Education, Training and Employment for Prisoners with Cognitive Disabilities: A Case Study

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Executive summary

Stable employment is widely recognised as a key feature of successful reintegration for people leaving prison. The provision of appropriate education and training for incarcerated people is pivotal to securing employment upon release, to mitigating the risk of recidivism and to improving rehabilitative outcomes. People with cognitive disability are increasingly overrepresented in prisons internationally. The vast majority of this group have significantly low levels of education, are generally excluded from the labour market and are unable to participate meaningfully in mainstream prison programs. They are also more likely to return to prison than their non-disabled peers. There is thus a significant need for specialised in-prison education, training and employment programs for this group.

However, while there is evidence from international jurisdictions of the efficacy of such programs in improving reintegration outcomes and reducing recidivism, in Australia specialised education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability remain scant. Increasing the provision of such programs calls for an understanding of the foundational principles associated with good practice in this domain. In Australia and internationally, very little is known about approaches to specialised education, training and employment support for prisoners with cognitive disability.

This report, compiled as part of the ‘A Future Beyond the Wall’ ARC Linkage Project, presents findings from research conducted in 2016 on the specialist education, training and employment programs provided at the Additional Support Units (ASUs), which are administered by Corrective Services New South Wales. It describes the organisational and operational context of the ASUs and identifies key principles and challenges associated with the ASUs practice model.

Findings from the study reveal six features foundational to the ASUs model:

1. Person centred and relational
2. Flexibility and adaptability
3. Collaborative multidisciplinarity
4. Strengths-based, holistic practice
5. Skill building in context, and
6. Cultural awareness.

The study also reveals three key challenges for the model:

1. Risk of dependency
2. Responsibility shifting in mainstream prisons, and
3. Improving post-release education and employment support.

By illuminating the key principles and challenges associated with one of the few Australian specialist programs for prisoners with cognitive disability, the study contributes to understanding about specialised approaches to education, training and employment support for this group. Findings from the study suggest that appropriately designed programs can offer an opportunity to provide improved outcomes and greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group. The research also highlights the need for the systematic collection of sufficient and appropriate data to judge the efficacy of specialist education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability. Such robust evaluation is critical to developing an evidence-based understanding of good practice in this domain.
1. Introduction and background

This case study, a component of a larger research project on vocational education, training and employment programs for prisoners pre- and post-release\(^1\) seeks to understand more about the key features associated with good practice in education and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability. Consistent with the approach adopted by Corrective Services New South Wales (CS NSW), the term cognitive disability is used throughout this report to refer to ‘an ongoing impairment in comprehension, reason, adaptive functioning, judgement, learning or memory that is the result of any damage to, dysfunction, development delay, or deterioration of the brain or mind’.\(^2\) It may arise from, but is not limited to: ‘intellectual disability (ID), borderline intellectual disability (BID), acquired brain injury (ABI), drug or alcohol related brain damage, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and autism spectrum disorders.\(^3\)

The representation of people with intellectual disability and other cognitive impairments in the criminal justice system is disproportionately high.\(^4\) Recent prevalence estimates indicate that between 7 and 10% of prisoners has an intellectual disability,\(^5\) compared to a prevalence of 1.3-1.4% in the general Australian population.\(^6\) This over-representation of people with disability in the criminal justice system does not arise from a pervasive inclination for crime.\(^7\) Rather as research in the field has established, this group is subject to processes of criminalisation\(^8\) and the vast majority of people with cognitive disability who come into contact with the criminal justice system experience multiple and intense forms of disadvantage, including: mental illness, having more than one form of disability, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, low levels of literacy and numeracy, poor health and violence.\(^9\) Indigenous Australians are disproportionately represented in

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\(^1\) This case study is a part of the Australian Research Council Linkage project, ‘A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving post-release employment outcomes for people leaving prison’.


\(^3\) ibid.


\(^7\) NSW Law Reform Commission (2012) People with cognitive and mental health impairments in the criminal justice system, Report no. 135, Sydney: NSW LRC.


this group. The combination of issues experienced by this group most often results in compounding social disadvantage and complex support needs.

It is now well recognised that these complex support needs originate not from an individual, but rather from the systemic failure of services to appropriately support people with cognitive disability who experience intense social disadvantage. In the absence of appropriate support, these individuals cycle in and out of prison, more rapidly and more frequently compared to those without disability. Research in the field has established that robust, holistic support and intervention – including assistance with education, training and employment - for people with cognitive disability would reduce the significant human and economic costs associated with this group’s high rates of re-offending and re-incarceration.

The importance of stable employment, as one of the key protective factors against recidivism, has been widely acknowledged, as has the role of prisoner education and training in improving rehabilitative outcomes, securing employment upon release, and in mitigating the risk of recidivism. People with cognitive disability who come into contact with the criminal justice system have significantly low levels of education, and as a result of their disability and criminal history they are largely excluded from the labour market. Furthermore, most incarcerated people with cognitive disabilities are unable to participate meaningfully in, and unlikely to benefit from mainstream prison programs. As a result, most individuals with disability and criminal histories are multiply disadvantaged; the importance of specialised education, training and employment

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programs for this group is thus all the more significant. However, while there is some evidence of the efficacy of education, training and employment programs in improving reintegration outcomes and reducing recidivism for prisoners with cognitive disability, there is very little academic literature that addresses how such programs assist in achieving these aims. Practitioners who work alongside prisoners with cognitive disability possess a range of knowledge and skills about service provision for this group.

1.1 Structure of the Report

The report is divided into six sections.

Section 1 provides introductory and background material relevant to the study.

Section 2 explains the methodological approach to the study. It details the key research questions, the rationale for choosing the case study, the type of data collected, and the methods employed to analyse the data.

Section 3 reports the results of an analysis of program documentation provided to the research team that was used to describe key information about the Additional Support Units (ASUs). It includes: a description of the organisational and operational features of the ASUs as part of CS NSW’s Statewide Disability Services (SDS); an account of the methods used by SDS to identify, assess, manage and refer people with a range of suspected disabilities; clarification of the principles underlying diagnosis of, and service provision for people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities; available statistical data; and the aims, structure and programmatic principles of the ASUs.

Section 4 reports the results of an analysis of semi-structured interviews with senior management and frontline practitioners involved in the delivery of education, training and employment support at the ASUs. It identifies six key elements that underpin the model adopted in the ASUs: Person centred and relational; 2) Flexibility and adaptability; 3) Collaborative multidisciplinarity; 4) Strengths-based, holistic practice; 5) Skill building in context; and 6) Cultural awareness.

