

# FLAT OUT INC: A BRIEF HERSTORY



*The Fairleas (Flat Out Workers) performing at 'Call me by my first name' 2007 Book launch: Source Flat Out Archives*

**Mary Cotter**

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**By Mary Cotter**  
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# PREFACE

Flat Out is a state-wide service that provides housing and support for women leaving prison and their children, and for women at risk of imprisonment. Flat Out assists in developing the women's skills to enable them to re-establish an independent life in the community, to regain self-esteem and to attain some degree of financial security to break the cycle of poverty, crime and imprisonment.

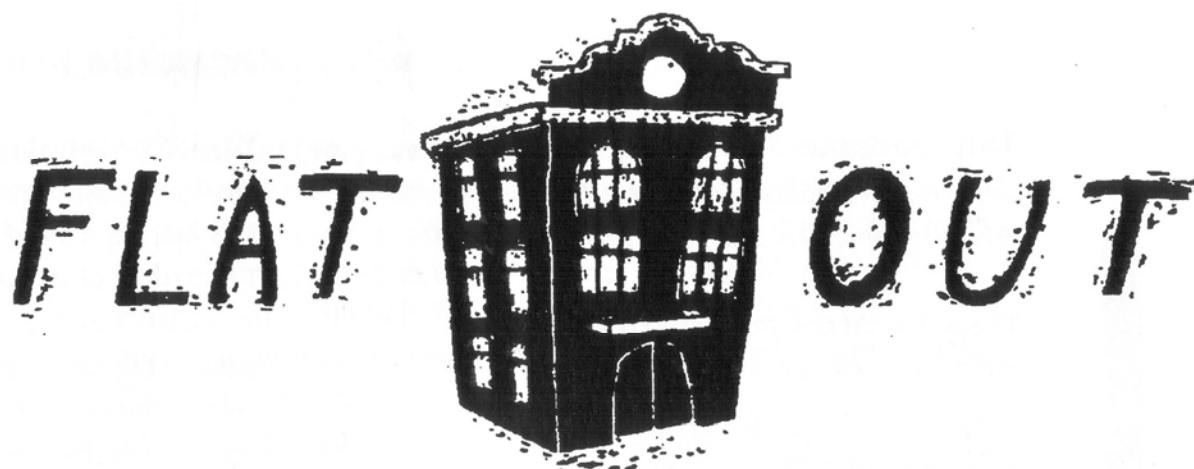
Its objectives include:

- to redress and eradicate the inequality and discrimination in the criminal justice system's treatment of women;
- to provide a compassionate response to personal and social trauma;
- to work towards a future where women are not imprisoned.

In achieving these objectives, Flat Out offers a range of services and supports, including information on and referral to other services such as legal and health services, counselling, education and training; financial assistance with furniture removals, rent, whitegoods and food vouchers; support for women facing court; case planning and management; family re-unification; personal support; support to help prepare for prison such as what to with kids, pets, house and storage; crisis intervention and support; and organising recreational activities.

While Flat Out's primary task is to provide housing and support, the organisation has two other overlapping areas of activity. The first of these consists of education, advocacy and research work. Flat Out members educate other service providers and the community on the needs and experiences of women caught up in the criminal justice system, as well as broader community education on issues affecting women in prison through giving talks, presentations and training for a range of agencies including universities and community groups. Members also spend time advocating for services, programs and supports such as psychologists, both in prison and in the community, advocating for systemic change so as to address the underlying issues of poverty, violence and disadvantage that underlie the reasons so many women are incarcerated, which once addressed will divert women from the prison system, as well as undertaking research into the issues surrounding women and imprisonment, eg children as unintended victims of legal process.

The third area of activity is the organisational development and maintenance of the Flat Out Feminist Collective, which involves exploring and articulating the advantages and importance of a feminist philosophy and collective structure for Flat Out, developing clear goals and priorities, and continually evaluating the effectiveness of the organisation, as well as the overall management of financial and physical resources.



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS and SOURCES

The Flat Out Collective would like to acknowledge the author Mary Cotter for the enormous amount of work she did in researching and writing this Herstory. Compiling such a story from disparate sources and different memories is a daunting task which she did with dogged determination, patience and good humour. The work done on the last 3 years of the Herstory was done by the collective as was the editing. Any mistakes or omissions in the Herstory are entirely the responsibility of the Collective.

The primary source for this history of Flat Out has been interviews with past and present workers and collective members together with a handful of women who have been recipients of Flat Out's services. Some interviewees have not been identified in order to protect their privacy, as per their request. Contributors that can be named are: Shelley Burchfield, Chris Burnup, Helen Carnaby, Evelyn Chittleborough, Sandy Cook, Amanda George, Sue George, Catherine Gow, Terry Hannon, Lesley Hall, Jude McCulloch, Siobhan Muir-Smith, Di Otto, Niki Sheldon, Linda Stevans, Dallas Taylor, Karen Taylor, Liz Thomas and Kay Thompson. I would like to sincerely thank all the above extraordinary and admirable women for sparing the time from their busy lives to answer my many questions, not all of which always related to Flat Out.

