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Field Project

Peer Support Programs Within Prisons

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Executive Summary

This report provides a survey and discussion of current practices in prison based peer operated programs, against a broader backdrop of peer theory and practice, with the aim of informing the development of a prisoner peer support program at Risdon Prison. Information was derived from published literature and conversations with staff at Risdon Prison and with prisoner support staff interstate, where peer support programs are currently operating.

A synthesis of theories is proposed to explain the potential effectiveness of peer interventions, particularly in correctional contexts. A broad classification of peer models into 'behavioural' and 'participatory' approaches is adopted. While a 'participatory' approach to peer work may be seen as the 'natural ideal', a pragmatic role for 'behavioural' elements is accepted.

The evidence for peer programs in correctional settings is surveyed. Although few empirical studies are to be found, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence, much of it unpublished and available only through personal communications. Peer programs in a wide variety of correctional settings and serving a wide variety of functions are identified. Reported and hypothesised problems with peer programs are also discussed. The benefits of properly conceived and operated peer programs for all parties involved is clear and conclusive.

The bulk of the report then surveys the literature and other sources for current practices in peer programs from conception and consultation through recruitment, selection, training, assessment, employment, maintenance and evaluation. Problems are identified in dealing with these areas separately, and an integrated approach to the whole process is described.

Peer training is seen as pivotally important to optimal peer support. The content and method of peer training are discussed in the light of the functions of peer

supporters, the identified needs of prisoners, the rationales for peer intervention, and appropriate practices in individual and group therapy. From this emerges the need for an emotion focussed approach to rehabilitative therapy and peer training that adds to, rather than replaces, cognitive/behavioural work.

Structural factors in Tasmanian corrections – prison and unit sizes and numbers of prisoners – are examined against optimal training group sizes and models of peer programs, to produce a picture that supports the provision of peer services to all prisoners. A Queensland peer support program for prison staff is also cited, in support of a whole-of-prison approach.

Finally, likely 'spin-offs' from prisoner peer support into the mentoring of young people at risk of criminal justice involvement and of people recently released from prison, are briefly discussed.

1.0　　　　Introduction

1.1　The purpose of this report

This report provides a survey and discussion of current practices in prison based peer operated programs, against a broader backdrop of peer theory and practice, with the aim of informing the development of a prisoner peer support program at Risdon Prison. However, since discussion of issues particular to Risdon Prison forms only a small proportion of the report, it should also be useful to students and prisoner support workers elsewhere, as it contains syntheses of material which appear to be otherwise unavailable.

1.2　Methodology

A literature search was conducted using the key words 'peer', 'support', 'mentoring', 'education', 'listening', 'offender', 'prison' and 'corrections' in various combinations. The experience of Devilly et al. (2003) was mirrored, in that few formalised studies have been found and most knowledge is of an anecdotal nature. Indeed much information is unpublished and even unwritten, available only through direct communication with practitioners. Furthermore, documented information is often regarded as 'intellectual property', available only for internal use within the organisation.

Correctional Departments throughout Australia were contacted and telephone interviews were conducted with prisoner support staff in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. A number of custodial and prisoner support staff at Risdon Prison were also interviewed. The limit on time available to this study, and the obvious busy-ness of many practitioners, prevented a thorough survey of Australian peer operated programs. However, the information that was obtained on a range of programs here and overseas, is offered as sufficient for the purposes of this report. According to information received, in-prison peer support programs operate in all jurisdictions (though not necessarily all institutions) except the Northern Territory and New South Wales at this point in time.

Due in part to the paucity of published material, literature and programs outside of correctional contexts were researched. There is an overlap of issues between youth mentoring and prisoner peer support, for instance, since many prisoners (particularly first-timers) meet common definitions of 'youth' (up to 25 years old), particularly 'at risk' youth. A case in point is the 'Men Mentoring Men' community-based program in Canberra (Foxlewin, 2005), which demonstrates an excellent approach to mentor training (sections 6.1 and 6.3). Knowledge from the area of family abuse therapy and group work (hitherto the author's area of work) is also offered as pertinent to prisoner peer-support training and practice.

1.3 Peer programs: definitions and domains

Peer workers in correctional settings come under a number of names: peer mentor, peer supporter, peer educator, peer counsellor and peer listener. **'Mentor'** is not often used in the prison context and is more often applied in community-based programs with adult 'mentors' working with young (usually teenage) 'mentees', and in pre- and post-release programs where trained ex-prisoners work inside the prison and/or with newly released people. 'Mentor' usually implies a significant age and/or experience difference within a paired relationship over a period of time. Although prison based peer programs may involve 'mentoring' – for example where an experienced and trained prisoner provides guidance to a new prisoner for a period of time after arrival – the term does not describe the wider, less individually-centred, service role of prisoner peer supporters. **'Peer educator'** is most often used to denote prisoners who support professional staff with treatment programs, particularly drug and alcohol programs, including the facilitation of educational groups. They do however carry out support functions, particularly in therapeutic communities. **'Peer counsellor'** and **'peer listener'** describe a predominantly emotional support role.

In fact these terms are used in the field with considerable overlap in meaning. Suggestions from prisoner support and custodial staff at Risdon pointed towards versatility in the roles of peer workers:

- Orientating and mentoring new prisoners
- Emotional support
- Self-harm and suicide prevention
- Crisis support
- Education
- Advocacy for prisoners to staff, management, and outside agencies
- Trusted intermediaries between staff and prisoners

Such a diversity of roles is best described by the term 'peer supporter'. Other terms are however used in this report, according to context and sources being quoted.

2.0 Why *peer* programs?

2.1 Prisoners and the prison environment

Gibson (2003) reports:

> *From…*[Department of Corrective Services] *and* [Corrections Health Service]
> *sources it was found that 60% of inmates are not functionally literate or*
> *numerate, 13% have an intellectual disability, 45% of males and 39% of*
> *females have suffered a period of unconsciousness, 64% with no stable*
> *family experience, 16% sexually abused before 16 years of age, over 40% of*
> *females and 30% of males are on psychotropic medication and 21% of*
> *males and 37% of females have attempted suicide…*
>
> *In the study of male receptions at Metropolitan Reception and Remand*
> *Centre…it was found that 55.4% were on psychotropic medication, 26.6%*
> *had had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and 69.8% had a mental health*
> *disorder not including personality and substance use disorder.* (p.61).

Walsh (2004) reports a high rate of mental illness (24%) and homelessness
(70%) among young prisoners (to 25 years of age) at the time of incarceration.
All of those who attended a focus group had lost their parents at a young age and
had been wards of state or in foster care.

> *For most, it was clear that their offending behaviour was directly related to*
> *past trauma and grief; many had turned to drugs as an escape, and others*
> *had committed violent offences as a result of the intense anger they were*
> *struggling to deal with.* (Walsh, 2004, p.113).

The Office of Corrections Victoria (1985), in Camilleri et al. (1999), estimates
suicide rates in prison to be between 2.5 and 15 times higher (depending on how
they are measured) than for the general community. Camilleri et al. (1999) note
that this cannot be explained solely in terms of psychopathology and that
commentators are generally agreed that the prison experience itself is an
important factor in these deaths. As Harding (2000) points out, "negative
environments can and do foster negative actions". Both violence to self and

violence to others are encouraged by an environment that subjects inhabitants to physical and social deprivation (the fundamental nature of imprisonment) and to a social structure characterised by large power differences (see Section 2.3). This is the dilemma that corrections staff face as they administer the contradictory requirements of punishment and rehabilitation.

It is the social aspects of the prison environment that peer-operated programs can influence. The high needs attributed to much of the prison population, exacerbated by (and exacerbat*ing*) the prison environment, can be more effectively served by the addition of prisoner peer resources to existing professional services, as the evidence presented in this report will show.

2.2 Social learning and self-development

Theoretical explanations for peer-education programs generally group around social learning, social inoculation, role, and differential association theory (see Devilly et al., 2003; and Turner and Shepherd, 1999). People learn by observing and practicing modelled behaviour, and the closer we identify with the models, the more likely we are to change our behaviour in a consistent manner. Social (including peer group) pressures contribute to the development of unhealthy or criminal behaviours, and counterarguments delivered by fellow offenders may be seen as more realistic or acceptable than those offered by therapists, who may be identified with authoritarian and conservative norms and institutions. Social learning theory also identifies self-efficacy and empowerment as important to a person's confidence in performing and maintaining particular behaviours and their expectations of success. An example is the importance of assertiveness training in family abuse behaviour change groups. Peer educator self-efficacy is important for display of self-congruence to the person being helped. For the educator, the adoption of the role that is desired to be instilled, promotes a deeper understanding of that role and commitment to it.

These theories, then, provide some explanation for the frequently observed effectiveness of peer-education in both promoting change in the person being

helped and in deepening or cementing it in the peer educator. In correctional contexts, however, these explanations give too little emphasis to the dynamics of power and powerlessness in criminal behaviour, self-harm, and coping with imprisonment.

