THIS IS MY ELEVENTH TIME IN PRISON OR YOUTH TRAINING CENTRE. I FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE HERE. I'LL JUST KEEP COMING BACK.
(FAMILY MEMBER IN CUSTODY)

In the early days after release you may find this lack of initiative and inability to make decisions frustrating. You may even resent the need to help another adult decide how to do whatever is required for daily living. This is understandable and it is the responsibility of your family member to take control of their life again and to quickly get back into a routine that includes responsibilities and tasks that help them fit back into the family.

While you may need to provide help and support with motivation in the early days remember that your family member had to observe many routines in prison. Clothing and cells or units had to be kept clean. There was a set time to get up in the morning, and the bed had to be made. Personal hygiene standards were expected. If they were able to meet all of these requirements while in prison, it is not unreasonable for you to expect the same at home.

The first family responsibilities and tasks that you agree on might be small, and you may need to help plan how these will be done, particularly if there are parole or other appointments that must be met. Parole can be seen as a positive as it provides the support and incentive to help get your family member out of the house and back into a regular routine.

If the family is without a driver's licence or car, or if public transport services are limited, you will need to plan carefully, and time and money will need to be allocated to meet these obligations. If children are at school, then the planning must include their needs also. Thinking about other people is not something your family member has had to do much of while in prison, and you may need to help them understand that being part of a family requires cooperation and taking each person's needs into account.

It is important to remember that when you provide support that you do not just take over and decide what needs to be done, either out of love or from frustration. It is important to stand back and remember that your family member must take control of their future if they are to succeed and stay out of prison.

Checklist of some community transition issues/questions that family members might wish to think about. You may not see these issues as relevant to your family situation, and may have other issues relating to community transition that you feel are important. Just remember to speak openly, with respect and to listen to what is being said.

- › If prison life feels more normal than life on the outside, how will you respond to this or help them change?
- › Is your family member able deal in a positive way with authority figures?
- › Does your family member understand the importance that goal setting and a routine can play in preventing a slide back into old habits?
- › Is your family member comfortable to ask others for information or assistance when needed?
- › Does your family member know how to access information?
If not what can be done to develop this ability?
- › Does your family member feel comfortable talking to people they may not have met before?
- › Is your family member reliable and able to keep appointments?
- › Does your family member take other family member's feelings and needs into account when planning? If not what can be done about this?
- › What do you think will be the greatest challenge for your family member in meeting community standards and expectations? Will they need help with this?

THE FAMILY TRANSITION PLAN

DEVELOPING A FAMILY TRANSITION PLAN THAT EVERYONE FEELS COMFORTABLE WITH

Now that you have had the opportunity to talk about the transition issues that are important to your family it's time to think about developing a more formal plan of how you might go about this. Thinking about it now will give you plenty of time to clarify your views and expectations around each issue, before you discuss it with your returning family member either during visits or post-release.

You might want to photocopy the following pages, or just use a sheet of blank paper for each issue

When you are ready, go back to the first area you discussed which was **Adult Relationships**, and working together, develop a summary of the issues you identified as the most important to your family on the lines below.

To make sure everyone's opinion is included while you are doing this, remember to use the rules of communication we talked about earlier.

Area of discussion:

When you have summarised the issues, and everyone is in agreement, then it is time to develop your family plan. Remember the rules of problem solving we talked about earlier while you are doing this. You will need to discuss the questions below and then write down what it is that you have agreed to. Once you have completed the plan for the first area of discussion go on to the next one, using the same process. Don't forget – if things become too difficult for you to do as a family and you stall, seek professional help to progress. The most important thing is getting family commitment and finishing the plan.

OUR FAMILY TRANSITION PLAN:

Area of discussion:

What the returning family member agrees to do:

What we agree to do as a family:

LIVING WITH YOUR FAMILY TRANSITION PLAN:

Congratulations! Completing a family plan such as this one takes courage and perseverance and shows what your family can do when you work together.

We hope that this exercise has brought you closer together, and helped you to confront and deal with the difficult issues.

Now that you have finished the plan, **use it**. Think of it as a roadmap that will help you find your way in the months, perhaps years to come and keep you on track when you might be feeling a bit lost. It contains your family's honest and real opinions about the things that are important to them, along with solutions that your family members own.

There may be times that you feel you need help to stick to the plan. Remember there are a number of services that you can contact for assistance, information or resources and the details of some of these services can be found on the following page. However you and your family should also search for your own local services.

Your family transition plan is a big step in the right direction. Good luck!

RESOURCES

USEFUL LINKS

Australian Human Rights Commission

www.humanrights.gov.au

Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

www.aa.org.au

Family Planning Victoria

www.fpv.org.au

Family Relationship Advice Line

Tel: 1800 050 321

Family Relationships Online

www.familyrelationships.gov.au

Family Violence

Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service

Tel: 1800 015 188

www.wdvcs.org.au

Family Violence

Men's Referral Service

Tel: 1800 065 973

www.mrs.org.au

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre

Tel: 93416200

www.mshc.org.au

Mental Health

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

Narcotics Anonymous Australia

www.na.org.au

Relationships Victoria

www.relationshipsvictoria.com.au

Victorian Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO)

www.vacro.org.au

Victorian Legal Aid

www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Volunteers Victoria

www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au

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In His Cell

In his cell he must sit
For drug addiction was the crime he did commit

Just another time the judge shook his head
And guilty is what he had said

I've missed him today
I'll miss him tomorrow
I'll miss him now through all the sorrow

So maybe this is the last time
That we will be away from each other

For I love him
As he is my big brother

(Sister 2001)



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