Section 5 describes the key challenges for the model that also emerged from an analysis of the interviews: 1) Risk of dependency; 2) Responsibility shifting in mainstream prisons; and 3) Improving post-release education and employment support.

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Section 6 summarises the key findings from the study. The need for robust evaluations of the few existing programs in this domain is highlighted, along with suggestions regarding the type of data and evaluation criteria required to fulfil this aim.
2. Methodology

This section details the methodological framework of the study. It describes the key research questions, the rationale for choosing the case study, the type of data collected, and the methods employed to analyse the data.

The study has four research questions:

1. What central principles are associated with good practice in education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability?

2. What are the key issues influencing service delivery?

3. What is the appropriate way to measure the effectiveness of these programs?

4. What is required to ensure that future programs are effective in improving rehabilitation and reintegration and to reducing recidivism?

2.1 Case study selection

Consultation with project investigator's and relevant project partners, together with an online search was undertaken to identify the presence of in-prison specialised education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability in any Australian jurisdictions. Two providers in Australia with publicly available documentation were identified: 1) the Additional Support Units (ASUs) in New South Wales, administered by Corrective Services New South Wales; and 2) the Joint Treatment Program in Victoria, jointly administered by the Statewide Forensic Service (Department of Human Services), Port Phillip Prison and Corrections Victoria. Permission was sought from NSW Corrective Services to undertake a case study of the ASUs in order to capture key features of the program as a contribution to the study. Ethics approval for the research was granted by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Approval No. HC15747) and the CSNSW Ethics Committee.

2.2 Data collection

Two types of data were collected: 1) documentation about the delivery model, funding, eligibility criteria, policies, practices and available outcome data; and 2) seven semi-structured interviews conducted individually with three senior management staff involved in the operation of the ASUs\(^{21}\) and four frontline practitioners directly involved in the delivery of education, training and employment support at the ASUs.

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\(^{21}\) The senior management who participated in interviews are: Director Statewide Services; Statewide Manager, Specific Needs; and Manager, Statewide Disability Services.
 Twelve types of documents were provided to the research team prior to a site visit and interviews. Documentation comprised: a) publicly available information regarding the delivery model and eligibility criteria; and b) internal documents regarding policies and practices, along with available outcome data.

A broad range of staff involved in the operation of the ASUs were recruited for interviews in order to capture a variety of perspectives on the education, training and employment programs provided at the ASUs. Interviewees were provided with an information sheet detailing the specific aims of the case study research, along with its contribution to the larger research project of which it is part. Prior to the interviews, a verbal summary of this information was provided to each interviewee, with particular emphasis on the focus of the interviews: the education, training and employment programs provided to prisoners with cognitive disability. Interviewees were asked to describe the key features of the ASUs education, training and employment programs, and to comment on what they saw as major areas of strength, as well as the level of success that the programs have had for prisoners with a cognitive disability. They were also asked to identify those factors that constrained program delivery and to describe how the program could be enhanced. Interviews with senior management provided a nuanced understanding of the program’s history, organisational and operational context, aims, as well as its theoretical underpinnings. Interviews with practitioners provided a detailed understanding of the practice domain, key features of practice, as well as the various challenges associated with practice. Audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed for analysis.

2.3 Data analysis

All sources of data were entered into NVivo analysis software including program documentation and interviews. Program documentation was analysed for thematic content pertaining to the organisational context and roles, aims, structure, and programmatic principles of the ASUs. Using an inductive thematic analysis approach, analysis of interview materials was undertaken over two stages. Initial preliminary independent coding by one researcher revealed a range of elements perceived to be associated with good practice in education and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability, as well as a number of challenges associated with the model. Three members of the research team then reviewed the findings from the preliminary analysis to identify key unifying themes.

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2.4 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the study. Most notably, the research team was unable to access quantitative outcome data regarding factors such as:

a. the recidivism rates of inmates who return to the ASUs
b. the length of time between an inmates’ release from the ASUs and their subsequent return to custody
c. the post-release education, training and employment outcomes of inmates, or
d. the accommodation, health, and community connections of ASUs inmates post-release.

Such data would have provided a means by which to quantify the impact of the education, training and employment programs provided by the ASUs. In the absence of such data, interviews were used to elicit anecdotal evidence and examples regarding program outcomes for individual inmates.

Further limitations relate to the qualitative component of the study. By way of ethical restraints, no interviews were conducted with inmates at the ASUs. Such material would have provided a more nuanced understanding of the effectiveness or otherwise of the education, training and employment programs.
3. The ASUs in context

The following section reports the results of an analysis of program documentation provided to the research team that is used to describe key information about the ASUs. It begins with a description of the organisational and operational features of the ASUs as part of CS NSW’s Statewide Disability Services (SDS) and of the methods used by SDS to identify, assess, manage and refer people with a range of suspected disabilities ensues. This is followed by a description of the principles that inform diagnosis of, and service provision for people with intellectual and cognitive disabilities. Next, relevant and available statistical data is provided. Finally, the programmatic aims, principles and structure of the ASUs are explained.

3.1 The role of Statewide Disability Services

SDS is the primary structure through which Corrective Services New South Wales’ (CSNSW) addresses the additional support needs of all offenders with a range of disabilities, both in custody and in the community. SDS oversees the operation of the ASUs. Its services include: the collection and provision of statistical information regarding disability; advice, training and consultation to staff in relation to the management of, and program delivery to offenders with a disability; direct service provision to offenders with a disability, including assessment of disabilities and referral to the NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care (ADHC).

CSNSW has an established process for identifying, assessing, managing and referring people with a range of suspected disabilities when they come into custody. When an inmate enters into custody, staff are required to check the Offender Integrated Management System (OIMS) Disability Screen. As part of the reception process, at either court cells or correctional centres, inmates must be screened for disabilities. If an inmate is seen to have a disability or is suspected of having a disability, or if there is information that the person has a disability, the staff member is obliged to enter a referral on the OIMS Disability Screen, together with a comment about why the referral is made.

SDS regularly reviews all referrals and determines an appropriate response. Responses may include: assessment; provision of information about the nature of the inmate’s disability; ongoing contact by SDS with regard to the inmate’s case management and placement; direct contact with the inmate; referral to services provided by NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, and since its introduction in 2014, assistance to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). To be eligible for services from SDS, an inmate must have one or more of the following:

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23 In the period 2015-16, SDS trained and supported 843 correctional staff to manage offenders with disability.
24 At the time of writing CSNSW remains the only Correctional Service in any Australian jurisdiction that engages a formal process for identifying and assessing people with suspected disabilities when they come into custody.
disabilities: intellectual disability or low cognitive functioning; Acquired Brain Injury (including traumatic brain injury and alcohol/ drug related brain injury); autism spectrum disorder; dementia; sensory disability (hearing or vision impairment); physical disability; frail aged.