2.3 Objective power and subjective powerlessness

The reported[1] resistance of some custodial officers to peer support projects may in part be due to a blurring of the distinction between objective power and subjective empowerment. Returning to the earlier example of family abuse group participants: these people may be legally coerced to attend the group (objectively disempowered) yet experience the group as personally empowering. The experience of being respected and listened to, along with the assertiveness and communication training and emotional literacy work, is often crucial to an acceptance of responsibility for their own behaviour and life outcomes, often expressed as 'taking control' of one's life. A survey of the literature on human agency (related in the study to empowerment) found several schemas of 'universal values' or 'domains of psychological wellbeing', which listed 'self direction', 'environmental mastery', 'autonomy' or 'agency' as basic psychological needs (Alkire, 2005). Success in supplying these needs in prisons depends upon the culture or social environment that is fostered, which is in turn dependant upon institutional policy and physical structures. Harding (2000) notes the relative success of therapeutic communities in enhancing program outcomes and reducing recidivism. An appropriately designed and supported peer-led program can have similarly positive effects, expressed in enhanced prisoner wellbeing, reduced rates of self-harm (see section 3.5) and a calmer and more cooperative social environment[2].

Wineman (2003) provides a useful framework for understanding power and disempowerment, which he relates to trauma, a common factor in the condition of people who come to be imprisoned:

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[1] From conversations with prisoner support and custodial officers in Hobart and interstate.
[2] From personal communications with prison staff in Western Australia and Victoria.

There is a strong tendency for traumatised people to internalise the experience of powerlessness, and then at critical moments to engage in desperate efforts at self-protection that are driven from that place of subjective powerlessness. This is a psychological and political place from which we are incisively aware of the ways in which we have been acted upon, victimised and harmed, but from which it can be difficult or impossible to gauge the impact of our enraged behaviour upon others, or even to maintain our awareness of the core humanity of those defined as Other. I attempt to describe and understand this phenomenon through the concept of **power-under** (p.13).

Moreover, traumatic response to abuse is seen on a continuum rather than as a discrete condition related to severe abuse. Sustained denial of an individual's need for agency (as a basic domain of wellbeing) can result in degrees of trauma, or subjective powerlessness – a pervasive condition in a society with high levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse[3]. Thus it is not only the violent or dominating prisoner who is likely to be acting out of power-under, but also the abusive or uncaring custodial officer.

Day et al.(2004) found *perceived* coercion to be a more useful concept than *objective* coercion in understanding motivation to change in offender programs. Despite being coerced[4] into treatment, offenders may not *feel* or *perceive* themselves as coerced after initial engagement in a program that promotes care and respect among participants. In the same way a distinction needs to be made between the objective disempowerment of imprisonment and opportunities for subjective empowerment within it. This points to the maximisation of prisoner empowerment or agency within the fact of imprisonment[5].

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[3] See Mathews (1996) for a discussion of the systematic abuse of boys in Canada, related to gendered socialisation. It is unlikely to be very different in Australia.
[4] The likely effect of refusal of treatment on Parole Board decisions is here seen as a form of coercion.
[5] Graphic support for this contention is found in Jimmy Boyle's autobiographical *A Sense of Freedom*. Boyle, who had been labelled (and treated) as "one of the most dangerous prisoners in Scotland", describes the transformative effects on himself and other prisoners of a transfer to an experimental unit which promoted prisoner agency and respect. See Boyle (1977).

2.4 Peer programs as relationship and community building

Flowers (2001) identifies two broad sets of reasons why *peer* education is chosen over other strategies:

- Peers are seen as the most effective means to convey information to the target group – the **behaviourist** approach
- Peers are seen as the appropriate facilitators of a participatory process of learning – the **participatory** approach

Both of these forms of peer-education draw on the social learning cluster of theories (section 2.2), while participatory peer-education draws more from empowerment theory (section 2.3). Empowerment may be defined as "the restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life's problems" (Bush and Folger, 1994, p.12), and corresponds to 'strengths focus' in social work. Behaviourist and participatory approaches stand as opposites in that the former focuses on outcome – such as changes to behaviour of the target group; while the latter is more concerned with the processes involved – such as the experiences and interactions of those involved in the peer relationships. Further, the behaviourist strategy is vertical in terms of power – *power-over* – while the participatory strategy is horizontal – *power-with*. With regard to the problems of institutionalisation and return to the community, a participatory strategy would be more congruent with community living, modelling equality and respect in relationships. But peer programs, suitably constituted, can do more than ameliorate the 'de-socialising' effects of imprisonment. The trust and openness that can be facilitated among the peer support team members in the course of a group work oriented training process and subsequent maintenance meetings, are likely to be unique in many participants' lives. The peer supporters can learn new ways to relate, individually and in groups, and model this to their peers in the prison. The communication skills and pro-social attitudes thus learned are of a higher order than those

generally displayed in everyday life inside or outside prison[6]. In addition, improvements in relationships between custodial staff and prisoners that are reported from peer programs, provide examples of community building under the most difficult of conditions[7].

These distinctions between approaches to peer work are particularly relevant to the framing of a peer program's goals and strategies, the design of evaluation, and the on-going negotiation between security and prisoner agency (section 4). However it needs to be remembered that 'behaviourist' and 'participatory' peer education are *models* – aids to conscious and reflective practice – that are best seen as lying at either end of a continuum. According to our values or the situation at hand we may want to maximise one or the other, but we cannot reject either.

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[6] Refer to Training, section 6, for discussion of the conditions that can enable this to occur. This information comes from the author's own experience in family abuse group work with men, and from personal communications from other practitioners across Australia.
[7] From personal communications with prison staff interstate. See also for example Syed and Blanchette (2000).

3.0   Peer programs in correctional settings: an overview of evidence

This overview summarises parts of the paper "Prison-based peer education schemes" by Devilly et al. (2003, pp.4-13), with additional material added. Studies of peer-led programs in non-correctional settings have found nearly uniformly positive outcomes. With regard to correctional programs, the authors note that while preliminary reports are positive, controlled research is lacking.

3.1 HIV/Hepatitis C and health education

Increases in drug related arrests have resulted in a large incarcerated population of injecting drug users. Drug injecting (usually without a needle exchange program), sexual activity, tattooing and interpersonal violence create the possibility of infection. Since most of these practices are illegal or stigmatised in prisons, peer education programs may be the most appropriate approach for offenders. Peers are more likely to know what is occurring and what strategies are most likely to reduce risks. From the evidence available, Devilly et al. find that peer led interventions are at least as effective as professional interventions, and are generally preferred by prisoners. Robinson (1994) recommends prison HIV peer education "as the most effective and efficient means of providing HIV education in prisons...[that goes]...beyond the provision of information to motivating prisoners to change practices which place them at risk" (p.xiii).

3.2 Drug and alcohol abuse

The involvement of ex-users of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) in work with users is well documented. Devilly et al. (2003) quote an estimation that 72% of professional AOD counsellors working in over 10,000 substance abuse centres in the U.S. are former substance abusers. Morison et al. (2000), writing about the peer support program at Bendigo Prison (AOD) Treatment Community:

> *Peers take a visible role within the community, contributing powerfully to the*
> *culture of change and to the development of processes that support the*

community and the programs at Bendigo. Peers have thus become a
significant part of the development and maintenance processes of the
community at Bendigo (p.3).[8]

Hudson (2005) argues for an empowerment or strengths approach to the use of
illicit drugs. Discussing the resentment created by current approaches, Hudson
quotes a user:

> *You are never going to make him think like a straight person, he is not a*
> *straight person, they are not straight people, they are what they are, and*
> *that is the biggest problem with every program I have been in, they have*
> *tried to do that, I am yet to see one that accepts us for what we are, and*
> *allows us to think and find some other ways to try and change the cycle and*
> *the only way you can really change the cycle is by allowing the cycle to exist*
> *to start with.* (p.86).

The point here is not that drugs should be provided in prisons, but that peers are
more likely to take the appreciative approach required for effective therapeutic
relationships, and having 'been there' are more likely to understand the nuances
of choice and compulsion in substance use.

3.3 Sexual offending

Studies of community based, peer education programs targeting sexual assault
show improved attitudes in respondents, at least in the short term. Attendance by
adolescent sex offenders of a peer group counselling program (facilitated by staff)
was followed by a recidivism rate of 2%, which favourably compares to the 3 –
14% frequently reported in the literature for one-to-one professional
interventions. A study found that victim denial can be reduced through peer
interventions which facilitate group cohesiveness, interpersonal support, and

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[8] The Peers Program is run for those prisoners who have completed the treatment program and
who have been invited to remain at Bendigo to help maintain the community culture and offer
guidance and support to other prisoners. Peers attend one therapy group per week to maintain
their own progress and to receive support and supervision for their role in the orientation program
and prisoner support generally.

acceptance (Devilly et al., 2003). Taplin (2000), from her study tour of sex offender programs in USA, Canada, UK and New Zealand, recommended the use of 'peer mentors' (offenders who have demonstrated change) in prison programs.