Unfortunately documentary sources from Flat Out's archives were very incomplete due to the limited time Flat Out workers could spare to go through said archives. They do include Annual Reports that cover the periods 1999--2007, various conference papers and research reports, media releases and newspaper clippings, leaflets and posters, correspondence and photographs. A major source for documents relating to many of the campaigns that Flat Out and Women Against Prison have been involved with was Catherine Gow's personal archives, which include the Fairlea Vigil Diary and very many photographs.

Malcolm Feiner, Resource Officer, Corrections Victoria deserves a special mention as an absolutely invaluable resource on anything to do with imprisonment in Victoria. His help included getting together a collection of relevant documents and answering email queries regarding dates.

An important source on issues regarding women and imprisonment during the late 1980s to the mid-1990s was a collection of papers produced for a conference organised by the Women and Imprisonment Group which was held in 1992 entitled 'Changing Agenda: Women, Imprisonment and Law and Order', which were published in 1995 under the title of *Women and Imprisonment*.

Many of the contributors to this history - most of whom were or are members of Flat Out and/or Women Against Prison - have written numerous papers on issues relating to imprisonment in Victoria, many of which are available online – just try googling “amanda george” and prisons or strip-searches for example. The People’s Justice Alliance website also has a number of such papers online:

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~pjan/pjakit.htm>

as does the Sisters Inside website: <http://www.sistersinside.com.au/>

For the period leading up to 1992 Patricia Weiser Easteal’s ‘Women and Crime: Imprisonment Issues’ is available online at:

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/ti35.pdf>

Two reports on Equal Opportunity submissions show what has changed (and what has not) for women prisoners in Victoria between 1982 and 2005: *Prisoner and Female: the Double Negative* 1982, and Pia Cerveri et al *Request for a Systematic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons* April 2005, available online at

<http://www.sistersinside.com.au/media/VICComplaint.pdf>

Sources for information on the needs of women leaving prison include Flat Out’s *Road to Nowhere* by Helen Carnaby published in 1998, and our ‘*Call me by my first name*’ published in 2007 and available on the [www.flatout.org.au](http://www.flatout.org.au) and numerous documents held in the Flat Out archives.

To learn more about women and the justice system in Victoria in the nineteenth century, see Christina Twomey’s *Deserted and Destitute: Motherhood, Wife Desertion and Colonial Welfare* (2002), and for more about the history of prisons in Victoria which includes specific references to women, Tony Vinson’s ‘Victoria’s Prisons: From Solitude to Sociability’ is online at:

[http://www.jss.org.au/media/reports/victorias\\_prisons.pdf](http://www.jss.org.au/media/reports/victorias_prisons.pdf)

Finally, acknowledgement is made to the Indigenous peoples of this country, who as a long term consequences consequence of dispossession, colonisation and policies of cultural genocide are

imprisoned at far higher rates than non-Indigenous people particularly women.

**All quotes photos and artwork are used with permission.**

**Women Against Prison and Flat Out Collective**

Jude McCulloch  
Kim Mulcahy  
Amanda George  
Annie Delaney  
Trish Luker  
Nikki Sheldon  
Renee Leon  
Deb Homburg  
Di Otto  
Jan Carr  
Josie Walker  
Sue George  
Evelyn Robson  
Rosie Finn  
Janai Newenstein  
Lesley Hall  
Serena Williams  
Sue Smith  
Judy Cox  
Shelley Burchfield  
Cath Mackie  
Karen Taylor,  
Helen Carnaby  
Kay Thompson  
Dallas Taylor  
Liz Thomas  
Cheryl Cornish  
Cherry Grimwade  
Koulla Roussos  
Katie Pound  
Bridie O'Reilly  
Pia Cervari  
Helen Barnacle  
Mary Keating  
Ruth Cooper  
Alyssa Fookes  
Megan Mahon  
Terry Hannon



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Cheska Whelan  
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Tania Wise  
Donna King  
Maggie Barford  
Joanne Doherty  
Michele Old  
Amy Mallett  
Billi Clarke  
Emily Piggott  
Brook Shearer

**Philanthropic funders**

Annamila P/L  
Stegley Foundation  
Poola  
Reichstein Foundation  
Victorian Women's Trust  
RE Ross Trust  
William Buckland Foundation  
Melbourne Community Foundation  
Arthur Allen Robinson  
Andy Inc  
Lord Mayors Fund  
Streetsmart

**Material aid**

Kimberley-Clarke  
The Body Shop  
The Whip Arounds  
Helen Barnacle  
Chris Tipler

Sancella  
Holeproof  
Forbes Chambers  
Denise  
Christa Momot  
Tony Pintado  
Avon  
San Seller  
Doris Jarvis  
Jane Herring  
Wendy and Mandy  
Julie Barnes

**Support**

Women's Housing Ltd  
VACRO (Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)  
Council to Homeless Persons  
Aboriginal Health Service  
Regina Coeli  
Eastern Emergency Relief Network  
Vic Relief and Foodbank  
Mission Australia  
The Salvation Army  
Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre

**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 – BTG (Bridging the Gap) and THM-CHPI (Transitional Housing Management - Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative)  
Corrections Victoria

# PRELUDE

Historically, the major organisations providing assistance to prisoners have focused on male prisoners. This probably reflects the reality that the number of male prisoners has always been significantly higher than the number of women prisoners, resulting in women being a minority group in systems that took no account of the differences between female and male prisoners' needs in prison and on release.