SDS recognises that intellectual disability (ID) and cognitive disabilities (CD), by far the most commonly occurring forms of disabilities experienced by inmates eligible for SDS services, are complex and multifaceted concepts that require a nuanced and comprehensive approach to diagnosis and service provision. The approach adopted by SDS comprises several elements. Firstly, rather than limiting services to people who fit the current strict clinical definition of ID (i.e. those who have an IQ score of less than 70 on a measure of intelligence and who also experience deficits in adaptive behaviours), SDS will recognise an individual as having additional support needs if they have an IQ below 80 or an ABI that affects individual functioning and/ or management. SDS recognises that inmates who do not have IQ scores in the ID range (i.e. those with borderline intellectual disability, or BID) frequently have very high support needs; greater emphasis is therefore placed on the identification of an individual’s support needs over an individual’s IQ score. In addition, SDS places considerable emphasis on the impact on an individual’s adaptive behaviour in the correctional centre. For example, inmates with CD may struggle with conceptual skills; have poor use of language; show poor social skills such as difficulty in understanding and following rules; have difficulty with interpersonal relationships, or being victimised; and have poor practical self-care skills such as poor hygiene routines.

This approach to diagnosis and service provision supports findings from a range of Australian and international research regarding the experiences of people with cognitive disabilities who come into contact with the criminal justice system. These studies have confirmed that while the risk of offending is similar between individuals with BID and ID, people with BID are often not eligible for specialised disability support services and/ or intervention; by consequence they are placed at a higher risk of repeated and lengthy incarceration compared to those with a diagnosis of ID.

3.2 Statewide Disability Services Statistics

In 2015-16, there were on average 695 offenders with cognitive impairments in custody in NSW prisons on any given day, an increase of 68 (9.8%) from the previous financial year. In the same

25 For further details on the multiplicity of issues surrounding diagnosis of intellectual disability and cognitive impairment, as well as the approach taken by CSNSW, see: Snoyman P & Aicken B (undated) The concept of intellectual disability, and people with intellectual disability in Corrective Services NSW, Australasian Journal of Correctional Staff Development.
period SDS received referrals in relation to 1,210 individuals with a range of possible impairments. Just over seven per cent (7.25%) of these individuals were female and 25.6% identified as Aboriginal. Overall there was an 18.3% increase in the total number of referrals from the previous financial year. Most notable however was the significant increase in referrals for suspected intellectual disability or borderline intellectual functioning: from 461 in 2014–15 to 613 in 2015–16, an increase of 36.9%. In 2015–16, SDS made a total of 63 referrals to NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care. For 26 of these individuals, this was the first time they had engaged with disability support. In the period 2015–16, SDS admitted 152 inmates to the Additional Support Units (ASUs). In the same period the ASUs housed up to 57 inmates daily. Whilst data is not collected about the number of Indigenous people housed in the ASUs, staff involved in interviews reported that Indigenous inmates were disproportionally represented in the ASUs.

3.3 The Additional Support Units

Formally established in 2006, the ASUs accommodate a small number of the most vulnerable inmates with an identified intellectual or cognitive impairment. The primary stated aim of the ASUs is to provide comprehensive assessment and appropriate programs to address offending behaviour. Individuals housed in the ASUs have complex support needs and traditionally present challenges for placement and management within the corrections environment. Placement in the ASUs is determined by the SDS Placement Committee and is dependent upon an inmate meeting the following criteria:

1. the inmate must have been referred to SDS for assessment or be known to SDS
2. the inmate must be assessed as having an IQ below 80 or an Acquired Brain Injury that affects individual functioning and/ or management
3. the inmate must be referred for consideration of placement in the ASUs by a CSNSW staff member or an external source, and
4. the inmate must be suitable for placement.

Due to the limited number of beds available within the ASUs (57 in total), a number of factors are taken into account to determine suitability for placement. These include:

a. the individual must agree to participate in the specialist programs offered in the ASUs

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29 The implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in NSW will result in a significant loss of services currently funded by ADHC, including the Community Justice Program. At the present time there are no equivalent services in the community to which SDS can refer people with disabilities leaving prison.
30 The vast majority of inmates with intellectual or cognitive impairments are accommodated within mainstream correctional centers across NSW.
31 The strict clinical definition of Intellectual Disability is not used to determine placement in the ASUs. There is higher cut off point in terms of IQ and a stronger emphasis on functioning and cognitive impairment support needs.
32 Inmates with other types of disabilities may be considered for placement depending on the nature of the disability and the impact on functioning. The placement committee considers such instances on a case-by-case basis.
b. the individual requires further assessment pertaining to their disability, or specialised case management or through-care planning

c. previous placement in mainstream correctional centres has been problematic and has resulted in repeated transfers between centres

d. vulnerability within the custodial environment, including a history of assaults or standovers, which indicates a current or future risk to safety, and

e. the individual is unable to cope in mainstream prison due to their disability, including difficulty with social adjustment and peer relationships.

The ASUs consist of three units – one assessment unit, one therapeutic programs unit and a pre-release unit - all of which are located at Long Bay Correctional Complex. Upon entering the ASUs, an inmate is first housed in the assessment unit, a 19-bed maximum-security facility. Upon admission an inmate is assessed by a multidisciplinary team in a range of areas, including risk assessment, social skills, cognitive functioning, and education and work skills. Based on the inmate’s progress whilst in the assessment unit, they may be moved to one of the other two ASUs, or to a suitable mainstream correctional centre.

If remaining in the ASUs, an inmate will either be sent to the therapeutic programs or pre-release units, a decision based on consideration of a range of factors including an inmate’s assessment, length and nature of sentence, and the needs of the inmate. If sent to the therapeutic unit, a 22-bed maximum security unit, an inmate will be required to undertake a number of programs to address factors relating to offending, safety in custody and to enable access to in-prison employment via a specifically trained Correctional Services Industries Officer. Programs in the therapeutic unit also aim to increase the inmate’s problem-solving skills and overall understanding of the criminal justice system. In addition, an inmate housed in the therapeutic unit will be offered a range of educational courses run by special education teachers and will also be given the opportunity to participate in employment.