3.4 Prison orientation

The first 24 hours, and the first week, in prison occasion the highest risk periods for suicide (Camilleri et al., 1999). These are also high risk periods for establishing harmful relationships with staff and other prisoners. One staff member at Risdon Prison suggested that new prisoners would benefit from one week of formal 'mentoring' by a peer supporter during this difficult period. Informal orientation does occur, but is likely to be inconsistent. Despite a lack of empirical data, informal reports from staff and prisoners at Port Phillip Prison highlight the usefulness of their peer support program for new arrivals[9]. HM Prison Service (2005a) evaluated six pilots for the "Insiders" peer support scheme. The evaluations demonstrated a positive impact on prisoners' early experience of custody. Peer supporters "found it personally rewarding and were keen to own and manage day to day issues themselves" (p.4). All 17 Officers and 18 Insiders interviewed recommended extending the scheme to other establishments, particularly the high risk "locals".

3.5 Suicide, self-harm and violence prevention

Prisons have high rates of suicide and self-harm, relative to the general community, due to an interaction between prison environmental stressors and prisoner vulnerability characteristics, particularly emotion dysregulation. Other prisoners may try to mask these emotions with aggression and violence. Correctional services largely view these behaviours as 'acting out' or manipulation, and as management rather than treatment problems (Devilly et al., 2003). Both self-harming and aggressive prisoners may effectively undergo solitary confinement, for their own or others' safety. This often escalates existing feelings of isolation, depression and anger, leading to suicidal ideation. Prisoners may try

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[9] Devilly et al.(2003) and personal communication, prisoner support officer, Port Phillip Prison.

to hide a depressed or suicidal condition rather than consult support staff and risk being moved to 'safe' or 'strip' cells[10]. Programs have been operating in Australia and elsewhere to address these problems through 24 hour availability of peer supporters to visit a distressed prisoner[11], sometimes in 'shifts', or sharing 'buddy cells', or using a stretcher-bed in the prisoner's cell. Most suicide watch and prevention may thus be shifted from crisis to residential units. Since 'risk factors' prediction of suicide is unreliable (failing to predict a third of suicides), more proactive and positive strategies for all prisoners are indicated, including peer support programs (Camilleri et al.,1999). Evaluations of Canadian (Syed and Blanchette, 2000; Delveaux and Blanchette, 2000), Australian and British programs (Devilly et al., 2003) indicated high levels of approval and usage by prisoners of peer supporters, and a general perception that the peer supporters gained even more from the programs than the prisoners they serve. Moreover, an evaluation of the 'Listener' scheme in Swansea, England showed a 50% decrease in self-harm (Camilleri et al., 1999). Port Phillip Prison in Victoria has also recorded a marked decrease in self-harm since the introduction of their 'Listener' program[12].

3.6 Advocacy and information

Wood (2001) reports on peer supporters becoming spokespeople for the wider prison community, bringing prisoners' concerns to the attention of staff. Further:

> More than 40 external organisations...[visit]...the centre to provide information direct to the peer support participants about a range of issues from health and employment, to law and justice topics. Peer support participants then take the information back to their fellow inmates, generating a cycle of self-help opportunities which can assist inmates upon their release. (Wood, 2001, p.1).

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[10] Devilly et al.(2003) and personal communication with staff at Risdon Prison.
[11] At Port Phillip Prison the Prisoner Listeners have 24 hour on-call access to other units, but don't sleep over.
[12] Personal communication, prisoner support officer, Port Phillip Prison.

Several staff members expressed regret at the demise of the 'yard representative' system at Risdon Prison and hoped a peer support program would fill the gap. Peer supporters can be expected to play this role differently from the earlier 'reps'. Differences include peer training and the coming (2006) change to Unit Management at Risdon. The role of prisoner advocate has often been reported to develop in the course of peer programs, rather than being one of the founding aims (for example,see Morison et al., 2000, p.3). The frequency of this occurrence argues for inclusion from the outset.

3.7 Pitfalls for peer programs

Devilly et al.(2003) note that although most studies and anecdotal evidence to date have demonstrated the value of peer operated programs for a range of issues, there is a lack of sound empirical studies that demonstrate an enhanced effectiveness of peer operated over professionally operated interventions. In this sense we cannot be confident in any particular model as representing 'best practice'[13].

Devilly et al.(2003) list a number of potential pitfalls to peer-education programs:

- They are complex to manage and require considerable maintenance and support
- Inappropriate or unclear roles and boundaries may alienate members or sectors of prison staff, and over-burden peer supporters
- Undue reliance on peers may compromise services
- In the area of ethics: accountability, peer competence and confidentiality

Walker and Avis (1999) list the following "reasons why peer education fails":

- A lack of clear aims and objectives

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[13] The reader is referred again to Flowers' 'behaviourist' and 'participatory' approaches to peer education (section 2,4). There may not be great differences in easily measurable, short- to mid-term *outcomes* such as recidivism – the stuff of 'sound empirical studies' – but there may be large differences in less easily measured qualities of wellbeing and relationship, which in terms of outcome may not be manifested for years. In fact the oft-quoted 'anecdotal' evidence for peer programs is often of a 'process' rather than 'outcome' nature, reflecting a 'participatory' interest on the part of the reporters. In this viewpoint, 'best practice' is what each peer support team, working with prison staff, develops in its local situation.

- An inconsistency between project design and external environment and constraints which should dictate the design
- A lack of investment in peer education
- A lack of appreciation that peer education is a complex process to manage and requires skilled personnel
- Inadequate training and support for peer educators
- A lack of clarity around boundary issues
- Failure to secure multi-agency (or -section) support

Means to avoid these and other pitfalls are discussed in the appropriate sections of this report.

3.8 General discussion and summary

Although there are few empirical studies of the effectiveness of peer operated programs in prisons, there is a wealth of evaluative and anecdotal support for them. A summary of benefits of peer operated programs, derived from the literature and from personal communications with peer program managers and staff[14] follows:

- Peers have better knowledge than staff of prisoners' concerns and behaviours
- Peers 'speak the same language', have had similar experiences to the other prisoners, and are therefore deemed as more credible sources of information and role modelling
- A prisoner may fear that anything revealed to a staff counsellor may be 'put on file', or that matters touching on security, for example, could be reported. Opportunities for supportive and preventative intervention may therefore be missed

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[14] I have been able to have conversations with peer program staff in Western Australia (prisoner support officer and Indigenous Peer Support Worker at Casuarina Prison) and Victoria (prisoner support officer, Port Phillip Prison).

- Peer-led approaches can result in increased participant knowledge and life skills, improved motivation and confidence in making changes, improved interpersonal relationships, and enhanced self-esteem

- Peer-led programs can reduce the rate of self-harm and suicide

- Peer supporters gain the most from the programs, discovering skills to help others, and gaining a similar sense of empowerment and fulfilment to that sought through criminal behaviour. Alienation from mainstream society can then reduce, leading to connection and 'embeddedness' within society, even to a new vocation post-release[15]

- Peer supporters ease the pressure on professional counselling staff and can provide extended (24/7) support

- Peer supporters can help maintain security and good order in the prison, reducing the stress on custodial staff

- Peer programs can be cost-effective in the long-term

Wood (2001), writing about Townsville Correctional Centre's peer support program, reports that peer supporters provide prisoner support and referral to professional staff and become spokespeople for the wider prison community.

Participants are taking their responsibilities very seriously…The program is utilising the biggest resource of the centre – the prisoners themselves.

They can provide support at ground level, providing initial contact with fellow inmates, with professional staff providing additional support.

The success of the program is because it is not solely staff driven. The prisoners are the major stakeholders, and based on their feedback during the program's consultation period, their areas of interest have been incorporated into the program.

Participants are also gaining tangible benefits from the program for when they return to the community, with the program providing them with self esteem, knowledge, leadership skills and responsibilities.

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[15] Brown (1991) reports that "professionalising rather than abandoning a deviant identity facilitates exiting deviance" in his study group of 'professional ex-s'. Peer program coordinators elsewhere have also witnessed post-release transitions from peer to professional work (personal communications with peer program practitioners in Victoria and WA).

(Ken Wano, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Senior Advisor, in Wood, 2001, p.1-2).

For an in-depth evaluation of a prison peer support program, using quantitative and qualitative methods, the reader is directed to Syed and Blanchette (2000). This is one of three evaluations of peer support programs in Canadian women's prisons (reports available on the Correctional Service of Canada website). The results for the three are quite similar. The results of the in-depth interviews of staff, peers and prisoners are particularly informative, and are recommended reading. The authors found that:

- Half of the prisoners surveyed had used the peer support service, and those who had received peer counselling expressed satisfaction with it
- Reasons for use of the service included upset/angry (13%), lonely (13%), self-injurious (13%), suicidal (13%), psychologist not available (9%) and argument with another prisoner (9%)[16]
- The program was especially useful to segregation prisoners and prisoners with mental health problems
- The peer support program helps bridge the communication gap between staff and prisoners: peers can act as 'go-betweens'
- The program lessens the workload of staff members
- The peer support team plays an effective role in individual crisis response and a 'somewhat' effective role in institutional crisis response
- The program plays a useful role in post crisis resolution
- The benefits of the program for all involved is clear and conclusive
- The program is cost-effective

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[16] In another Canadian evaluation, 81% of the 53 respondents valued the existence of the peer support program whether they used it or not. Of those who did use the service, 33% used it for depression, 22% for self-harm and 22% for flash-backs of abuse (CSC, 2005).

