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Thankyou...

To all the women involved in Flat Out in the past year, and those who were able to contribute to the development of this report. Informed consent was given for all quotes, artwork and photographs contained within the report. Particular thanks to those women who shared their stories and experiences of leaving prison.

All donations to Flat Out are tax deductible. Please contact us for more information or regarding any of the work undertaken by Flat Out.

FLAT OUT

The name

“Flat Out’s name came about for a number of reasons and after numerous long meetings at bars, spas, lounge rooms floors, offices and weekends away. At first (in 1988) we envisaged that we would get flats for women when they got out. We also thought women might be working flat out on their back paying the rent and that perhaps we would find women flat out on the floor overdosed. We were certain that our workers would be flat out meeting the demand”. A George

OUR VISION

- People’s rights are understood and upheld
- There is a compassionate response to personal and social trauma
- Women are not imprisoned

PRIMARY TASK

To support women who are exiting prison or who are at risk of incarceration by providing access to transitional housing and providing support to re-establish themselves in the community and to avoid re-incarceration.

Flat Out will give priority to women in Victoria (and their children), who at the time of initial contact,

- are single, and
- exiting the adult prison system, and
- whose housing status puts them at risk of incarceration.

Core Work

Flat Out's core work comprises three overlapping areas of activity:

- 1. Direct Support Services**
- 2. Community Development, Education, Research and Advocacy**
- 3. Development and Maintenance of the Flat Out Feminist Collective**

Flat Out will endeavour to create opportunities for women to be involved in the thinking, planning and organization associated with its activities and services.

Direct Support Services

- providing information on rights, housing, prison issues, income, legal issues, health services, family reunification, courts, financial & material aid
- facilitating access to transitional housing
- personal support
- supporting re-unification with children and family
- case planning and management
- referral to support agencies and resources and assistance with accessing those services
- crisis intervention & support
- court support
- support to prepare for prison eg house, pets, kids, storage
- organizing recreational activities

Community Development, Education, Research & Advocacy

- educating other service providers and the community on issues around women and imprisonment and about the experience of women in prison
 - advocating on behalf of women who encounter the criminal justice system
 - research – continue to explore women and imprisonment from a personal and political perspective with the aim of enriching Flat Out's work and informing community attitudes and government policy.
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Development and Maintenance of a Feminist Collective – Organisational Development

- continue to explore and articulate the advantages and importance of a feminist philosophy and collective structure for Flat Out
- develop clear goals and priorities for the Collective and continually review the effectiveness of our work
- support employed collective members in their work by developing clear job roles, creating learning & development opportunities and clear support and accountability processes
- manage the financial and physical resources of the collective
- ensure a safe, functional workplace



Artwork by Karlene Clarke, 2006

What We Do



Flat Out works with women who are currently incarcerated or have been released within the last three months from an adult prison although we do offer flexibility on the criteria for accessing our programs.

We work within a feminist framework and are non judgmental in our provision of service. The overall objective to service provision is to secure long term housing and support the transition for women/children to live independently.

“

[At Flat Out] I received a service that went far above and beyond just finding me a place to live.”

Case workers work along side women and their children to develop support plans that strive to meet the immediate and long term needs of individuals and their families. Case plans are regularly revised to ensure their relevance to women/children and to ensure their appropriateness to the individual support needs.

Flat Out offers an accessible and flexible service. We provide a range of access points including prison visits and home visits. We also provide a welcoming office space that can provide for children and appointments with a woman at a safe place within and after business hours. It's all about what makes the woman feel most comfortable and how she wants to work with the service.

Support needs can range from low to very high need. Each case worker works with a range of women and has a case load of twelve on average dependant on the configuration of worker hours. Assistance provided can include: Housing, financial/material aid, advocacy, transport, removals, storage of belongings and referrals to services such as: legal, drug/alcohol, mental health, sexual assault, children's services and employment.

The service can offer support periods of 13 weeks for women/children in the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, up to 3 months for those in the National Illicit Drug Strategy and 6 months in the Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative. Although the funding bodies are directive in their support time lines, the service is always flexible, taking into account the complexity of need and the availability of the broader service system.

The service strives to develop networks that are relevant to the diverse needs of women/children accessing Flat Out. These include: Transitional Housing Managers, Crisis Accommodation Services, Drug and Alcohol Services and a range of Medical/Mental health providers.

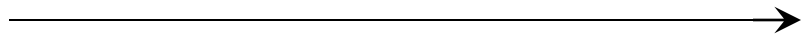
“

My needs were great, I didn't know how to talk to anyone,

I was a very aggressive person who now knows how to

”

communicate verbally thanks to Flat Out.