When nearing the end of their custodial sentence, an inmate will enter the pre-release unit, a 16-bed minimum-security unit. Programs offered within this unit are designed to address offending behaviour and decrease the likelihood of recidivism. Employment skills, social and interpersonal skills form a significant part of an inmate’s program. Staff working in the pre-release unit liaise

33 In May 2016 (two months prior to undertaking interviews for this case study) the NSW Minister for Corrections and NSW Corrections Commissioner announced the introduction of the ‘Better Prisons’ initiative, part of which involves a proposal to outsource the functions of 132 of the 152 teachers employed by NSW Corrective Services. Under these proposals, adult education and training will be outsourced to private providers. The two Special Education Teachers and one Correctional Education Officer attached to the ASUs were informed that their positions would be replaced by two new positions that require no teaching qualifications or disability expertise. For further details, see: Community Justice Coalition (2016) Prisoner Education NSW, Sydney: CJC, http://www.communityjusticecoalition.org/events/prisoner-education-forum-2016

34 For details of participation rates and educational outcomes in these courses, see Appendix B & C.
Extensively with community-based services (including NSW Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care) to ensure that offenders have appropriate post-release supports arranged prior to their release. It is also important to note that an inmate can be placed in the ASUs to undertake a particular program, or to have their release needs addressed more comprehensively.

A comprehensive range of interventions is available to inmates at the ASUs. These include programs designed to: address factors related to offending behaviour; improve skills in problem solving, communication and planning; improve inmates’ employment skills, literacy and numeracy; and a number of TAFE courses. Programs provided at the ASUs are facilitated by a multidisciplinary team consisting of the following:

- Manager, Specific Needs
- Manager, Statewide Disability Services (SDS)
- Correctional Officers
- Education Officer (x 1)
- Teacher (x 3)
- Corrective Services Industries Officer (x 2)
- Senior Services and Programs Officer
- Services and Programs Officers (x 4)
- Psychologist

The above team also work closely with professionals within the Correctional Centre environment, including Justice Health nursing staff, Probation and Parole Officers, Regional Aboriginal Program Officers and the Chaplaincy.

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35 For details of these interventions, see Appendix A.
4. Key features of the ASUs model

The following section reports the results of detailed thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with senior management and frontline practitioners involved in the delivery of education, training and employment support at the ASUs. The analysis revealed six key features of the model adopted in the ASUs:

1. Person-centred and relational
2. Flexibility & adaptability
3. Collaborative multidisciplinarity
4. Strengths-based, holistic practice
5. Skill building in context, and
6. Culturally appropriate.

4.1 Person-centred and relational

4.1.1 The crucial role of relationships

Interviewees consistently identified the importance of relationship building, a key component of a person-centred approach, as a central characteristic of good practice in education, training and employment programs for prisoners with disabilities. Through their relationship with staff, inmates in the ASUs come to feel that they are “people of value” who are able to “learn and contribute”. The chief emphasis on the relational aspect of working with inmates was reported to provide a critical “foundation for their learning”:

...the relationship aspect is key ... inmates [come] from traumatic experiences ... so the first thing that [needs] to be able to come [is to get] around those traumatic ideas ... the way that the teachers [build] those relationships I think is key. It [develops] a trust that maybe there is something that [the inmates] can do, there are people they can work with, they won't be pushed to the back of a class or jeered out. But rather they are people of value, and they have competencies where they are able to learn and contribute.

Interviewees articulated an acute awareness of the extensive disadvantage and trauma experienced by individuals who enter the ASUs and of the subsequent challenge such experiences create for these individuals to develop rapport and trusting relationships; a process that takes considerable time. The importance of engaging with prisoners in ways that are “supportive”, “welcoming”, and “warming” was consistently identified as being “paramount” to understanding the vulnerability and complex support needs of prisoners with cognitive impairment:
Our population are vulnerable, they’re very, very challenging ... and you need to have a very strong rapport with these guys in order to be able to achieve any outcomes with them. Once you’ve got that rapport and you’re able to engage with them, which takes a very, very long period of time to do, then you are able to really get into the vulnerabilities and the issues that they have and the reason why they might keep coming back and the reasons why things are the way they are for them today ... rapport building is paramount and key with our guys.

Trust and rapport between prisoners and staff involved in the ASUs was also seen as integral to assisting prisoners to understand the nature and value of support services, since many inmates will have either little knowledge of community supports or have had negative past experiences with services in the community. This trust building aims to maximise the likelihood that prisoners will utilise community-based external services for support post-release:

The role modelling, they see from the regular contact with staff, the trust that’s built, trusting external agencies, making referral to external agencies where you can be that ... liaison point between them and an outside service provider to build that trust. Then they will ultimately use the service and not just take off when they get out.

4.1.2 The value of a person-centred approach

The “one size fits all approach” underpinning the majority of mainstream correctional programmes was described as “inappropriate and ineffective” for this group; rather, interviewees stressed the importance of a person-centred approach attuned to the complex and varied support needs experienced by prisoners with disabilities.

It’s that person-centred approach looking at all the responsivity issues, understanding their experience to a much greater extent rather than just imposing a one size fits all approach onto them.

The comparatively small number of inmates housed in the ASUs allows educators to get to know prisoners at an individual level. As a result, educators at the ASUs are able to develop an understanding of the specific barriers that prevent prisoners from effectively engaging in learning.

Well, they’re treated as people. Not that I don’t think [mainstream educators] want to treat them as people ... but you have 150 [inmates in one wing] ... [and] ... one [educator]. Whereas [in the ASUs], the numbers are down. I’m able to know each of them. I’m able to know what they want to do, what’s happened in the past. I’m able to have in-depth conversations to find out what their fears are.

For many prisoners, their experience in the ASUs is the first time they have felt “respected” and taken “seriously”.

Many of the people who come through the ASUs really do benefit from the contact they have. It is the first time they actually have people listening to them, taking them seriously as people, respecting them as people. I think that makes a bigger difference than anything else.
4.2 Flexibility & Adaptability

4.2.1 Flexible integration of literacy and numeracy instruction into all programs

Staff who participated in interviews explained that the vast majority of inmates in the ASUs have significantly low levels of education, and by consequence very low levels of literacy and numeracy. Improving literacy and numeracy skills is therefore a priority for ASU interventions. However, interviewees stressed the importance of adopting a flexible approach to achieving this aim, with a concentration on functional rather than formal instruction. For example, literacy and numeracy training is integrated with the teaching of employment-focused “practical skills”. This approach ensures that literacy and numeracy training flies “under the radar” for prisoners:

We organise for them to do warehousing, they do horticulture. In the past they’ve done cooking or hospitality skills. So, a range of different practical things. With that, we add on a literacy component so that they’re always practising their reading and writing and learning through ways where they’re not just sitting in a classroom doing ABCs. That doesn’t really work with them. When they’ve got a hands-on thing to do, they’re learning what they need to in literacy and numeracy [and] it goes under the radar for them. They don’t realise they’re learning it, but they’re learning it. It works very efficiently.

