



# **COUNTING THE COST OF INACTION: FAILURE TO DELIVER PRISONER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNSELLING**

## **Counting the Cost of Inaction: Failure to Deliver Prisoner Domestic Violence Counselling**

*Community Justice Coalition Paper: 17 July 2017.*

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# COUNTING THE COST OF INACTION: FAILURE TO DELIVER PRISONER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNSELLING

Community Justice Coalition

17<sup>th</sup> July 2017

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need to reduce the rate of domestic violence offending has been identified as an area of priority by the NSW Government with a nominated target of achieving a 5-percentage point reduction in the 12-month recidivism rate of domestic violence assault offenders.<sup>1</sup> Although access to behavioural change and counselling programs are vital to prisoner rehabilitation, the NSW Auditor General found that 75% of prisoners who needed access to behaviour change programs reached their earliest release date without gaining entry.<sup>2</sup>

Inability to access such rehabilitative programs is not only detrimental to domestic violence offenders, but also to all offenders. Counselling programs are essential in providing offenders the social skills to deal with the disturbances of family and partner relationships in a healthy way. Additionally, they help offenders cope with their isolation in prison and prepare them for a smoother re-integration into society.

The current mental health and rehabilitation services are not meeting the urgent needs of prisoners, especially with a conflict of interest present in the system. Corrective Services psychologists have a role as a counsellor, while also reporting to parole boards for purposes of management, creating a trust issue and undermining objectivity in their dealings.

An earlier paper “Domestic Violence Prevention: Online Services for Prisoners” 230317 argued that prisoners, in addition to current face-to-face programs, should be given access to online counselling services that are designed to change attitudes and to promote and

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<sup>1</sup> *Reducing Domestic Violence* (2017) NSW Government <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/premiers-priorities/reducing-domestic-violence/>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Therapeutic Programs In Prisons - Audit Office Of New South Wales* (2017) Audit.nsw.gov.au <<https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/therapeutic-programs-in-prisons>>.

strengthen respectful relationships between men and women. These could be made available to many who are unable to access face-to-face programs. The proven benefits of such programs were discussed in detail in the earlier paper.

In an effort to assist the NSW government in satisfying the unmet demand for counselling programs, an offer was presented to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry to conduct a free trial of using computers in cells to deliver online counselling services (OCS) to NSW Prisons.<sup>3</sup> The provision of OCS services alongside existing programs was intended to assist collaboration between prison staff and external providers, ensuring that all prisoners have access to an appropriate level of support. The NSW Government rejected this offer<sup>4</sup> to increase the number of prisoners accessing treatment programs, and recidivism rates have continued to rise.<sup>5</sup>

This paper argues that the cost of providing on-line services would be far less than the costs now incurred as a result of domestic violence recidivism. It explores the social and economic cost of domestic violence recidivism in NSW and illustrates some of the potential costs of this missed opportunity. It concludes that in the twelve months of 2016 alone the counselling proposal could have resulted in 352 fewer offenders returning to NSW prisons, over 500 women and children spared the traumatic effects of domestic violence, and delivered potential savings to the NSW economy of up to \$110 million dollars.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Corrective Services NSW act on the recommendations of the *Domestic Violence Prevention: Online services to Prisoners* discussion paper<sup>6</sup> and supplement existing behavioural change programs with online counselling delivered through computers in cells.

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<sup>3</sup> *Recent Responses To Our Online Counselling Proposal* (2017) Justice Action <[http://www.justiceaction.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=800:recent-responses-to-our-online-counselling-proposal&catid=132&Itemid=1005](http://www.justiceaction.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=800:recent-responses-to-our-online-counselling-proposal&catid=132&Itemid=1005)>.

<sup>4</sup> Luke Grant, *Letter To Justice Action Dated 14 January 2016* <[http://www.justiceaction.org.au/images/140116\\_letter\\_from\\_luke\\_grant.pdf](http://www.justiceaction.org.au/images/140116_letter_from_luke_grant.pdf)>

<sup>5</sup> *Service Delivery* (2016) Audit.nsw.gov.au <<http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/financial/volume-seven-2016-justice/service-delivery>>.