4.0   First steps in implementation

4.1 Funding and resources

Walker and Avis (1999) note that "a good peer education approach requires a
trained and committed staff and may be labour and time intensive" (p.575). Too
often, peer-led work is tacked onto a worker's other responsibilities. Following the
initial consultation and planning, the coordinator of a program will need to carry
out on-going recruitment, deliver (or organise and monitor the delivery of) an on-
going training program, supervise and motivate peers, monitor budgets, provide
reports, oversee resource production, liaise with other prison sections and external
agencies and undertake or organise evaluation.
Syed and Blanchette (2000) report that:

> *According to the Coordinators, the program requires very little funding.*
> *Expenses for the program include supplying trainees with manuals as well as*
> *cost associated with the graduation ceremony. Facilitators from the*
> *community volunteer their time and are therefore, not paid.* (p.27).

This approach would need to be looked at closely, particularly with regard to the
model and quality of peer training thus provided (see section 6), its maintenance
over time, and time spent by the coordinators (who presumably *are* paid) in
organising all this. White and Mason (2003), in their evaluation of the "Inside
Out" program at Risdon Prison, recommend that "no programme be approved or
implemented without full analysis of costs and benefits" (p.41). The potential
benefits of a well conceived and operated peer support program are very
considerable, from the evidence gathered for this report. It is essential, then, that
such a project be well resourced. Devilly et al. (2003) claim that "despite
numerous start-up expenses, peer programs represent long-term cost

effectiveness". Financial resources should also be planned and committed over the long term[17].

4.2 Steering Committee

Devilly et al.(2003) suggest a "working party encompassing management, therapeutic and correctional staff, and, at a later stage, several representative offenders who may become peer educators should they possess the necessary skills" (p.13). HM Prison Service (2005b) suggests a Working Party which includes at least two prisoners, prison staff, coordinator, and staff from other disciplines as appropriate. Corrections Canada, in the National Guidelines for Peer Support Programs (NGPSP, 1996), specify a Steering Committee comprising the Coordinator, Secretary, Peer Support Team Chair (a prisoner), and Honorary members from staff and/or community organisations. The Coordinator, Secretary and Chair are appointed by the Warden of the institution, the latter two also endorsed by the Peer Support Team. The Honorary members are principally invited from interested staff (including custodial), but only when the program is well established, to encourage prisoner 'ownership' of the program. The Honorary members complete the same training program as the Peer Support Team, the purpose being to increase staff awareness and involvement in the program. The National Guidelines point to the earliest possible involvement of prisoners in the planning and implementation processes[18] (NGPSP, 1996).

4.3 Staff consultation

White and Mason (2003) have highlighted the pitfalls awaiting a program whose implementation does not involve the thorough informing of and feedback from prison staff. This should occur in a cyclical fashion from first conception through on-going maintenance of the program. The requirements of security and prisoner self-determination become at some point contradictory, and extensive dialogue

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[17] It is particularly important, when working with people, not to begin something that cannot be maintained. During research into post-release peer-mentoring (2003, unpublished), a prisoner told me: "We have had it up to here with people saying they want to help and nothing comes of it".
[18] This was confirmed by a prisoner at Risdon who on hearing I was researching post-release peer mentoring, made the unprompted comment: "We know what we need... if you don't ask us it won't work" (unpublished, 2003).

and negotiation will have to take place if all parties are to emerge with a sense of ownership of the program. Experience in established peer programs indicates that the mutual trust that is needed for their optimal working *can* grow[19], but needs to be supported by a framework that maintains boundaries, ensures transparent accountability, and formalises consistent communication and feedback between all parties (NGPSP, 1996). This is a shifting, ecological process, producing cultural change in the organisation.

4.4 Prisoner consultation

Mention has been made in Section 4.2 of Corrections Canada's Guidelines for prisoner consultation and involvement in on-going decision-making. This is in accord with the theories of social learning and subjective empowerment, as related to the needs of prisoners, discussed in section 2 of this report. If Flowers' participatory approach (section 2.4) has been adopted and prisoners have been selected for the working party and Steering Committee, it may be considered appropriate for them to conduct the prisoner consultation, with mentoring help from staff. The more the prison population is involved, the more likely they are to understand and use the service. Evaluations of Canadian peer support programs indicated a significant lack of knowledge among staff and prisoners of the purposes and methods of the programs (Delveaux and Blanchette, 2000; Syed and Blanchette, 2000). The shifting nature of prison populations necessitates wide consultations and constant promotion.

4.5 Program objectives, principles and guidelines

It is presumed that for a new program, the setting of objectives, principles and guidelines will be responsive to the consultations that have taken place. Another consultation that could take place is with the evaluator. If internal evaluation is to take place: "An appropriate evaluation assessing the program's intended impact on its target audience should also be drafted at this early stage to ensure that the programs aims and objectives are measurable" (Devilly et al., 2003). Backett-

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[19] From conversations with peer support officers. See also Syed and Blanchette (2000).

Milburn and Wilson (2000) describe an 'interactive process evaluation' of a peer education program, which evolved with the project. Evaluation will be discussed in section 8, but is mentioned here for the light it can cast on project design if incorporated into it from the outset.

The 'Stated Purpose' of a peer support program in Corrections Canada's Guidelines (NGPSP, 1996) consists of:

- Support to inmates by their peers
- Support to inmates who resist staff intervention
- Post crisis intervention
- Provision of services when staff counsellors are not available (including after hours)

The 'fundamental purposes' of peer support schemes in Britain (HM Prison Service, 2005b) 'could include':

- To identify, as soon as possible after imprisonment, those who are at risk
- Refer at risk prisoners to staff
- Provide information and reassurance to new prisoners
- Provide assistance with domestic and practical issues, including letter writing
- Promote awareness of the program to the prison population
- Provide ongoing support to prisoners who request it
- Provide company, both for emotional support and as a preventative measure, for those who are not safe to be left alone

Together these approximate the list gathered from the Risdon Prison staff who were interviewed for this report (see section 1.3). Whatever the aims or duties chosen, it is important that they be clearly stated, consistent with environmental constraints, adequately resourced, and the peers suitably trained and supported for each function (Walker and Avis, 1999). In a participatory approach, the objectives will primarily be chosen through the consultation process and particularly by the peer support team itself.

The mode of delivery of the program needs to worked out at an early stage between support staff, prospective peer supporters and security staff. This includes times and places of service and special services such as crisis watch (Devilly et al., 2003).

Ethical issues need to be addressed and potential problems identified. Rules and means to avoid abuse of the service by peer supporters need to be developed. Professional conduct, confidentiality, values, referral and boundary issues will be part of training, but need also to be codified and kept in circulation. Confidentiality has been identified by prisoners as the most important potential abuse by peers. It is uncertain how often peers have broken confidentiality to other prisoners, but it is a source of distrust for some prisoners in any case (Devleaux and Blanchette, 2000; Syed and Blanchette, 2000). This points to providing a strong focus on confidentiality during training and team maintenance (see section 7.4).

5.0   Recruitment and selection

5.1 Number of peer supporters

Casuarina Prison (Western Australia) currently has 17 peer supporters for 500
prisoners (1 peer to 30 prisoners). At least one peer per wing and two to three
per unit are desired (Each unit has two separate wings). These minima are
currently just met[20]. Two Canadian programs recorded ratios of 1:19 and 1:16 at
the time of evaluation.

The refurbished Risdon prison is to have 11 units (9 medium security and 2
maximum), each housing up to 28 prisoners. Units are divided into 2 floors,
locked apart at night. A minimum of one peer supporter per unit has been quoted
by staff. This would provide an optimal group size for the first training (see
section 6.1).

5.2 Recruitment and selection

Recruitment is generally initiated through advertising (flyers, posters and word-of-
mouth around the prison). At Casuarina Prison, peer support officers organised a
poster design competition. The winner earned $40 and the honour of having his
poster displayed around the prison. Self referral is favoured at Casuarina, as a
measure of the person's motivation. This is followed by a security check, a talk
with the prisoner's unit senior officer, and finally endorsement by existing team
members[21].