Similarly, literacy and numeracy is incorporated in a flexible manner into the teaching of “daily living” skills, skills that prisoners with a cognitive disability often lack:

I think learning those really, really core basic daily living and adaptive function skills through literacy and numeracy is what’s so different about this. It’s not so much a classroom. These boys don’t learn well when you sit down and give them a booklet ... It’s all very practical learning. Things they can apply in their daily life so teaching them how to do their own washing [and] incorporating all that back to literacy and numeracy. Everything you can tie back into those things ... I think that’s key.

4.2.2 Adapting mainstream prison education and employment programs

Educational programs that are implemented within mainstream prison populations, such as TAFE and Adult Educational and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI) programs are also delivered within the ASUs, however these are adapted to meet the needs of inmates with cognitive disability. Teachers involved in the ASUs described the process by which they continually seek to come up with “novel” ways of adapting and delivering mainstream programs to prisoners with cognitive disability while simultaneously ensuring that core competencies are met. Other staff reported that they engage in “live learning” which can “take place at any time”:

I don’t think that many, if any, of the inmates whom I’ve worked with here could pass a TAFE course without the assistance of a correctional education officer or a literacy
A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison

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Education, Training and Employment for Prisoners with Cognitive Disabilities: A Case Study

Rather than adopting a “one size fits all approach”, educators at the ASUs seek to identify the individual factors that impact on a prisoner’s ability to learn. They then seek to address these factors by adapting content and delivering it in flexible ways to better match to the learning needs of the individuals they are teaching:

The aim is for everybody to do education. In other [mainstream prison] areas ... there are 300 other people wanting to come into [education]. Whereas out here the aim is for all of them to do education. We’re just figuring out what it is that they need. It’s never a thought in our minds that they’re not going to do the education and they’re not going to get through the TAFE course. All of them are going to get through it. My job is to figure out how they’re going to do it...

Interviewees explained the way in which ASU teachers are in close collaboration with external TAFE educators. Often teachers at the ASUs will co-facilitate classes with teachers from TAFE. In this scenario, the role of the teacher is to assist prisoners in learning the course material and to find ways of helping them demonstrate their knowledge of the material in ways that circumvent low levels of literacy and numeracy:

They’re [inmates at the ASUs] not capable of doing a certificate that would be for an average class from the outside. They need some adjustments to it. So, I’m [teacher at the ASUs] always in the classroom, I’m helping the guys with homework during the week. We tend to do things when we’re answering the questions of a booklet that’s set by TAFE that we can’t change, what we’ll do is just change the delivery. So, we’ll ask the question and then we’ll all talk about what the answer might be and then come up with an answer and write it in simplistic language on the board. Then, they can copy it onto their answer. That works that way.

Employment programs are also modified to aid comprehension and understanding among prisoners. For example, work procedures are adapted so that prisoners with low levels of literacy can understand them. This often involves rewriting procedures:

We work with ... companies like Emirates, Qantas and the work has to be done according to the procedure. These guys can’t comprehend the procedure so we have to break it down and make it as simple as possible for them to understand...

4.3 Collaborative multidisciplinarity

The ASUs comprise a multidisciplinary team of professionals who work collaboratively to meet the complex and varied support needs experienced by inmates with cognitive disability. This approach was consistently identified by a range of interviewees as a central characteristic of good practice. Interviewees described the ASUs team as having a “mutual respect for each discipline and what
each discipline does", along with a shared vision of the ‘bigger picture’ of disadvantage for this group:

It’s just worked really, really well. In terms of that mutual respect for each discipline and what each discipline does. Sometimes it might get a little bit blurry because teachers do take on … more … counselling and helping with their [inmates] behaviour, that kind of thing. … It’s always very much that the focus is keeping the offender at the centre of what we do. That’s very much my way of working and thinking … So, I’d say 98% of the time it’s effective in terms of mutual respect and understanding the big picture.

Interviewees from a variety of disciplines also described a shared openness to ongoing learning and a willingness among staff to draw on each other for support and guidance; features identified as central to developing collaboration between staff from a variety of disciplines:

... all of our education staff here have been here for a really long time, and they’ve got a lot of knowledge in disability and working with guys with disability, and intellectual disability specifically. Learning from them, shadowing them. We do supervision all the time, so discussing things, debriefing. Yeah. Really learning from each other. We’ve got a really, really good team. We’ve got good psychologists as well. Having a chat, “Look, this is what happened with so and so today. What do you think? What’s the best way of dealing with this? How do I address it?” Yeah, we really learn from each other.

The capacity for staff to work effectively in collaboration was further identified as facilitating the development of the practice knowledge:

Working with inmates is all about practice … having colleagues that you can speak to, to ask them how they manage things and what you could have done better. That’s it. That’s the way that you learn how to manage inmates, because they’re full of complex needs.

The collaborative multidisciplinarity at the heart of the ASUs was described as unique, an approach not applied in the mainstream prison milieu:

Well, for me [the ASUs] are unique in terms of having that strong multi-disciplinary approach and having the expert input from each discipline. It’s unfortunately very unique outside of even a therapeutic program such as the sex offender program or violent offender program.

The ASUs [are] like a small community. Everybody is involved in it. I think all of us play our part.

Many interviewees explained that the skilled educators at the ASUs were critical to the collaborative multidisciplinary team. Educators at the ASUs are “well-trained” in adult learning techniques as well as having experience and skills in working with people with a disability. They
utilise their training and knowledge to “drive” things along and to create a learning environment that is “interesting, fresh, [and] relevant” for prisoners:

I would say that they [the educators] are the drivers ... They initiate and innovate new areas that keeps it [moving] I’m always surprised [that] it’s always an enthusiastic area and the inmates seem enthusiastic as well ... they work very hard and they’re very conscious to keep things interesting, fresh, relevant...

The role of the educators at the ASUs was described as going “above and beyond” the “standard teacher role”. Educators provide not only education but also “support” for a particularly “vulnerable” group of prisoners. They act as “mentors” and “role models” for prisoners and play a significant role in their “day-to-day management”:

... our education staff are not just education staff. They're very much ... part of an integral multi-disciplinary team. So, unlike [mainstream prison educators] ... [our] teachers are on-site, 7 hours a day. Yes, they're delivering education, yes they're supporting the TAFE teachers, but they're also very much part of the team in terms of, you know, planning for throughcare, day-to-day management...