<sup>6</sup> Community Justice Coalition, *Domestic Violence Prevention: Online Services for Prisoners* (23 March 2017) <<http://www.communityjusticecoalition.org/archive/domestic-violence-prevention-online-services-for-prisoners?showall=&start=2>>

2. That Corrective Services NSW consider extending the use of computers in cells to educational programs, such as the successful *Making the Connection* program offered by the University of Southern Queensland.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIA

Between January and December 2016, thirty-four people in NSW lost their lives in incidents attributed to domestic violence.<sup>8</sup> In the same period, NSW Police recorded 29,044 incidents of domestic violence-related assault, accounting for approximately 46% of all recorded assaults.<sup>9</sup>

The Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012 Personal Safety Survey (PSS) found that 54.2% of women who experienced 'current cohabiting partner' violence had children in their care,<sup>10</sup> and 57.8% of those women stated that their children had witnessed the violence.<sup>11</sup>

Between October 2015 and September 2016, 15,711 persons were convicted of domestic violence offences in NSW and 2,132 were sentenced to imprisonment, respectively.

Domestic and family violence offences account for 13% of listed court matters across NSW and some regions report that this percentage is as high as 60%.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RECIDIVISM

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<sup>7</sup> University of Southern Queensland, "Making The Connection" (University of Southern Queensland, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research Reference: kr17-14918

<sup>9</sup> NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, "NSW Recorded Crimes Statistics 2016" (BOCSAR, 2017) <<http://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Documents/RCS-Annual/Report-Recorded-Crime-Statistics-2016-rcs2016.pdf>>

<sup>10</sup> Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 'Violence against women: Additional analysis of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey, 2012' (at 22 October 2015) 102 [2].

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> New South Wales Auditor-General, "Responding To Domestic And Family Violence" (Audit Office of NSW, 2011).

NSW has among the highest rates of prisoner recidivism in Australia with 50.7% of all offenders released from custody returning to prison within two years of their release.<sup>13</sup> This percentage is likely even higher among those convicted of domestic violence offences as the ten-year reimprisonment rate for some offences that are commonly linked to domestic violence such as assault (63%), or breach of a violence order (80%), are significantly higher than the average.<sup>14</sup>

A recent NSW study into the effectiveness of short prison sentences for domestic violence-related offences found no significant difference in recidivism rates between offenders sentenced to custodial sentences of fewer than twelve months and those sentenced to suspended sentences.<sup>15</sup> Concerns have been expressed that prison sentences may actually have the opposite effect of increasing the likelihood of reoffending<sup>16</sup> as experiences in prison may serve to reinforce violent behaviours.<sup>17</sup> The increasing rate of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in NSW correctional facilities<sup>18</sup> highlights the necessity of providing services to assist all NSW prisoners to overcome the factors contributing to violent behaviours and to develop the skills necessary for successful reintegration.

### 3. THE BENEFITS OF BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE PROGRAMS

Behavioural Change Programs that include a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) component have demonstrated promising results when offered to domestic violence offenders. A recent ANROWS review of perpetrator intervention programs found that “there is no difference between the effectiveness of the psychoeducational approach or the CBT approach to perpetrator interventions” but noted that the most appropriate approach may vary across different groups of offenders.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision), "Report On Government Services 2017 Vol. C, Justice" (Productivity Commission, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Therapeutic Programs In Prisons - Audit Office Of New South Wales* (2017) [Audit.nsw.gov.au <https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/therapeutic-programs-in-prisons>](https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/therapeutic-programs-in-prisons)

<sup>15</sup> Judy Trevena and Suzanne Poynton, 'Does a Prison Sentence Affect Future Domestic Violence Reoffending?' (Research Paper No 190), NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Parliament of Australia, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Justice Sentencing Council, "Sentencing Trends And Practices: Annual Report 2015" (NSW Sentencing Council, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Western, "Lifetimes Of Violence In A Sample Of Released Prisoners" (2015) 1 *rsf: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Justice, "2015-2016 Annual Report" (NSW Government, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> ANROWS, "Perpetrator intervene

A 2013 US analysis of domestic violence offender programs compared treatment programs that follow the Duluth “power and control” model and those that used alternative approaches, including CBT. The authors found completion of non-Duluth programs was associated with an average 33% reduction in recidivism rates.<sup>20</sup>

More recent evidence suggests that these results are magnified when programs including CBT are combined with other programs in a prison environment that is supportive of prisoner rehabilitation. A 2016 Israeli study found that

*“Integrating a package of evidence-based treatments in a supportive prison environment can lead to significant and strong reductions in general recidivism and recidivism for violent offenses... After 4 years from release, the risk of reincarceration within the treatment group was 39.7 % lower in comparison to the control group and the risk of rearrests was 38.7 % [lower in comparison as well].”<sup>21</sup>*

A recent longitudinal study of Australian domestic violence offender programs found that the majority of participants were violence free or almost violence free two years after completing the program.<sup>22</sup> Although this study focused on community programs and cannot be assumed to apply to programs within correctional facilities the authors noted that the positive effects were strongest among offenders whose involvement in the program mandated by the justice system.