Funding

Acknowledgements

Non Government Funding

Annamila P/L

Arthur Allen Robinson

Government Funding

Department of Human Services – SAAP (Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program)

Department of Health and Ageing – NIDS (National Illicit Drug Strategy)

Department of Justice – CHPI (Corrections Pathways Initiative)

Turning Point – Bridging the Gap

WORKERS

Dallas Taylor

Administrator

Mary Hansen

Book Keeper

Siobhan Muir-Smith

Support Worker

Megan Mahon

Support Worker

Alyssa Fooks,

Support Worker

Esther Singer

Support Worker

Wendy Nannes

Support Worker

Tracy Mison

Support Worker

Ada Conroy
Support Worker

Tania Wise
Indigenous Support Worker

Terry Hannon
Researcher

Mary Cotter
Cleaner

Flat Out is funded for 6 EFT positions with some workers working part time.

COLLECTIVE MEMBERS

Shelley Burchfield
Aboriginal Family Violence and Legal Centre
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Karren Walker
St Vincent's De Paul

Pia Cerveri
Melbourne City Mission
Kay Thompson
Sacred Heart Mission

Cherry Grimwade
Good Shepherd Sisters

Pru Smith
Anglicare

Jo Doherty
Aboriginal Housing Board

Amanda George
Deakin University

Catherine Gow
Community Member

PROGRAMS

SAAP

(SUPPORTED ASSISTANCE ACCOMMODATION PROGRAM)

SAAP is governed by the Commonwealth Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994. In Victoria SAAP forms a key part of the Homelessness service system, which also includes the Transitional Management (THM) program

The overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and a range of related support services, in order to help people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness, to achieve the maximum possible degree of self reliance and independence.

Within this aim the goals are to:

- Resolve crisis
- Re-establish family links where appropriate; and
- Re-establish the capacity of clients to live independently of SAAP

Flat Out Inc has been funded by SAAP since her establishment in 1988.

NIDS

(NATIONAL ILLICIT DRUG STRATEGY)

- NON GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION TREATMENT GRANTS PROGRAM

NIDS key service requirements are:

To provide short-term supported accommodation to alcohol and drug clients who have undergone a drug withdrawal program or who require assistance in controlling their alcohol and drug use.

To provide support and assistance to enhance the woman's capacity for non-drug abusive community living through skill acquisition, counseling, personal care activities and relapse prevention.

To facilitate client access to other services appropriate to their health and welfare needs.

To negotiate an "Individual Treatment Plan" with the woman.

To support the woman in safe, secure and affordable accommodation.

To provide services for carers and families of those affected by alcohol and drug use.

CHPI

(CORRECTIONS HOUSING PATHWAYS INITIATIVE)

CHPI aims to improve the transitional experience for women exiting prison into the community by providing pre and post release support using a case management model. The CHPI has a strong housing focus, within a holistic welfare based case management model. Women of the CHPI are given structured and planned support to address their identified needs which may include substance abuse, housing, finances family reunifications and social isolation.

This program was very successful with positive outcomes for many of the women. We attribute this to the fact that this program has a property allocation on release, a \$1000 grant for financial assistance and a longer support period; that of 6 months.

Funding for Flat Out was withdrawn in October 2006 and MCM, VACRO & the Brosnan Centre were the successful contractors. However Flat Out remains a partner to the consortium.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Corrections Victoria funded Turning Point to provide intensive pre and post release support services for women with or without children with moderate to high risk of re-offending and with identifying high needs. Flat Out negotiated a collaboration agreement with Turning Point to provide a housing and support worker on a part time basis.

DONATIONS

Annamila P/L

Annamila has been a friend of Flat Out for many years and donates funding to our financial assistance program. This program is specific to providing small allocations of money to women who access our program for varying expenses that they themselves can ill afford on their Centrelink incomes.

Such expenses are for methadone payments, food vouchers, clothing, car registrations, house hold items and costs relating to children.

The financial assistance program has proven to reduce women's offending and prevented women returning to prison.

This donation from Annamila provided women and their children with a Christmas party at the Melbourne Zoo in December 2005. The party was complete with Santa and her helpful elf, a sack full of presents, kindly donated by the Doncaster Christian Women's Group and the Salvation Army. The women in our program were each given a Christmas food hamper to tie them over the holiday period.

Our Christmas party is a particularly special day for everyone involved as quite often this day is Christmas for many of the women's children and those little faces lighting up when Santa arrives with her sack of toys is as good as it gets. Our Christmas is a very special day indeed especially when a child tells their worker she missed out on seeing Santa when he is a she!!

There is a lot to be said about the provision of financial assistance and with that we hope we are in a position in the future to continue to financially support women during their transition to independent living.



ARTHUR ALLEN ROBINSON

Flat Out received a \$4000 donation in 2006. The funding was directed to the purchasing of white goods for women accessing our programs.

EDUCATION FEES

During this reporting period Flat Out provided financial assistance to women studying at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. Flat Out funded 12 women to pursue education whilst incarcerated.

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Dallas Taylor has been employed at Flat-Out for 10 years. Dallas is well known to many in the community and union sector in particular around prison issues. She has been a committed and tireless worker who seen the organisation through many changes and has steered us through the ever changing financial and accountability requirements. Dallas has been extremely resourceful in obtaining various forms of material aid from disparate groups in the community which we can then pass on to women. The office at times has seemed more like a supplies and toy distributor than a housing service thanks to thoughtful and generous contacts.