4.4 Strengths-based, holistic practice

4.4.1 Strengths-based practice

A Strengths-based approach emerged as a foundational component of good practice in education, training and employment programs for prisoners with disabilities. By “enabling” prisoners to recognise and build on their strengths, interviewees stressed that strengths-based practice is especially important when working with inmates who have lived with the disability “label” throughout their lives:

Enabling their strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses ... that’s very, very important ... When all your life you’re told that you’ve got a disability or ... you get expelled from school, you don’t function like other kids, and it’s pointed out to you all the time you really develop a complex about it and you start believing that you’re not worth anything. So, we’re really trying to take it away from those labels. Really strengths focussed.

One interviewee explained the way in which inmates are often amazed to discover that they are capable of learning and achieving. This leads to “confidence”, “believing in themselves” and feelings of empowerment. They realise that they have “strengths and skills” they never knew they had. This leads to a “snowball effect” where a growing belief in their capabilities leads them to undertake new challenges, including feeling “confident to engage with a workplace”.

Interviewees described their own fundamental belief that people with a disability are capable of making a meaningful contribution to society as well as being capable of engaging in employment.
Instead of limitations, staff involved in the ASUs described possibilities and they encourage prisoners to view themselves in the same way:

[We] teach them basic plumbing, basic carpentry. [People] think they are not capable of holding a saw in their hand and cutting, but when you give it to them and you teach them the proper technique ... they get it right. I have seen it. They did it. You can use like a start, you know, you can get things in form of plastic, you don't have to get the real thing.

4.4.2 Holistic Practice

Alongside the central role of strengths-based practice, interviewees consistently conveyed the crucial role of holistic practice. Holistic practice was explained as that which involved not only the provision of a full range of in-prison programs and services designed to respond to the complex support needs of this group, but also an equal emphasis on linking inmates to a comprehensive range of supports prior to exiting custody. This holistic approach adopted at the ASUs is seen to be unique in that it aims to assist prisoners to “transition into the community properly”:

I think if you’re going to make an impact on recidivism with intellectually disabled people you have to do something and it has to be holistic. You have to do drug programs, you have to do literacy, you have to do it all in a holistic way and then you have to have an equal amount of energy [put in] to post release support.

The importance of a holistic approach emerged from the interviews as particularly essential for inmates with cognitive disabilities, the vast majority of whom experience significant disadvantage and compounding complex support needs. One interviewee explained that in the absence of a holistic approach, the majority of inmates exiting the ASUs would return to “nothing”:

I’ve linked these guys with numerous support services when they’re leaving here, which is a really supportive environment ... where you’ve got teachers and you know, you’ve got all the custodial staff are very, very interactive with our guys as well. So, case officers, social workers, psychology. You’ve got a really supportive environment. Then to leave to nothing, can be really, really scary. So ... that continuity into the community is really important.

Interviewees described holistic practice as one that ensures inmates leaving the ASUs are linked with as many community supports as possible, whilst also providing ongoing assistance to maintaining those links. For example, one interviewee explained that holistic practice might involve referrals to community health, community mental health services, the Community Justice Program, education providers; ensuring that inmates leave prison with any requisite medications; and “setting up an SMS to remind them of appointments”. In certain circumstances where prisoners lack geographical knowledge or are unable to navigate public transportation systems, staff from the ASUs will transport prisoners to the local train station or to their new accommodation. Where possible, staff also provide intensive post-release support to those prisoners who express an interest in continuing an education or training course that was initiated in prison. Interviewees also
explained that they encourage communication between themselves and newly released prisoners. This is particularly important if ex-offenders have a known history with alcohol or substance use. Frequently this will involve contacting ex-offenders on a monthly basis to “see how they’re going” and to ascertain whether they require any additional assistance or help finding employment:

One guy for example has never left custody with supported accommodation before I referred him to CJP [Community Justice Program]. He had supported accommodation, he had an apartment on his own. Case workers came and picked him up. I got him clothing from Salvation Army. He had his DSP [Disability Support Pension] and crisis payment ready to go here ... He’s still out of jail. He still hasn’t touched drugs. He had CRC [Community Restorative Centre] drug and alcohol support.... He’s been out for 4 months. The longest he’d been out maybe was 2 or 3 weeks before ... We still follow up the education officer rings him sometimes [and asks] “Hey, mate. How about work? I've looked up a few things for you.” That continuity is really, really important.

4.5 Skill Building in Context

When discussing the impact of the education, training and employment programs provided to inmates at the ASUs, most interviewees indicated the need to transcend the frequently adopted framework of measuring ‘success’ only in terms of gaining employment post-release or rates of re-offending; rather interviewees expressed the need for a realistic approach to measuring programmatic success that is cognisant of the extreme disadvantage and complex support needs experienced by prisoners with cognitive disability. To this end, interviewees clarified that the prime aim of the education, training and employment programs is to assist inmates to build skills fundamental to improving rehabilitative outcomes and to reducing the risk of recidivism.

4.5.1 Addressing the risk of recidivism

While gaining employment post-release was acknowledged to be an important factor in preventing an inmate’s return to prison, most interviewees communicated that for prisoners with cognitive disability, securing employment post-release is complicated by a multiplicity of structural and systemic barriers. As such, staff at the ASUs are focussed primarily on improving foundational skills in literacy and numeracy, which, they explained can in turn lower the risk of recidivism:

Teaching them those very, very basic skills increases their confidence, increases their motivation, gives them hope for the future. Even if they do come back to jail again, it may be over a longer period of time. They’ve just been able to function that little bit easier when they get out of here.

Interviewees also reported that focussing on teaching prisoners day-to-day and practical living skills can increase the likelihood of gaining employment post-release. For example, improving “computer skills” and “teaching [prisoners] how to read a bus timetable” was understood to increase the likelihood of securing employment post-release. In addition, interviewees described
that supporting prisoners to obtain their drivers licence is a practical skill that gives ex-offenders “a way of getting around and getting to work”:

we are in the unique position of having the drivers licence course being run in the ASUs part of that program was we’ve been able to incorporate someone with an intellectual disability getting their theory test done, approved and adjusted before they leave jail. So, when they get out, they’re driving validly ... Because a lot of our offenders, one of the huge parts of their offending is they’re driving without a licence, driving while disqualified and all that kind of stuff.

4.5.2 Improving skills for reintegration

Staff reported that the education, training and employment programs at the ASUs help prisoners to better re-integrate into the community and “set them up” so they will “stay out longer”:

...our aim ... is to set them up so they’ve got some skills [so] that when they get out they can stay out longer. We’ve got a lot of frequent flyers [frequent recidivists] who come back. I know they’re not all going to stay out forever, but they can stay out for a bit longer and they can maybe change their lives slightly.