Other studies have demonstrated the validity and cost-effectiveness of online delivered behavioural change programs. A recent evaluation of an internet-facilitated behavioural change program developed by Violence Free Families found that it was “at least as successful as face to face programs and caused no additional difficulties in implementation.”<sup>23</sup> The

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tions in Australia: Part one - Literature review. *State of knowledge paper*” (ANROWS 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, ‘What Works to Reduce Recidivism by Domestic Violence Offenders?’ (Research Paper), Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2013

<sup>21</sup> Badi Hasisi et al, "The “Care Package,” Prison Domestic Violence Programs And Recidivism: A Quasi-Experimental Study" (2016) 12 *Journal of Experimental Criminology* <<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11292-016-9266-y>>.

<sup>22</sup> P.E. Thea Brown, Dr Catherine Flynn, Paula Fernandez Arias, Carlos Clavijo , “A Study of The Impact On Men & Their Partners In The Short Term & In The Long Term Of Attending Men’s Behaviour Change Programs” (2016), Monash University Printing Services, 2016

<sup>23</sup> P.E. Thea Brown, Dr Catherine Flynn, Paula Fernandez Arias, Carlos Clavijo , “A Study of The Impact On Men & Their Partners In The Short Term & In The Long Term Of Attending Men’s Behaviour Change

evaluation, performed by the University of Melbourne's Centre for Program Evaluation, found that the online program resulted in greater openness and engagement among many participants and that homework requirements resulted in offenders spending up to 50% more time on the program.<sup>24</sup> Most importantly the evaluations found that there was no higher risk to partner and family safety and that the partners of participants expressed a high level of satisfaction with the program.<sup>25</sup> The closed environment of correctional facilities allows the risk to current and former partners to be further reduced as all activity and contacts can be closely monitored and restricted using technology already in place in a number of Australian facilities.<sup>26</sup>

Although behaviour change programs for domestic violence offenders are offered in NSW prisons, they are limited in their capacity and often include admission restrictions that exclude many prisoners who have been incarcerated for domestic violence offences.<sup>27</sup> Online counselling services can assist in meeting this unmet demand and can increase the number of prisoners who have access to evidence-based treatment options.

Independent OCS providers may find it easier to develop trust and open communication with prisoners due to their lack of direct involvement in decisions concerning future release. Nevertheless, as independent service providers they can co-operate with authorities and assist in identifying prisoners who may benefit from inclusion in existing treatment programs.

A number of studies have noted that a significant number of domestic violence offenders also suffer from mental health conditions requiring independent treatment.<sup>28,29</sup> The need for

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Programs" (2016), Monash University Printing Services, 2016

<sup>24</sup> The Family Violence Prevention Foundation of Australia, "Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence" (2015) < <https://www.violencefreefamilies.org.au/web/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/VFF-Submission-to-RCFV-15-05-29.pdf>>

<sup>25</sup> The Family Violence Prevention Foundation of Australia, "Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence" (2015) < <https://www.violencefreefamilies.org.au/web/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/VFF-Submission-to-RCFV-15-05-29.pdf>>

<sup>26</sup> Cyber IT Solutions, *Prison Projects* (2017) <<http://www.prisonpc.com/projects.html>>.

<sup>27</sup> Community Justice Coalition, *Domestic Violence Prevention: Online Services for Prisoners* (23 March 2017) < <http://www.communityjusticecoalition.org/archive/domestic-violence-prevention-online-services-for-prisoners?showall=&start=2>>

<sup>28</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 'What Works to Reduce Recidivism by Domestic Violence Offenders?' (Research Paper), Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2013 <[http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1119/Wsipp\\_What-Works-to-Reduce-Recidivism-by-Domestic-Violence-Offenders\\_Full-Report.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1119/Wsipp_What-Works-to-Reduce-Recidivism-by-Domestic-Violence-Offenders_Full-Report.pdf)>

<sup>29</sup> Hester M, Ferrari G, Jones SK, *et al.* (2015). Occurrence and impact of negative behaviour, including domestic violence and abuse, in men attending UK primary care health clinics: a cross-sectional survey. *BMJ Open*; 5:e007141. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2014-007141

behavioural change programs to establish links with other providers to ensure that any additional mental health or dependency issues are addressed has thus been noted as an important aspect of supporting offender progress.<sup>30</sup>