Port Phillip Prison (a maximum security institution) takes self referrals and
recommendations from staff or inmates. Security clearance involves having no
positive drug tests or 'incidents' in the previous 6 months, and no charges such as
rape or paedophilia. The coordinator interviews all applicants and gets feedback

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[20] From personal communication with Indigenous Peer Support Officer, Casuarina Prison.
[21] From personal communication, peer support officer.

from staff and other inmates. Selection by a 'multi-disciplinary team' is based on the following attributes:

- Consistently displaying a sound work ethic and commitment to programs
- Willingness to actively participate in programs and activities
- Good communication/interpersonal skills with both staff and prisoners
- High level of interpersonal and conflict resolution skills
- Flexible, confident and reliable attitude
- Ability to show initiative, creativity and responsibility in a challenging environment
- Incident free and drug free for previous 6 months   (ICPA, 2005)

Canadian peer support applicants are initially screened by the case management team, including the Peer Support Team Coordinator, and two representatives of the Peer Support Team, and interviewed by the Coordinator and a peer support team member. Selection criteria include:

- Capacity to show empathy
- Capacity to set limits
- Desire to aid others
- Communication skills are rated as 'good'
- Capacity to conform to rules and regulations
- Previous group experience
- Capacity for tolerance of difference
- Length of time left at the facility   (NGPSP, 2005)

5.3   Selection as a product of training and assessment

Devilly et al. (2003) suggest that "a two stage selection process would be most effective, where potential peer educators are chosen at a pre-training stage, and then, pending their performance during training, a final group is selected at a post-training stage". Such an approach would need to be allied to multiple employment opportunities if the program is to avoid rejection, stigmatisation and humiliation of the 'failed' candidate (see section 6.4). British prisons have two

peer operated programs with separate trainings – the Insiders peer support scheme (HM Prison Service, 2005a) for new prisoner orientation and the Prisoner Peer Support scheme (HM Prison Service, 2005b) for general support duties. The two schemes require different levels of 'counselling' ability, as reflected in the lengths of the trainings. Alternatively, one training course could lead to a number of employment paths to which the peers are guided according to their aptitudes or progress within the training group. The Men Mentoring Men program in Canberra (Foxlewin, 2005) found that by keeping the training process intense and evocative of the men's emotions, a large proportion of unsuitable candidates withdrew of their own volition. Those who completed the training and were still unsuitable were told they were 'not ready to mentor young men yet' and asked if they would like to help in the program in other ways. In all, about 50% of those who began training became mentors and only two men out of nearly 100 were asked to leave the program.

The interplay between selection, training, assessment and employment path is discussed at length in section 6.

6.0   Peer training, assessment and employment

6.1   An overview of peer training

Devilly et al.(2003) suggest several core skills for peer training programs:

- Listening and communication skills
- Assertiveness and conflict resolution skills
- Empathy skills
- Problem solving skills
- Enhancing self-esteem
- Individual and group work skills
- Cultural and ethnic perspectives
- Ethical issues: confidentiality, values, accountability, boundaries, etc
- Suicide awareness

While there is some consistency in core content, there is a wide variation among peer trainings with regard to breadth of subjects, manner of delivery and length of course. This is sometimes due to the duty description of the program, and other times to a lack of resources, but often appears to have no other reason than a variation in perceptions of the requirements of peer training among program managers. For example:

- Fulham Correctional Facility's (Victoria) peer training comprises a 'minimum' of four half-day sessions, possibly 12 to 15 hours, focusing on listening skills for providing emotional support and suicide prevention
- Casuarina Prison's (WA) training appears shorter than this, somewhat informal, and involves suicide prevention, team building and First Aid[22]
- Programs in NSW tend to use the accredited "Mentoring in the Community" course, nominally 60 hours, which includes values and ethics, interpersonal skills, youth studies and issues pertaining to mentoring roles

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[22] I should be noted that Casuarina's program employs Indigenous Peer Supporters, coordinated by Indigenous Peer Support Officers. Aboriginality is therefore a primary qualification, enabling shorter trainings, as noted in other areas of indigenous service.

- Corrections Canada's National Guidelines specifies 18 three hour sessions (54 hours) over 6 to 9 weeks, and includes a wide range of subjects outside the core subjects, such as childhood sex abuse, substance abuse, self injury, loss and grief, and trauma
- Canberra's community based Men Mentoring Men ('Triple M') training spans eight weeks and comprises eight evenings, one Saturday and one residential weekend (5pm Friday to 4pm Sunday) – in all about 60 hours
- Port Phillip Prison has four training schedules for the different roles played by peers in the prison, taking between 24 and 60 hours, usually in three 2-hour sessions per week

Training may be facilitated in-house, by outside people (volunteer or paid) or by a combination of these. Current (trained) peer supporters are valuable additions to training, and benefit from the experience of facilitating a group. Indeed inviting *trainees* to plan and facilitate parts of training sessions, is a common strategy in adult education training and assessment. Devilly et al.(2003) discuss the importance of effective training processes in skills acquisition, specifically mentioning role play and other experiential techniques, highlighting the need for skilled facilitation. But quality of facilitation is one thing – another is *continuity* in facilitation. The training of people to offer emotional support to others (the core function of a peer support program) requires the creation, and the recreation in each session, of an emotionally safe environment for the peer supporters to explore their own feelings with each other. This is experiential learning applied to emotion work. While the course will also contain important technical and cognitive components, the *emotional intelligence* work is arguably the most important – and challenging (see section 6.2)[23]. What this points to is:
- The quality and content of the peer training is a major concern in the implementation of the program

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[23] For an example of an emotion focused prison peer education program, see "Keepin' It Real" at www.insightprisonproject.org/programs/?id=11
Program topics include Removing the Mask, Self Validation, Healing the Wounded Father/Son Relationship, and Keepin' It Real With Self and Others.

- The facilitator should be experienced in emotion focused work and group work
- The facilitator (who ideally would also be the peer program coordinator) maintains a continuity and presence through the training course, while bringing in guest presenters for specific subjects or skills
- The maximum training group size should be commensurable with emotion focused work – approximately ten members, in a range of from 8 to 12[24]

An evaluation of a peer support team found:

Interview participants found the peer support team training, both in its philosophy and in its structure, to be a welcome contrast to some of the damaging effects of both their life experiences and the prison environment itself. The women pointed to the inconsistency, distrust and lack of safety that had pervaded their lives and the prison setting. In contrast, the training provided a consistent, safe space focused on mutuality and trust, and it demonstrated that staff trusted the peer counsellors by giving them responsibility for counselling women in distress. This gave the participants increased feelings of self-worth (CSC, 2005).

Corrections Canada's National Guidelines suggests that interested staff can be invited to join the Peer Support Team as 'Honorary members', which involves doing the same training as the peer supporters and attending Team meetings (NGPSP, 1996). This is reminiscent of the Western Australian Reasoning and Rehabilitation program for prisoners, running parallel with the Interpersonal Skills Training Program for officers (Harding, 2004). These approaches promote broader understanding through the prison of the nature and intentions of programs. Robinson (1994) states that effective HIV peer education requires attention to the training of staff, so that "custodial officers and those in management positions understand the process of peer education so that they are partners in the process" (p.69). The Woodford Correctional Centre (Queensland)

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[24] The Men Mentoring Men training numbered 10-12; Centacare Tasmania's Controlling Abusive Behaviours group numbered 10; in community men's groups, 8 is a commonly cited maximum.

peer support program for custodial staff (Corrections News, 2001) points to the possibility of parallel staff and prisoner trainings feeding a peer support program for each group. Such a model would offer great versatility in the degree of communication between the two groups, depending on the prevailing culture of the prison and the desires of the group members. The difficulties that custodial staff endure in the course of their work is too often forgotten in debates on prison reform.   A participatory peer support model could be applied across the whole prison community, with a high probability of acceptance because the approach enables people to feel in control of the process that is meant to support them, rather than having it imposed on them from above.

6.2   Cognitive skills and emotional intelligence

Cognitive behavioural approaches to correctional work are generally cited as 'best practice' despite often slim supporting evidence (see Harding, 2004, Chapter 2). Greenberg (1993) argues for an emotion focused approach to therapy that helps people to integrate the rational and emotional aspects of self:

> [Due to the fact that emotion controls action], *if change is desired it is important that therapists pay attention to helping clients achieve a living connection between thought and emotion. People must experience what they think and say in order to effect action. One of the most frequent clinical observations is that behaviour governing cognitions seems to change most when a cognition is accompanied by emotion. When people feel what they say and think, the confusion disappears and they become clear. They are then connected to their internal resources, and they are confident that what they say is valid and are more likely to act.*
> (Greenberg, 1993, pp.499-508).

Emotion focused therapies have undergone remarkable development in recent decades. Comparative evaluation of Stosny's (2005) 'Core Value (Compassion)' workshops for family abuse shows an 86% success rate (violent-free after one year as reported by partners) among the 68% who completed the program (Stosny, 2005). Donovan's 'Emotional Bioscan' approach to family abuse and

anger therapy resulted in a 96% success rate among the 80% who completed the program (from a study group numbering 37). Donovan's work with mandated clients of the Shepparton (Victoria) Community Corrections Service, using the same model, also received a favourable evaluation, with only one of a group of eight men not completing the program[25], and some expressing a wish to continue the work beyond the life of the group. The following is from the Shepparton evaluation, quoting one of the participants:

> *The first comment was made at week one of the support group session after re-visiting the Bioscan. He was attempting to identify events and emotions that triggered anger: "I can't cry. I feel something...then like a block, no tears....and no emotion". At week five, a very different comment was made to the group: "I knew I was angry about something. Now I know what the issue has to do with. I need to release the ghosts".* (Donovan, 2005)

The foregoing is intended to support and illustrate the inclusion of emotion-focused work into cognitive behavioural and psycho-educational programs. Donovan's six to eight session program, for example, can be incorporated into larger or existing programs, and could provide the emotional/experiential core of a peer support training.

The need to 'formalise' emotion work in correctional settings (rather than simply leaving it to the proclivities of individual support staff or facilitators) is highlighted by a tendency among 'traditionally' socialised men towards restricted emotional awareness and expression (Fischer and Good, 1997). 'Cracking the shell of masculinity'[26] can be a difficult and delicate process, sometimes requiring specialised tools.

