

OUTCARE - SPECIAL SUPPORT FOR OFFENDERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

by Peter Sirr

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Outcare is the major non government organisation which deals with the care and resettlement of offenders in Western Australia and has developed a unique relationship of cooperation with prisons and other agencies to provide offenders with a highly professional and personal service.

"Outcare will provide a comprehensive and effective range of rehabilitative and supportive services for offenders, ex-offenders, and their families, with the objective of reducing crime in the community."

(Outcare Mission Statement)

Outcare is a non profit, non government, community managed body which was incorporated in 1964 as the Civil Rehabilitation Council Of Western Australia. The original intention of the organisation was to provide community based parole services to offenders. This focus quickly changed to providing non-statutory community based support services to offenders, ex-offenders, and their families.

Outcare is the only major organisation providing these services in Western Australia.

CURRENT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The current aims and objectives of Outcare are comprehensive. The Constitution outlines these as:

- (a) *To provide for released offenders, the opportunity for personal rehabilitation and to ensure that any such persons shall have the greatest opportunity for adjustment to the expectations of the community.*
- (b) *To provide suitable accommodation for released prisoners or defendants.*
- (c) *To provide financial and other material assistance to the families of defendants, released offenders and prisoners, who are in need of such assistance.*
- (d) *To help the families of defendants, released offenders and prisoners and particularly to work for the provision of suitable accommodation for such families or dependants who are in need.*
- (e) *To cooperate with statutory or voluntary bodies whose work affects or assists the rehabilitation of released offenders, or involves the provision of assistance or support to the families of defendants, released offenders or prisoners.*

- (f) *To generate and increase the level of community awareness of the causes of crime, the need for community participation in the rehabilitation of released offenders and the specific needs of prisoners' families and dependants.*
- (g) *To cooperate with the relevant government bodies and other agencies for the furtherance of these aims and objects.*
- (h) *To assist offenders, released offenders and their dependants to obtain suitable employment and to provide them with the opportunity for training and retraining to that end.*

SERVICE DELIVERY

The range of services provided by Outcare include:

- Financial and general counselling
- The provision of emergency relief/material aid
- Employment, training and a "second chance" business register
- Liaison and advocacy with government departments
- Accommodation
- Children's programmes for families of offenders (occasional care, camps, holiday programmes)
- Developmental programmes for women

SERVICE STRUCTURE

The Outcare service is structured at three levels.

1. **Outcare Support Services:** This is run from the Perth Office and deals mainly with ex-offenders' welfare and integration needs, and includes the accommodation programme.
2. **Outcare Employment and Training Services:** This service is provided to both pre and post release offenders, and includes the Second Chance Business Register.
3. **Outcare Family Support Centres at prisons:** There are two such centres located at Casuarina and Canning Vale prisons. These provide supportive and welfare services to families of offenders. Programmes for children and women are run through these centres.

OPERATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Outcare's philosophy has a crime prevention and community safety focus.

Outcare provides services that decrease the rate of re-offending of individuals who use those services. By supporting the positive rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into the community, the level of crime is diminished, the costs associated with the justice system are lowered and society stability is improved. With current incarceration costs at around \$50,000 per year per prisoner, the investment in preventative services is economically sound.

There is also a focus on maintaining family stability and unity. By supporting the families of offenders and ex-offenders the stability and unity of the family is maintained, thus reducing the stresses on the family and the pressures on an ex-offender to re-offend on release. Families of offenders serve a "silent sentence" and suffer many hardships as a result of crime within their family. By supporting families of offenders, women and children are offered greater long term chances than normally would be the case.

If the family is in a position to support and encourage the offender, there is a greater potential for his or her rehabilitation and reintegration into community life.

One of Outcare's main philosophies is to encourage offenders in self motivation and self help. Outcare provides services on the premise that those accessing the services are motivated to change their circumstances in order to re-enter society, cease offending behaviour and take responsibility for their own lives.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Outcare is managed by a Board of Management drawn from the membership of the Council and nominees of two government departments. The current Board membership numbers ten.

The management is divided amongst sub committees of the Board who specialise in different areas of service delivery. Accountability is an essential feature of Outcare's operations.

All services are managed by four Coordinators, one each based at Canning Vale and Casuarina prisons running Outcare Family Support Centres; two in the Perth office managing Employment and Training, and Support Services to mainly ex-offenders.

STAFFING

Outcare currently employs the equivalent of 17 full time staff (21 individuals) and utilises an average of 25

individuals are available by taking on student placements (approximately three per year) and placements through the Jobskills programme.

A major thrust of Outcare's staffing policy is the continual use of trained volunteers. As Outcare has a policy of community involvement, volunteers are critical to the provision of all services. The majority of volunteers work in the family support centres within the services for women and children.

OUTCARE BUDGET

The total expenditure for 1993 for all Outcare's operations is projected at \$792,000; a 20% increase over expenditure in 1990.

The number of clients seen over this three year period has more than doubled.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Outcare is planning two significant initiatives over the next 12 months.

The first is to facilitate the development of an Outcare Family Support Centre at Bandyup Womens Prison. Preliminary work on this has already begun. Imprisonment of women creates problems unique in the Corrections system, and they thus require special attention. The concept has been supported generally by Corrections and further work is being done on raising support from other quarters.

The second proposal seeks to provide support services to offenders, ex-offenders and their families in regional centres. The service provision would be through locally constituted management groups with Outcare possibly taking on a financial sponsorship and quality of service supervision role. This concept received substantial support but has not yet been considered by the current Government in Western Australia.

The proposal is based on the fact that a substantial proportion of prison exits are through prisons based in regional centres and that these newly released ex-offenders are not supported in re-entering those communities. Employment, stable accommodation and other opportunities are scarcer in these areas. Community acceptance of a person with a record of imprisonment is more difficult. A programme run in Albany has been very successful and has highlighted the advantages of pursuing such a concept.