Collaboration between OCS providers and internal mental health staff can be supported by the inclusion of regular assessment modules. This allows mental health staff to track prisoner improvement and provide an indication of prisoners who would benefit from supplementary treatment or immediate intervention.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the use of independent OCS providers will be able to reduce any ethics-based conflicts that arise from psychologists having dual-Corrective Services/client-relationships.<sup>32</sup> Without this dual role as a treatment provider and evaluator for the same individual, psychologists' abilities to provide effective and objective services to prisoners and patients is not compromised. This is needed as reporting matters include intimate parole details and security classifications, and thus it makes it difficult for psychologists to maintain the best interests of their client in their dealings.

## 4. THE COST OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The social and economic costs of domestic violence are wide ranging and accumulate across a victim's lifetime. While it is impossible to measure the entire impact of such a devastating social phenomenon, attempts have been made to provide some indication of ways in which the negative impact of domestic violence are shared between individual victims and the wider community.

### 4.1 ECONOMIC COST OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It has been estimated that domestic violence costs the NSW economy over \$6 billion dollars a year<sup>33</sup> with a lifetime cost per victim of approximately \$313,125.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> P.E. Thea Brown, Dr Catherine Flynn, Paula Fernandez Arias, Carlos Clavijo, "A Study of The Impact On Men & Their Partners In The Short Term & In The Long Term Of Attending Men's Behaviour Change Programs" (2016), Monash University Printing Services, 2016

<sup>31</sup> Gerhard Andersson, "Internet-Delivered Psychological Treatments" (2016) 12 Annual Review of Clinical Psychology.

<sup>32</sup> Ana Natasha Cervantes and Annette Hanson, "Dual Agency and Ethics Conflicts in Correctional Practice: Sources and Solutions" (2013) 41 Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law.

<sup>33</sup> KPMG, *The Cost Of Violence Against Women And Their Children In Australia* (Department of Social Services, 1st ed., 2016)

The estimated annual cost for each victim living with violence is \$27,000. While the largest share of this annual cost is born directly by the victims, including difficult to quantify aspects such as pain and suffering (\$10,075 per victim), other significant costs such as the cost of treating injuries to the victim (\$1,312), costs to the justice system (\$1,879) and the cost of reduced productivity and time away from work (\$1,969) are born by the entire community.<sup>35</sup>

Women who have experienced physical domestic violence within the last three years are on average 35.5% more likely to be receiving government benefits, and 14% less likely to be employed than other comparable groups. There is no significant statistical relationship between experiences of domestic violence occurring more than three years ago and employment, suggesting that any reduction in recidivism will have a significant positive impact on the long term financial prospects of victims.<sup>36</sup>

NSW Local court submissions to a joint study by Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and New South Wales Law Reform Commission (NSWLRC) pointed out that a custodial sentence often causes the victim of domestic violence additional financial hardship as they lose access to any financial support that the perpetrator may have provided.<sup>37</sup>

Providing prisoners with tools that can help their rehabilitation ensures that not only are victims spared the physical and psychological trauma of further offences but also that the financial impact is not compounded.

## 4.2 SOCIAL COSTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08\\_2016/the\\_cost\\_of\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_their\\_children\\_in\\_australia\\_-\\_summary\\_report\\_may\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2016/the_cost_of_violence_against_women_and_their_children_in_australia_-_summary_report_may_2016.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> PWC (2015) A high price to pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women  
<<https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/a-high-price-to-pay.pdf>>

<sup>35</sup> PWC (2015) A high price to pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women  
<<https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/a-high-price-to-pay.pdf>>

<sup>36</sup> Access Economics, "The Cost Of Domestic Violence To The Australian Economy: Part I" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014)

<[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2012/cost\\_of\\_dv\\_to\\_australian\\_economy\\_i\\_1.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/cost_of_dv_to_australian_economy_i_1.pdf)>.

<sup>37</sup> Standing Committee on Social Issues, "Domestic Violence Trends And Issues In NSW" (New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. 2012).