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[25] The program involved a two day intensive phase facilitated by Frank Donovan, involving two workers as participant trainees in the model and eight clients. The workers then continued as facilitators of the remaining eight week term of weekly groups. Although three groups undertook the program, only one of them has an available evaluation report.

[26] "Cracking the shell of masculinity" (attributed to Dale Hurst) was an exercise presented in the "Violence and Addictions" module of the "Working *With* Shame" series of workshops in Hobart, Tasmania, October 2003, facilitated by Tony Webb. See Webb (2003), Chapter 8, pp. 213-215.

A tool that has been found useful for the enhancement of both cognitive and emotion work is mindfulness meditation[27]. In the context of training and team maintenance, short mindfulness practices at the beginning of each session help to create the conditions needed for emotion focused work, and model the mindfulness practice for use elsewhere. The objectivity ('witness' or 'observer') that mindfulness meditation fosters can help people sort out emotional and narrative entanglements. It is widely used in family abuse group work[28].

6.3 Assessment as a part of training

In the Men Mentoring Men program, part of the evaluation and assessment process was built into the training program and involved "making the men work hard emotionally to see if they can handle their own emotional material" (Foxlewin, 2005). Some men were unable to do this and left the course. How the men related to each other during the training was also noted. The integration of assessment and training is common practice in experiential group learning work and adult education[29]. Additionally, prisoner populations are characterised by relatively low literacy and self-esteem (see section 2.1). Training and assessment procedures need to recognise and accommodate this (see 'Literacy and equity access', section 6.6).

6.4 A multi-path approach to peer employment

As has been noted in section 5.3 of this report, it is important when implementing a program to avoid adding to the burden of humiliation or low self-esteem a prisoner may be carrying. The recruitment/training/selection/employment of peer workers can be conceived and run as a whole, with the intention that every person who completes the course earns the certificate and is offered some sort of employment. Alternative paths might include (borrowing in part from Port Phillip Prison's model):

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[27] See   http://www.prison.dhamma.org   for discussions and links to use in prison programs.
[28] From personal communications, family abuse networks.
[29] This is the author's experience throughout a TAFE Community Work course, and more recently in a Workplace Training and Assessment course.

- Peer supporter or listener, able to move between units, providing service to segregation or medical units, sitting with prisoners in crisis and generally filling gaps in prisoner support
- Unit supporter, similar to peer supporter but confined to own unit
- Peer welcomer, orientating and/or mentoring new prisoners for a specified period (one week has been suggested by a Risdon staff member)
- Peer helper, assigned to tasks such as helping with letter writing, buddying a cognitively impaired prisoner, helping with peer program surveys, etc.
- Peer educator, transmitting specific information to prisoners
- Peer training mentor, returning to subsequent training courses to mentor new trainees with literacy or other needs or to help the facilitator with sessions and preparation, in the process deepening their own learning

Peers would not be locked into these categories, but would shift between then according to their personal and skills development. A participatory approach would have the peer support team (which includes the peer program Coordinator) decide who enters training and where and when they work. (It is accepted that this would be subject to endorsement by security staff).

Canadian peer support evaluations noted that the peer supporters benefited most from the program, and that the training could be opened to anyone who wanted to do it. The evaluations also noted some ill feelings from prisoners who applied to join the team but were not accepted. Some of this is probably unavoidable, for even in a participatory approach the peer support team will need to protect the integrity of the team from disruptive influences (Syed and Blanchette, 2000; Delveaux and Blanchette, 2000).

6.5   Peer training as a continuous process

The need in a shifting population for a continuous supply of new peer supporters, and the need for on-going training and maintenance of existing peers, could largely be served in the one process. Following the first peer training and set-up of the peer support team, trained and experienced team members can beneficially

take part in on-going training of new peers (NGPSP, 1996). People may also choose to repeat a training course[30], or be asked to by the team. This may also be useful in filling the training group to an optimum number.

6.6   Literacy and equity access

The relatively low levels of literacy found in prisons (section 2.1), and the need to avoid adding to the burdens of stigmatisation and humiliation that a prisoner may already be carrying (section 5.3), points to the accommodation of suitable prisoners with low literacy into the peer support program. The experiential nature of much of the training, the formalisation of peer support and mentoring *within* the training group and peer support team, and the adoption of a multi-path approach to peer employment (section 6.4), would enable a policy of inclusive practice. Peer support recording forms (data collection for evaluation and planning) can primarily consist of tick-boxes, as identity of the person helped and personal information from peer support sessions should not be recorded for confidentiality reasons (NGPSP, 1996). The supportive culture of the peer support team and a team policy of mutual support and mentoring could also provide opportunities for literacy development.

6.7   TAFE (NSW) 'Mentoring in the Community' course

This course was developed by TAFE (NSW) with the Justice Action prisoner support group, initially for accredited training of peer mentors for post-release prisoners. The course has to date been offered for a variety of community and prison-based mentoring or support applications, with the graduate being awarded a Statement of Attainment. TAFE (NSW) is currently conferring with TAFE (WA) with the intent of cooperatively developing the course into a Unit of Competency within the larger Community Services Training Package. Accredited training that is linked to vocational pathways is considered highly appropriate to the

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[30] This is a common request in family abuse groups, when the participant realises the need for more work. Typically they become models and motivators for new members. (From the author's experience and discussions in a stopping violence network).

rehabilitative purpose of prisons and to the theory and philosophy of participatory peer support programs (TAFE/NSW, 2004).

The course has been independently assessed in the context of HIV and health promotion peer support worker training. Offenders were selected to do the 2 day HIV and Health training after completing the TAFE course. The Coordinator reported that the "program outcome was...the best informed and highest skilled group of Peer Support Workers I have experienced for the last 9 years", and recommended the use of the TAFE 'Mentoring in the Community' course as "a pre-requisite program for HHPU Peer Support Workers be pursued within the scope of the Offender Programs and Services Unit"[31].

Competency-based training (under the National Training Framework) offers a flexible approach to training and assessment that is responsive to organisations' and individuals' needs and circumstances. For example, Justice Action's (NSW) mentor training was able to bring in various specialist presenters to facilitate sessions like 'working with shame and other emotions', 'working with mental illness', 'working with addictions' and 'working with mental health'[32]. These are not 'extras' that are added to the nominal 60 hours of the TAFE course, but rather become part of the course and are assessed in light of the matrices provided in the course materials, or the Competency Descriptors available on the National Training Authority website. The Framework also offers "Recognised Prior Learning" (RPL), which need not have been formal, as a means to recognition of existing skills.

To provide a course under the National Training Framework, a facilitator experienced in the subject matter of the training, holding a current Workplace Training and Assessment certificate, and working within the ambit of a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), is needed.

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[31] Personal communication, Fred Ropp, NSW Corrections, December, 2004.
[32] Personal communication, Tony Webb, January, 2004

7.0   Program maintenance and support of peers

7.1   Staff and prisoner awareness and communication

The high turnover of prisoner populations and normal staff turnover require formalised procedures to maintain program awareness at a high level. Peer orientation of new prisoners is likely to be part of the program, but needs to organised so that provision is ensured for *all* new arrivals. In their evaluation, Syed and Blanchette (2000) note that the role of the peer support program within the prison needed better definition. Since there was no Standing Order for the program, policies and guidelines for the functioning of the program were "somewhat ambiguous" (p.22). Inclusion of the program in the Standing Orders was therefore recommended. Peer support program information should also be written into the staff induction manual or procedures.

Means to enhancing communication between staff and peer supporters have been discussed in sections 4 and 6.1. These include regular meetings of the Steering Committee (comprising peer team chair and staff), inviting interested staff into honorary positions on the peer support team[33], parallel trainings for staff and peers (possibly with some cross-over between the groups), and a parallel peer support program for staff. The peer support program Coordinator, as both a member of the team and of staff, "is the critical link between the Peer Support Team and the staff of the facility" (NGPSP, 1996, p.4).

At Casuarina Prison (WA), regular meetings are held between the Assistant Superintendent, the Indigenous Peer Support Officers and the Peer Support Team. The Peer Support Officers also attend meetings discussing 'at risk' prisoners and can pass pertinent information to relevant team members.

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[33] A Canadian evaluation noted: "Both interview participants and survey respondents appreciated the correctional officers who have been asked to join the Peer Support Team as 'honorary' team members. Participants requested that this practice continue" (p.3). (CSC, 2005).

Most programs use a method of identification of peer supporters, usually a distinctive T-shirt or a badge. At Port Phillip the Listeners are also issued with a swipe card to facilitate moving about in the course of their duties (also recommended for British prisons; see HM Prison Service, 2005b). At Casuarina Prison it has been reported that the prisoners have no problem with the T-shirts, although a "couple of the peer supporters don't use them because they don't want to stand out"[34].

7.2 Ongoing training of peers and training of new peers

All graduates of peer support training should have a manual or folder of course materials, which can be added to in subsequent training workshops. Some of these may be facilitated by people from the outside community. Syed and Blanchette (2000) report:

> Volunteer facilitators from the community were well received by the trainees. They felt that these facilitators represented support from "the outside". Trainees appreciated that community facilitators were unpaid volunteers who took time out of their schedules…to participate in the training. One team member mentioned, "We had great people come and talk to us!" Including volunteer facilitators in the training is also beneficial in easing the workload of PST Coordinators (p.29).