RESEARCH PROJECT

In 2003 Flat Out was successful in obtaining funding to research and write a report looking at the legal issues that arise for children when their mother is incarcerated. The report is titled *Children: Unintended Victims Of Legal process – A review of policies and legislation affecting children with incarcerated parents*. The research was jointly published as a Discussion Paper with VACRO (Victorian Association for the Care And Resettlement of Offenders) in February 2006.

The research project was funded by Reichstein Foundation, RE Ross Trust and the William Buckland Foundation.

A steering committee supported the researcher in conjunction with significant support from particular Flat Out members.

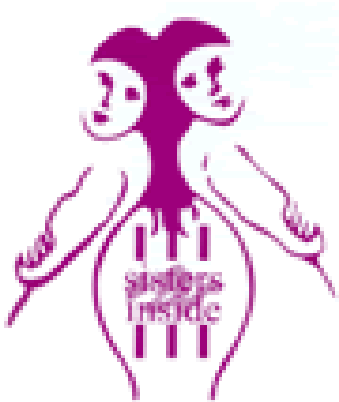
The members of the committee are:

Arie Frieberg
Catherine Gow
Cherry Grimwade
Robyn Hamilton
Cheska Whelan
Christa Momot

The Discussion Paper is available free of charge from Flat Out.

IN KIND SUPPORT

A number of community organizations & individuals provide us with personal and household items to give to women who participate in Flat-Out programs. These things range from clothing, computers, furniture, food, books. We are greatly appreciative to these people for their thoughtfulness and insight.



SISTERS INSIDE

In July 2005 an international conference *Is Prison Obsolete?* which addressed the crucial issues relating to the criminalization of women, their experiences of prison and post release was held in Melbourne. This conference was organized by Sisters Inside, a Queensland women's prison, support and advocacy organization and Flat Out. Sisters Inside has been organizing these conferences biannually for a number of years. Over 300 people attended the three-day conference and

Flat-Out assisted many women who had experienced incarceration in Victoria to participate in workshops and deliver personal presentations at the conference. A number of international speakers presented and many people attended from interstate. .



CALL ME BY MY FIRST NAME

In 2003 a working party of women from the collective and current and former clients convened to develop a one-day forum with a view to educating workers in the community who deal with women who have been in prison, by listening to women present their experiences of incarceration and post release.

The forum was taped and then transcribed by women at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre with the consent of prison management. We obtained generous funding from Annamila P/L and the Victorian Women's Trust to publish the transcripts of the forum and this will be launched as a booklet *Call Me By My First Name* in 2007.

The publication will be available from Flat-Out in 2007.

HOMELESSNESS ASSISTANCE SERVICE STANDARDS

Flat Out has been also been focused on meeting a mandated set of standards developed by the State government. These standards hope to focus on both assuring quality services and improving service delivery. This has involved enormous amounts of organisational time to implement. Although Flat Out already conforms to most of these standards, we have spent a great deal of time translating our practices into the model expected from the government. Particular collective members have contributed enormously on meeting these requirements.

NETWORKS ATTENDED

Corrections Stakeholders Forums

Indigenous Housing Forums

NAIDOC

Relationships Between Indigenous and Mainstream Services

SAAP Regional Network

Women's Services Access Network

Victorian Women's Pre and Post Release Network

Transitional Housing Managers

Corrections Housing Pathway Initiative

BETTER PATHWAYS

A Flat Out worker was a member of the Corrections Victoria Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee which developed *Better Pathways: An Integrated Response to Women's Offending and Re-offending*. The advisory committee was a group of selected people with an interest and expertise in women's prisons. However as is the current practice, organizational representatives are frequently not allowed to be on these committees because of concerns about confidentiality, so only an individual from Flat Out could be on this committee. This government practice stops these individuals being able to consult with the rest of their organization from which their expertise is sourced.

In 2005, *Better Pathways* was launched by the government with a substantial increase in funding to go towards women's prisons. Better Pathways came up with 37 initiatives to reduce women's offending, imprisonment, re-offending and victimisation. It also aimed to find ways to address the underlying causes for the extraordinary increase in women's prisoner numbers in the last 5 years. The Better Pathways initiatives are being implemented over the next 5 years.

COLLECTIVE REPORT

Flat-Out is managed by a feminist collective, comprising unpaid community members as well as the paid workers. We meet monthly and also have a number of working parties that look at particular issues – industrial issues, homelessness assistance service standards, recruitment, indigenous employment, research projects and policy. Many women have been on the collective for number of years and we are always looking for new women to join what is never an uneventful experience. The collective acknowledges the extraordinary amount of work undertaken by its employees who not only deliver the service required by our funding bodies but who are also actively involved in the management of the organization. This is an extra burden that they undertake and we are cognizant of the commitment and time that this requires.