In 2011 it is estimated that there were 26,469 years of healthy life lost by female victims of domestic violence in Australia. Domestic violence was associated with 13.1% of all depression and 12.4% of all anxiety disorders amongst Australian women.<sup>38</sup>

Women who have experienced violence report a 23% lifetime rate of experiencing a substance use disorder and it has been suggested that over half of all mental health issues experienced by women may be related to experiences of violence.<sup>39</sup>

Intimate Partner Violence has been identified as the largest contributing factor to ill health and premature death of Australian women aged between 25 and 44 and second only to alcohol in women aged 18 to 24.<sup>40</sup> It is believed to be the largest contributing factor to the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women aged between 18-44.<sup>41</sup> Domestic violence is especially serious for Indigenous women aged 15 years and over as women who had experienced physical violence were more than 4 times as likely as males to express that the violence was perpetrated by their current or previous partner.<sup>42</sup>

Domestic violence is also a major contributing factor in homelessness. Between 2011–12 and 2013–14 over a third of adults and children using specialist homelessness services sought assistance for domestic and family violence.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.3 IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence found that children who experience domestic violence often suffer a wide variety of long-lasting physical, psychological, social

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<sup>38</sup> ANROWS, "Examination Of The Burden Of Disease Of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women In 2011" (AIHW, 2016) <<http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/BoD%20Horizons.pdf>>.

<sup>39</sup> KPMG, *The Cost Of Violence Against Women And Their Children In Australia* (Department of Social Services, 1st ed, 2016) <[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08\\_2016/the\\_cost\\_of\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_their\\_children\\_in\\_australia\\_-\\_summary\\_report\\_may\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2016/the_cost_of_violence_against_women_and_their_children_in_australia_-_summary_report_may_2016.pdf)>.

<sup>40</sup> ANROWS, "Examination Of The Burden Of Disease Of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women In 2011" (AIHW, 2016) <<http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/BoD%20Horizons.pdf>>.

<sup>41</sup> ANROWS, "Examination Of The Burden Of Disease Of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women In 2011" (AIHW, 2016) <<http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/BoD%20Horizons.pdf>>.

<sup>42</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15" <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4714.0~2014-15~Main%20Features~Safety,%20law%20and%20justice~8>>

<sup>43</sup> Domestic And Family Violence And Homelessness 2011–12 To 2013–14 (AIHW) (2017) Aihw.gov.au <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/domestic-violence-and-homelessness>>.

and educational effects. Children who have experienced family violence also face an increased risk of substance abuse and mental health disorders during adolescence and adulthood.<sup>44</sup>

Although the effects of childhood experiences of domestic violence can be severe and long lasting, studies have shown that outcomes for children improve once their parents exit a violent relationship.<sup>45</sup>

Parental imprisonment is also associated with a high, although largely unquantified, social cost. A qualitative study of ACT children with a parent in prison found that these children were ‘invisible’ in the system despite suffering a number of social, emotional, and educational challenges as well as a dramatically higher likelihood of involvement with the justice system as adults.<sup>46</sup> It is estimated that five per cent of Australian children are affected by parental imprisonment each year. For Indigenous children the number is as high as twenty per cent.<sup>47</sup> Providing prisoners with the skills to decrease reoffending and model more appropriate behaviour may assist in mitigating the negative impacts of parental imprisonment.

## 5. ESTIMATING THE COST OF INACTION

This section attempts to illustrate some of the benefits that may have been provided if the 2015 proposal to provide OCS to domestic violence offenders had been accepted. It calculates the potential impact of a thirty-three per cent reduction in recidivism on the 2,132 offenders sentenced to prison for domestic violence related offences in 2015-2016. While this provides a useful demonstration of a portion of the cost of this lost opportunity, it must be

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<sup>44</sup> State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16).

<sup>45</sup> State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16).

<sup>46</sup> Saunders, Vicky, McArthur, Morag, SHINE for Kids (Organisation), Australian Catholic University. Institute of Child Protection Studies, Saunders, Vicky et al. *Children of prisoners : exploring the needs of children and young people who have a parent incarcerated in the ACT*. SHINE for Kids, Canberra, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Saunders, Vicky, McArthur, Morag, SHINE for Kids (Organisation), Australian Catholic University. Institute of Child Protection Studies, Saunders, Vicky et al. *Children of prisoners: exploring the needs of children and young people who have a parent incarcerated in the ACT*. SHINE for Kids, Canberra, 2013.

remembered that the impact of reduced recidivism compounds over time<sup>48</sup> and the benefits to victims of living free from the threat of violence is almost impossible to measure.

If we assume that the NSW overall recidivism rate of 50.7% applies to domestic violence offenders, then the potential reduction in recidivism offered by online counselling services would have resulted in 352 fewer offenders returning to prison within two years.