The use of community volunteers can enable frequent scheduling of learning sessions without straining the resources or time of the Coordinator. Subjects can be broad and as useful to the personal development of the team members as to the quality of the peer support team's work. Canadian trainings include the following 'extra-core' subjects:

- The socialisation process
- Violence
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Loss and grief
- Conflict with the law

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[34] From personal conversation with Peer Support Officer.

- Substance abuse   (NGPSP, 1996)

From the evaluation report of a peer support program:

Participants in the study requested that ex-addicts and former prisoners be asked to conduct training workshops. Women felt the involvement of these individuals , rather than "professionals", would help strengthen their ties to the outside community and to people with whom they have more in common (CSC, 2005, p.3).

A practice that has been shown to be useful in prison contexts is mindfulness meditation (see Studer, 2001). Short mindfulness practices at the beginning of training sessions and team meetings can help create the grounded presence useful for emotion-focused work, as well as teach the practice for use elsewhere[35].

The employment of trained and experienced peer supporters in the training of new peers serves both to refresh and deepen the learning of the former and to provide models and motivation, as well as skills training, to the latter. The program Coordinator or trainer could supervise these peer educators towards qualifications in adult education – another vocationally linked, accredited training opportunity (see section 6.7).

7.3 Support of peers

The HM Prison Service (2005b) 'Good practice guide for peer support schemes' warns that: "For listeners, the support and opportunity to off-load that is provided by regular contact with Samaritans[36] is vital" (p.20). It also states: "The individuals and methods by which support will be provided must be determined from the outset, or the scheme will fail" (p.21).

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[35] This was a regular practice in Centacare Tasmania's Controlling Abusive Behaviours group, and is frequently used in similar groups elsewhere.

[36] In many British prisons the peer supporters (termed 'listeners') are trained and supported by the Samaritans, a community based organisation.

A training and maintenance process that emphasises collective decision-making and mutual support, care and respect, should provide considerable support to team members through regular formal and informal meetings and workshops (see section 6). However, professional support must also be available. The program Coordinator should be available for support and debriefing. Regular supervision meetings (every 3 months in Canadian programs; see NGPSP, 1996) between the Coordinator and each peer supporter would help formalise this process. Outside support should also be available, since issues may arise that a team member feels unable or unwilling to discuss within the team (which includes the Coordinator). This latter role could be filled by volunteer community based counsellors, who ideally would remain available in the medium to long term, or by partnership with a community based agency[37].

Syed and Blanchette (2000) discuss peer supporter burnout. Their evaluation found that two out of three team members indicated no burnout or pressure associated with their role. Precautionary measures at Joliette included:

- Peer supporters may refuse a request for counselling
- Temporary leave from team duties is encouraged in cases of role-related or personal stress
- Peer support is not permitted at Joliette between 10pm and 8am[38]
- Debriefing by support staff following difficult sessions

Delveaux and Blanchette (2000) report the additional precaution that peer supporters do not counsel members of the same house in which they live. This gives them more opportunity to relax outside their role. Problems with provision of services have resulted from this policy, and it may not suit security and housing arrangements of some institutions.

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[37] An example of this is provided by the Tasmentors program (which does group mentoring with boys in schools) whose mentors have access to the donated services of a counselling agency (from personal conversation with Coordinator).

[38] Syed and Blanchette point out that this restriction may in itself be a source of stress to peer supporters, who may feel they are prevented from doing their job properly. HM Prison Service, 2005b, recommends the rotation of Listeners every three or four hours in cases of crisis care, and the use of two Listeners in the case of overnight care.

HM Prison Service (2005b) further suggests a six week (minimum) 'probationary' period for new Listeners, during which time they are closely supported by experienced Listeners. This points to a peer support service that becomes increasingly self supporting from its inception. Although staff support remains essential, the work load of staff would decease after the training and employment of the first group of peers.

7.4 Maintenance of ethical standards

HM Prison Service (2005b) suggests the establishment of ground rules to deter and deal with abuses of the scheme:

- Any Listener proving positive on a drug test may be temporarily suspended
- Permanent suspension would usually follow a case of trafficking or persistent positive tests
- Any breach of confidentiality would result in instant deselection

Confidentiality is the most common concern for prisoners who contemplate using a peer support scheme. This points to a strong focus on confidentiality during training and maintenance. Most program guidelines recommend expulsion from the team when confidentiality has been breached. Peer support team confidentiality safeguards should be communicated to prisoners in order to encourage confidence in the program. HM Prison Service (2005b) highlights the responsibility of staff to help maintain confidentiality:

> *Listeners should not be asked to reveal details received while acting in that capacity including, for example, possession of a weapon. Listeners who cannot keep to this rule should not continue in the role* (p.14).

Syed and Blanchette (2000) found two other problems, related to ethics, in the evaluated program:

- Some staff and prisoners believed the peer program created a hierarchy amongst the prisoner population. Some team members exhibited 'airs of superiority' and some staff treated team members preferentially

- A few prisoners thought that some team members tried to 'control' recipients too much, making decisions for them

Both of these problems have their origin in the essentially hierarchic and dominating culture of which the prison community is only a small part. Addressing these and related issues is integral to any counselling or human services program. However, they are particularly pertinent (and inimical) to a participatory peer operated program. As developing (and experienced) counsellors discover, old habits in relating to people will recur in different contexts and guises. The vigilance necessary to counter them can be encouraged in a program's design, training and maintenance – where an ethical congruity is expressed through the whole process.

Misuse of the program by peer supporters – such as using a support session to chat with other prisoners or to transport messages and contraband – do not appear to be a significant problem in existing programs. Although these misuses are difficult to detect, staff members of a number of programs thought that they rarely occurred[39]. The best safeguard would lie in the quality of the training and selection process (see section 5.3).

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[39] Syed and Blanchette (2000), Delveaux and Blanchette (2000), and from conversations with peer support staff, Victoria and Western Australia.

8.0   Program evaluation

Evaluation is integral to implementing an effective program. It can:

- Establish whether a program is meeting its objectives
- Provide quality assurance
- Enable on-going program feedback and improvement
- Ensure accountability for all parties   (Hollin,1995, in Devilly et al.,2003)

8.1   Methods of evaluation

Evaluation needs to be budgeted and built into the program from its inception. It should include both process and impact evaluation and use both qualitative and quantitative methods.

A **process evaluation** investigates whether there are changes due to implementation of the program, and whether the program has been implemented and managed as intended.   Pre- and post-program surveys could investigate areas such as:

- Opinions of users of the service
- Benefits and problems experienced by peer supporters
- Changes in the culture of the prison

Notes taken during meetings, training, and supervisory sessions provide useful qualitative data about the program's processes. Individual interviews and focus groups of staff and prisoners provide rich material towards ensuring and improving program integrity.

An **impact evaluation** measures the program's success in achieving its aims and objectives. An important example is suicide and self harm prevention. Pre- and post-program levels of distress, self harming incidents and suicidal ideation may be compared. Devilly et al. (2003) suggest here a controlled study involving peer and professionally served groups, and a group receiving no intervention. In view

of the wealth of anecdotal evidence for peer support programs, as well as the studies from Swansea and Port Phillip showing marked decreases in self harm following the implementation of peer support programs (section 3.5), the denial of service to a 'control group' could be seen as unethical.

Corrections Canada's National Guidelines for peer support programs (NGPSP, 1996) recommend that the evaluation process includes:

- Documentation review (including records of individual peer supporters' sessions with prisoners)
- Surveys
- Face to face interviews with prisoners and staff
- Measures of self-esteem
- Measures of group dynamics
- Prisoners' perceptions of their correctional environment

Pre- and post-program tests are administered (see section 8.2) and the evaluation is administered by Correction's Research Branch. The intent of the evaluation is to:

- Examine the program's effectiveness
- Point to changes needed to improve the program
- Examine gaps in the service and find solutions to improve it
- Provide in-depth evaluation of all aspects of the program from a variety of perspectives within the prison

8.2 Tools of evaluation

Corrections Canada requires the following tools for peer support program evaluation:

- Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale
- Sociometric Tests
- The Correctional Environment Status Inventory
- Surveys
- Semi-structured Interviews   (NGPSP, 1996)

The use of these tools is discussed and illustrated in Syed and Blanchette (2000).

Morison et al.'s (2000) evaluation of Bendigo Prison Community's residential drug and alcohol program used for pre- and post-program tests:

- The Coping Resources Inventory
- The Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory

8.3   An interactive process evaluation

Backett-Milburn and Wilson (2000) describe an interactive approach to a process evaluation of a school based peer education project. The evaluator used the following mainly qualitative methods:

- Monitoring by the Project Coordinator and regular liaison interviews
- Interviews with stakeholders and interested parties
- Individual interviews and focus groups with peer educators
- Observation of training sessions
- Evaluation by peer educators of training and their own work
- Participant observation at steering group meetings
- Surveys of knowledge and attitudes

The model of interactive evaluation adopted required regular contact and feedback between the evaluator and the project, from its inception. Because the evaluation model draws on 'competing versions of what is going on', the evaluator needed to involve other relevant people in decisions about the kinds of questions to be asked, of whom, and the ways of gathering the data. The value of this feedback mechanism is describe by Scott (1992) in Backett-Milburn and Wilson (2000):

> ...the essential [documents] of everyday evaluation...become, not the truth enshrined, but the means through which changes, developments, problems and issues can be assessed and explored. ...If this process does not occur, the danger is that when an external evaluation occurs, or time to write the final report comes around, what may have been valid shifts away from the

original aims can appear as failures because the means of explanation and justification do not exist (p.87).