4.6 Cultural Awareness

4.6.1 Collaboration with Aboriginal staff

The vast majority of staff involved in the ASUs reported an awareness of the importance of providing culturally appropriate services and programs to Aboriginal prisoners. Collaboration with Aboriginal staff working in the mainstream prison was seen as crucial to achieving this aim. To this end, the services of Regional aboriginal program officers, aboriginal classification coordinators, and aboriginal services and programs officers are all called upon when necessary:

I think RAPOs [Regional Aboriginal Program Officers] deal with disability in a culturally appropriate way in terms of just seeing people as different, rather than labelling something as a disability. Just understanding that person has a different way of communicating or whatever. So, it’s much more accepted I think in terms of Aboriginal culture ... It’s also really useful for them to come in and help the guys to work out some of their issues. If there’s a bunch of guys who are not getting on or having trouble liaising with our SAPOs [Services and Programs Officers], the RAPOs can often help to smooth the way. They’ve been a great resource...

in the ASUs we work really closely with our aboriginal staff ... cultural support - especially if there’s a death in the family - that kind of thing...

4.6.2 Integrating Aboriginal culture

One interviewee explained that a few years earlier staff involved in the ASUs arranged a focus group with Aboriginal inmates in an effort to ascertain how they may achieve greater cultural awareness and sensitivity in the programs delivered at the ASUs. Aboriginal prisoners involved in
the focus group expressed a desire to feel “more connected” to their community by incorporating culture into literacy, numeracy and other educational programs:

> They were really keen to have their culture incorporated into programs. They wanted to learn much more about culture, particularly when they were so disconnected. They’ve come from a rural area, but because of their crime they can’t go back and so they’ve been in the city and they wanted to learn language and feel more connected to country.

As a result of the focus group, Aboriginal inmates are now offered classes on Aboriginal culture and history, as well as Aboriginal language courses provided by TAFE. As explained by an education officer, knowledge gained from these courses is then integrated with literacy and numeracy programs:

> ... they’re keen to tell me everything that happened in the [classes] and then we try and work that into their literacy and numeracy classes. So say they’ve developed an interest in where they’re from ... They’ll find out what their clan was and then ... I’ll give them some research and we’ll make some of our literacy and numeracy into learning about their culture so they can bring it into that. They’re very, very keen on learning about their culture.
5. Challenges for the model

The following section describes the three key challenges for the model adopted in the ASUs that emerged from the interviews:

1. Risk of dependency
2. Responsibility shifting in mainstream prisons, and
3. Improving post-release education and employment support.

5.1 Risk of Dependency

Some of the interviews revealed that the safe, nurturing environment of the ASUs could, in some circumstances, encourage dependency. Staff cited examples of former inmates released back into the community who expressed (and sometimes enacted) a strong desire to return to the ‘sanctuary’ of the ASUs:

But on the not so positive side, because they get the high level of programs, services, attention, respect, however you want to describe it while they’re in the ASUs, for some offenders, they’ve never experienced that level of feeling ... part of something and being valued and not being called stupid ... [So] if and when they re-offend ... this is where they want to come back to ... I can think of one particular instance where this young man, he was being re-arrested when they’re doing their screening, he was saying, “I want to go home. I want to go home now. I want to go to [the pre-release unit]”. He identified that as his home. That’s a bit of a struggle sometimes.

The other thing I think is important to mention is that by having ASUs, you create dependency ... and what happens to those guys, and it does happen, where we’re full and we can’t bring them back in ... So, it’s always a balance. You need them but what are the implications ... if the ASUs become the best place and it’s easier to commit a crime to come back to the ASUs than be out in the real world we have to realise that there are both positives and negatives to having the structures that we have.

One interviewee explained that the ‘protected’ environment of the ASUs is also perceived to reduce the likelihood of prisoners developing protective skills and “becoming more street smart”:

There’s two sides to the ASUs. There’s a positive side in that it provides a sanctuary, it's a very special environment where people are able to develop themselves. But at the same time, it’s a negative space in terms of the overall custodial environment because it’s very protected and individuals don’t learn skills that they may need to become more street smart.
Staff described that they try to combat the risk of dependency by teaching prisoners’ skills that will enable them to ‘cope’ and be ‘happy’ living in the community:

... coming back to an Additional Support Unit is almost safe for them. They know that they’ve got that support here. So, rather than enabling that support, we’re trying now to enable them with skills ... really try to enable them with the skills to not return ... It’s comfortable, but let’s make it comfortable for you outside. Let’s try and set up a life for you outside that you think is home. ... something outside for you that ... you’re going to really look forward to ... It’s going to be a happy and safe and great environment to live in.

5.2 Responsibility shifting in mainstream prisons

Many interviewees reported that the presence of the ASUs has encouraged mainstream prison staff to defer responsibility for prisoners with disability to staff involved in the ASUs. Separation of the responsibilities for disability-specific prison services (ASUs) and mainstream prison services often results in the needs of prisoners with a disability being unmet. It also decreases the capacity of mainstream prison staff to respond to the needs of prisoners with disability. For example, one interviewee reported that needs assessments of cognitively-impaired prisoners are generally low on the priority list of mainstream prison psychological support services:

One of the things that also happened historically [is] we had a team of psychologists in SDS [State-wide Disability Services] who used to go out and do cognitive assessments to identify people. What that meant was that we built an attitude that only SDS could deal with people with disability and so nobody else in the mainstream wanted to touch them. So years later, we’re still paying for that.

5.3 Improving post-release education and employment support

Interviewees consistently identified that greater specialised community-based services and supports designed to assist ex-prisoners with cognitive disability and complex support needs to obtain employment are urgently required. Ideally, prisoners would be linked in with such support services prior to release:

We do a great job finding people housing; we really do not do much to get them a job.

...a few years ago now [we tried to] set something up in terms of a link to employment using Centrelink and whatever, but that just ... fell over. What we were trying to do is get that link directly into a job network provider. But then that becomes really contentious because ... you’re not supposed to just pick one job network. That’s a choice for the offender ... That all became too complicated and fell over. So, it’s really on the individual basis, them committing to services out in the community.
Interviewees provided a range of suggestions for improving post-release employment support. For example, it was proposed that the ASUs could form partnerships with community-based disability employment providers such as Australian disability enterprises or supported employment where prisoners could continue with traineeships, obtain qualifications, or undertake employment post-release. It was further suggested that transition into community-based employment could be facilitated through in-prison employment pathway programs allowing prisoners to undertake employment with community-based employment providers while still in custody. This would give prisoners the opportunity to undertake employment in a real-life workplace while continuing to receive the intensive support of the ASUs:

What I’d like to see is a pathway to work. So, you’ve got a pick and pack area there and it would be good if they had a pathway too.