Available statistics relating to domestic violence offenders in Australia suggests that;

- 56 (16%) of those offenders would have been responsible for five or more police-recorded incidents.<sup>49</sup>
- 191 (54.2%) of avoided victims would have had children in their care and 110 of those the children would have witnessed the violence against them.<sup>50</sup>
- The economic impact of 352 fewer victims could be estimated as high as \$110 million over the lifetime of the avoided victims.<sup>51</sup>
- The average 220-day sentence for domestic violence offences<sup>52</sup> suggests these 352 offenders would have spent a combined total of around 77,440 days in custody at a cost of \$167 per prisoner per day.<sup>53</sup> This represents a cost of nearly \$13 million dollars that may have been avoided.

Although these figures are only estimates, there is clearly scope for a significant reduction in the incidence of family violence and in the rate of recidivism.

## 6. FURTHER BENEFITS OF ONLINE SERVICES

While the focus of this report has been on the delivery of Behaviour Change Programs to domestic violence offenders, there is evidence that the benefits provided by offender access to online services are not restricted to any one group of offenders, or to counselling services

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<sup>48</sup> Weatherburn, Don, et al. "Prison populations and correctional outlays: The effect of reducing re-imprisonment." *BOCSAR NSW Crime and Justice Bulletins* (2009): 12.

<sup>49</sup> State of Victoria, Royal Commission into Family Violence: Summary and recommendations, Parl Paper No 132 (2014–16).

<sup>50</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Women's Safety Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996.

<sup>51</sup> PWC (2015) A high price to pay: the economic case for preventing violence against women <<https://www.pwc.com.au/pdf/a-high-price-to-pay.pdf>>

<sup>52</sup> NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, New South Wales Criminal Courts Statistics 2015

<sup>53</sup> *Service Delivery* (2016) Audit.nsw.gov.au <<http://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/publications/latest-reports/financial/volume-seven-2016-justice/service-delivery>>.

alone. Online provision of educational programs would widen access to a service that one recent meta-study found was associated with a 36% lower chance of recidivism as well as a 13% higher likelihood of obtaining post-release employment.<sup>54</sup> The use of computers in cells to successfully deliver educational services to prisoners has been demonstrated in Australia by the University of Southern Queensland's *Making the Connection* program.<sup>55</sup>

There is also potential for secure online services to be used to assist prisoners in maintaining contact with family members. Studies have found that many prisoners wish to use their time in prison to improve or repair their family relationships, and those who do so are less likely to reoffend. However access to programs designed to support them in these goals is severely limited.<sup>56</sup> Often tensions arise from feeling supplanted and inadequate as a parent and/or spouse, and online counselling services can function to help offenders deal with such frustrations in a healthy manner. Furthermore, expanding online services to cover effective communication with family members can play a significant role in reducing hardships of resettlement with the family after release from detention. OCS modules designed to assist the development of relationship and parenting skills could be offered to all prisoners, not just those convicted of domestic violence offences. Additional benefits may be gained due to the ability of OCS providers to provide continuity of care after release, allowing offender's access to a trusted professional capable of assisting them to reintegrate with their families and the wider community.

Thus, offering online service to prisoners in correctional facilities may result in increased access to at least two distinct and complementary elements that are associated with significant reductions in recidivism and other broad social benefits.

## CONCLUSION

Online counselling services offer an extremely cost effective means of alleviating the staggering social and economic costs of domestic violence recidivism outlined in this report.

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<sup>54</sup> RAND Corporation, "How Effective Is Correctional Education, And Where Do We Go From Here?" (Rand Corporation, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> University of Southern Queensland, "Making The Connection" (University of Southern Queensland, 2017).

<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, Anne. Forgotten families: the impacts of imprisonment. [online]. *Family Matters*, No. 59, Winter 2001: 35-38. Availability: <<http://search.informit.com.au/simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=200114619;res=IELAPA>> ISSN: 1030-2646. [cited 05 May 17]

Quotes obtained for the *Domestic Violence Prevention: Online Services to Prisoners* report estimate the installation and ongoing support costs required to deliver online counselling services to a 600 cell prison as \$230,000 for the first year, and \$110,00 for each following year.

The case for offering online counselling services to prisoners in NSW correctional facilities is strengthened by the potential to gain further benefit from this, already minor, cost by extending the use of computers in cells to other areas such as educational programs.

As a result this report recommends that Corrective Services NSW act to ensure that online counselling services are provided to NSW prisoners, and that they investigate other potential uses of computers in cells.