This is offered as an appropriate model of evaluation for a participatory peer support project, the aims and procedures of which may change as it develops, particularly in the context of an institution undergoing major change, which very much describes Risdon Prison now and into the future. The evaluation might be coordinated from an educational institution, with students carrying out the tasks. Indeed the project itself might be approached as a participatory action research project[40] involving prisoners, staff and students, the evaluation being an integral part of it. The research and learning opportunities would be vast. This option does not preclude impact or outcome evaluation, as part of an illuminating whole.

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[40] For information on this approach, consult "Action Research Resources" at:
http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arhome.html

9.0   Peer programs for Tasmanian corrections

9.1   An inclusive strategy

The refurbished Risdon Prison is to have 11 units (9 medium security and 2 maximum), each housing up to 28 prisoners. Units are divided into 2 floors, locked apart at night. A minimum of one peer supporter per unit has been suggested by staff. This would provide an acceptable group size (11) for the first training (see section 6.1).

Hayes Prison Farm currently contains about 80 prisoners, of whom 40 are serving longer than one year and 14 more than 10 years. This population would also support a peer program. In view of the likelihood of funding limitations and the migration that takes place between the two institutions, it may be appropriate for both to be served by the same Coordinator.

There are currently about 30 women at Risdon prison, 7 of whom are serving more than one year. A peer training within this small population could be piloted in the way suggested by Syed and Blanchette (2000), who discussed offering training to the whole prison population because of the beneficial effects training had on trainees and because many who wanted to do the training were refused. In that model, not all graduates become peer supporters.

The frequently expressed desire of peer support team members to continue with community work, for themselves and for others, could provide a powerful resource for two vulnerable groups: young people at risk of entering the justice system, and people who have been released from prison and are in danger of returning.

9.2 Mentoring of at risk youth

HM Prison Service (2005b) argues against running peer support schemes with juvenile prisoners, because they are "insufficiently mature for the role and most spend too short a time in custody to allow a stable listener group to be created"

(p.7). Peer mentoring among young people does in fact exist in schools and youth crime contexts[41], yet the issue of time in custody may remain a hindrance. Whether it be at Ashley (youth) Detention Centre or in diversionary and post-detention contexts, the training and experience of prisoner peer supporters would provide a valuable pool of potential mentors for young people involved in or at risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. The informal involvement of ex-prisoners with at risk youth is a well-known phenomenon[42], and is increasingly being formalised, as in the Breaking the Cycle program (Victoria)[43], where women ex-prisoners with a history of drug addiction work with youth who are in the early stages of anti-social behaviour and substance abuse. The accredited peer support training and experience received in prison could be credited towards a Youth Work qualification within the National Training Framework. This could be completed in paid employment working with youth, with part time attendance of TAFE or other Registered Training Organisation.

9.3   Pre- and post-release peer mentoring

A peer program evaluation noted that "participants expressed the need for a formal Peer Support Team to be established for women once they leave the Prison for Women" (CSC, 2005). Some peer support team members will want to continue the work after release from prison. 'Half way houses', staffed by peer mentors, could be established for newly released people with nowhere to go. Prisoners might also be contacted pre-release, the mentors helping them to set up useful contacts in the outside community (JA, 2004). Peer mentors may be more acceptable to ex-prisoners than Community Corrections Officers, for ongoing support. Again the training and experience of these people would provide a pool of skilled workers who would be encouraged to further their learning, either within the National Training Framework, or University.

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[41] See U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Youth in Action No.8* at: http://www.ncjrs.org/html/youthbulletin/9907-4/contents.html
[42] For example, a volunteer ex-prisoner working with a police youth diversion team (from conversation with a police officer, Hobart)
[43] A winner of the 2003 Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards. See: http://www.aic.gov.au/avpa/2003.html

10.0   Conclusion

Prisoner peer operated programs are widespread nationally and internationally and on evidence available show high levels of approval from prisoners and prison officers. Improvement of the social environment for both staff and prisoners has been demonstrated. The small amount of empirical evidence available is also favourable, showing large reductions in self harm following the implementation of peer support programs.

The peer supporters gain the most from the programs, ranging from increases in self-esteem to the discovery of a vocation. The benefits of peer support programs for the peer supporters may be explained primarily by empowerment theory. Subjective disempowerment is offered as a major factor in the complex production of a majority of criminal acts and behaviours and in the playing out of power relations in prisons. Prisons need to promote maximum subjective empowerment, within the objective fact of imprisonment, if they are to become rehabilitative for the majority of prisoners.

Peer supporters can provide models for fellow prisoners of new (more open, supportive and respectful) ways for peers to relate to one another. Part of this modelling is the self-respect that is inherent in respect for the other, and vice versa. This is related to the 'mentoring cycle', which may be conceived as a mechanism that translates empowerment from the psychological to the social, that is, from the individual to relationship and community. Prisoner support staff and community facilitators mentor the development of peer supporters who in turn support and mentor prisoners, some of whom in their turn will take on the work themselves, whether formally or informally, in prison or later in the wider community.

Peer led programs can therefore been seen as exercises in relationship and community building, and therefore as eminently suitable in criminal justice and correctional contexts.

Appendix 1

Some tools for emotion focused group work

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list of resources for what is a large and growing area of work. The intention is only to present some recent developments I have been exposed to that are pertinent to peer supporter training and maintenance.

"Working *With* Shame" workshop

This experiential workshop was developed by Tony Webb in the course of his doctoral research (thesis entitled "Towards a Mature Shame Culture: Theoretical and Practical Tools for Personal and Social Growth", available online – see Webb, 2003). The facial and postural expression of emotions provides an anchor point for participants' explorations of their emotional dynamics around 'shame' and 'pride'. Shame emerges as a positive social emotion that has been culturally distorted and in our inner experience frequently conflated with fear. The tactics we use to avoid these painful feelings are explored on the floor by physically moving about on a map of avoidance behaviours – the 'Compass of Shame'. Our emotional manoeuvrings are felt in the body as well as observed by the intellect, fulfilling the conditions of change described by Greenberg (1993, 2002) (see section 6.2).

The primary mode of facilitation is by asking questions of the participants, and modelling by the facilitator. Duration of the workshop is open-ended, but a minimum would be three hours. I have presented it to men's behaviour change groups in two sessions of 2 hours each, incorporating revision time at the beginning of the second session. The workshop is pivotal for many participants and is highly pertinent to correctional contexts. The workshop would also provide an excellent introduction to a training module on 'emotions'.

The workshop script is available online (in the thesis – see Webb, 2003) or contact Tony Webb, webb@pnc.com.au , or myself, davidsadair@yahoo.com.au, for

further information or facilitation. An evaluation report on the 2003 series of workshops in Tasmania is available.

"Seven Steps to Mastery": a mentor training workshop

This workshop has been developed by Tony Webb, from Rein Van de Ruit's work with original ideas from Joseph Campbell. The workshop is in three parts:

- Questions on the meaning of mentoring and participants' experiences of it.
- Walking the floor map – the "Seven Steps to Mastery" – where the participant's personal development or path to a specific attainment is explored 'in the body'. This facilitates access to emotional drivers and blocks to progress. The role of mentors in these life processes is explored.
- Debrief and discussion.

This workshop would make an ideal introduction to mentor training. The script is available at <http://www.cpe.uts.edu.au/pdfs/seven_steps.pdf> or contact Tony Webb <webb@pnc.com.au> or in Tasmania myself, davidsadair@yahoo.com.au, for further information or facilitation.

Emotional intelligence group work

This is a form of group and/or pair work developed in Tasmania from co-counselling roots by Rex Stoesigger. The model is essentially about active listening to emotional content. The task of the 'intelligent listener' is to help keep the 'emotional processor' focused on feelings, using gentle questions and reminders to divert the person from rationalisation or other avoidance tactics. To do this successfully the listener must avoid being 'highjacked' by the emotions and narratives of the 'processor'. The model is therefore effective both for training of counsellor/supporters and for the development of emotional literacy and the processing of difficult or blocked emotions[44].

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[44] For elucidation of this broad type of approach, the reader is referred to Greenberg, 2002. Greenberg terms his approach 'emotion coaching', summarised into "...(a) being attuned to clients' feelings and offering proposals to help them process their experience more deeply and (b) working to integrate cognition and emotion by using cognition to make sense of emotion" (p.xii).

The work is introduced to group participants within the framework of emotional intelligence theory (see Goleman, 1996). This provides an easily understood cognitive basis to a model of emotional processing that is designed for non-professional use. Information or training in this model may be sought through Rex Stoesigger, rex_stoessiger@southcom.com.au , or PO Box 567, North Hobart, Tasmania, 7002, or contact myself as above.

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