One interviewee expressed that more needed to be done to establish partnerships between the ASUs and community-based education providers such as TAFEs. These partnerships would allow prisoners to “transition” their education/training across to community education providers so that education/training commenced in prison could be more easily continued in the community:

Like if you do the [TAFE] certificate 1, 2, 3, but if you want to take it any further, I think it’s up to the individual thereafter. That’s where we fall short. Someone has to follow up on the program to make sure that we can get those guys back into TAFE without any issues someone to drive it further.

The creation of an “education officer” role in the community was seen as highly desirable by one interviewee. It was explained that the person in this role would be responsible for providing ex-offenders with information, support and guidance about how to undertake or continue with education/training. This individual would ideally have a specialised knowledge of education/training within the corrections system:

All the good work stops at the gate. It needs that intermediary like I mean set up an office in a parole board somewhere and come here if you’re released from jail and we can find out what you’ve done and help you write your resume and stuff like that ... just because we [corrective service educators] know where to find things, we know where to look for things. I think if you’re looking for results being transferred from the jail into the community that’s the stumbling block because people are sort of kicked out, pretty much cold You need that person ... in that interim area just to say you’ve done this in the jail, here is where you go next.
6. Summary and conclusion

This section summarises the key findings from the study. The need for robust evaluations of the few existing programs in this domain is highlighted, along with suggestions regarding the type of data and evaluation criteria required to fulfil this aim.

There is growing awareness of the need for specialised education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability. Almost a decade ago the Director General of the Western Australian Disability Services Commission, Dr Ron Chalmers, noted that the expansion of specialist education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability is critical to providing improved outcomes and greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group. Yet at the present time, specialised education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability remain scant.

This study contributes to knowledge in this domain by illuminating the key features of one of the few specialist education, training and employment programs in Australia for prisoners with cognitive disability. Findings reveal that the model is theoretically informed by person-centred, relational, strengths-based and holistic practice principles. A multidisciplinary team of professionals work collaboratively to meet the complex and varied support needs experienced by inmates with cognitive disability. Skill building is understood as fundamental to improving rehabilitative outcomes and to reducing the risk of recidivism. To achieve this aim, mainstream programs are delivered in a flexible manner, and programs are adapted to suit the specialised needs of prisoners with cognitive disability. In addition, the importance of providing culturally appropriate services and programs to Aboriginal prisoners is well understood.

The study also reveals challenges for the model. The comparatively safe, nurturing environment of the ASUs can, in some circumstances, encourage dependency for inmates. The presence of the ASUs can also encourage mainstream prison staff to defer responsibility for prisoners with disability to staff involved in the ASUs. In addition, the persistent lack of appropriate and sufficient specialised community-based services and supports for ex-prisoners with cognitive disability continues to undermine the positive outcomes achieved at the ASUs. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that a practice model that is informed by and delivered from a well-considered theoretical base by a collaborative multidisciplinary team that is capable of adapting mainstream education, training and employment programs in a flexible manner, and where appropriate is delivered in a culturally sensitive manner, offers an opportunity to provide improved outcomes and greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group.

The research also highlights the need for the systematic collection of sufficient and appropriate data to more effectively evaluate the efficacy of specialist education, training and employment programs for prisoners with cognitive disability. Knowledge about the compounding social disadvantage and complex support needs of this group indicates the need for a well-considered evaluative framework that moves beyond a simplistic measurement of recidivism or employment outcomes alone; rather a range of outcomes need to be considered. This requires the systematic collection of a range of quantitative and qualitative outcome data. Quantitative outcome data should address factors such as a) the recidivism rates of program participants; b) the length of time between an inmate’s release from custody and any subsequent return to custody; c) the post-release education, training and employment outcomes of inmates; and d) the accommodation, health and community connections of program participants post-release. Qualitative outcome data should aim to elicit a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness or otherwise of the programs, including social and emotional well-being from both the perspective of program participants and people involved in supporting them. The systematic collection of such data will be critical to developing an evidence-based understanding of ‘what works’ in terms of education, training and employment support for prisoners with cognitive disability. Moreover, it is crucial to achieving greater equity for this highly disadvantaged group.
Appendix A  Programs provided at the ASUs

- **Offending Behaviour**: All inmates housed at the ASUs have contact with the unit psychologist to address factors related to their offending and other issues that may adversely impact on their management and successful transition back to the community.

- **Living Skills**: This includes cooking, budgeting, planning, developing personal hygiene and time awareness. The program also assists inmates to follow schedules and improve their communication skills.

- **Planning**: Inmates are assisted to focus on their needs and goals on release. This includes accessing community services, financial management and other skills that will prepare them for their release.

- **Job Seeking**: Assists inmates who have limited work experience to develop the skills necessary to either enter employment or the adult education system or both.

- **Food Skills**: These units are designed to be practical and develop food related skills that are not only useful in their own environment but can also assist in future employment or education.

- **Roads and Traffic Authority Course**: Upon completing this course, eligible participants (i.e. those with no outstanding fines, or driving disqualifications) have the option of completing the Drivers knowledge test and obtaining their Learners Driver Licence whilst in Custody. The course also assists inmates to improve their critical literacy skills.

- **Employment**: Employment opportunities are available through Corrective Services Industries (CSI) to participate in assembly and packaging work. A specially trained CSI Officer who assists inmates to develop their employment skills oversees employment at the ASUs.

- **Other Courses**: These include: literacy and numeracy; occupational health and safety; a number of TAFE courses; NEXUS (reintegration service); and Health Survival Tips.
## Appendix B Participation in Education and Psycho-education courses in the ASU from 2010–11 to 2015–16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education, offence related and psycho-education programs</th>
<th>Number of offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education courses (internal) – Total participants only, regardless of attending multiple programs</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education courses (internal) – Total participants – with duplication for attending multiple programs</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education courses (external) e.g., OTEN, TAFE</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-educational and skills programs e.g., Problem Solving, Relationships, Communication</td>
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## Appendix C  Educational Outcomes from January to December 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education outcome</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVETI Unit Completions</td>
<td>125 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Certificates Achieved</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EQUIPS Foundation, Aggression, Addiction</td>
<td>28 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE Warehousing, Kitchen Operations, Barber Skills, Digital Media and Technology</td>
<td>154 participants</td>
</tr>
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