People imprisoned in the first years of white occupation in Victoria included not only those who had been found guilty of committing crimes but many people who were seen as 'society's outcasts', including people who would in later times have been classified as living with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities, as well as women whose only 'crime' was to have found themselves unmarried and pregnant. In 1848 the Yarra Bend Park Lunatic Asylum, set on land situated on a large bend of the river, was established and people deemed to have psychiatric or intellectual disabilities began to be transferred there from the Gaols, but most women remained in the general prisons. The gold rushes of the 1850s brought vast increases in the numbers of women with children left destitute as their husbands disappeared off to the gold fields, leading to crimes of desperation such as begging, theft and prostitution<sup>1</sup> by women with hungry children or in danger of being evicted for non-payment of rent. The most common reason for women's imprisonment during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century overall was for vagrancy, a situation which more often resulted in a prison sentence than a referral to a charitable organisation.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, the majority of prisoners were (and are) male, with women prisoners at around 6%, a small minority in the overall prison population. As a result, until relatively recent times women have virtually always been held in the same prisons as men, prisons with systems, rules and regulations designed for (and by) men. Although the latter is still largely the case, partial separation of the sexes began in Victorian prisons in 1866 when women who had been spread across several mixed-sex gaols in Melbourne were transferred to the Female Division at Pentridge Prison. Then in 1894 they were moved to what was called the Female Prison, separate from but still part of the Pentridge Prison complex<sup>3</sup>, but conditions there were little better. Then in 1952 Phyllis Frost, who some twenty years later would be given the title of Dame for her years of community service, had cause to visit a young woman being held at the Female Prison.

After being shocked at the conditions women prisoners were subjected to, Phyllis Frost approached the Victorian Inspector-General of Prisons, Alexander Whatmore and soon after the office of the Victorian Premier John Cain (Snr) and obtained permission to establish the Consultative Council for Female Prison Reform (later the Victorian Women's Prison Council), with herself as chairman. The Council's aim was to draw attention to and fight for reforms regarding women and imprisonment, but to do this from within the system in ways that were not publicly critical of the prison system itself. Following the establishment of this Council, Alexander Whatmore made a series of recommendations with the backing of the Consultative Council. These recommendations were ultimately incorporated into the *Penal Reform Act* of 1956, and one of the key recommendations was that there should be a separate prison for women away from Pentridge.

As a result, Fairlea Women's Prison, the first prison in Australia built specifically for women, was established in 1956 at Yarra Bend Park, Fairfield. Fairlea Prison was built on the site of what had previously been a hospital for venereal diseases, and prior to that, Melbourne's first Lunatic Asylum. Some of the accommodation consisted of small self-contained cottages, and Fairlea soon offered women improved services and programs such as medical, psychiatric, counselling and education through involving religious and community organisations. The Victorian Women's Prison Council (VWPC) continued running their classes there, and Phyllis Frost also devoted much of her time to speaking about prison reform at public meetings to raise community awareness of the problems within the prison system. Through Phyllis Frost's lobbying, Fairlea became the only prison in Victoria to allow babies to live with their mothers until they reached twelve months of age. In 1965 Phyllis submitted a report to the Australian Prison Aftercare Council that included the recommendation that children be allowed to remain longer, but was unsuccessful at that stage.

Prior to the *Community Services Act* 1970 it was very difficult for single mothers to avoid being deemed to be unfit mothers and thus having their children taken from them by the state. The result was that many such children grew up in orphanages. Single mothers who found themselves imprisoned found it exceedingly difficult to regain custody of their children upon their release from prison. Two years after the introduction of this Act the Australian Labor Party headed by Gough Whitlam won the Federal election, and in the following year introduced what was then called the Supporting Mothers' Benefit. This finally allowed single mothers the means to care for

their children, leading to a steep drop in the numbers of children in orphanages as well lessening the likelihood of single mothers having to resort to crimes such as prostitution to feed and house their children.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from a number of church-based organisations, since 1872 the main group providing assistance to prisoners upon their release from prison was the Prisoners' Aid Society. In common with the religious organisations, the Prisoners' Aid Society was influenced by a view commonly held in the nineteenth century about the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor. Throughout history the far greater majority of people who end up in prison are economically disadvantaged and this affected the organisation's attitudes towards those they were there to assist in resettling into the community. The Prisoners' Aid Society's self-confessed paternalistic attitude continued right up until the mid-1970s. The Society's aims as outlined for its Centenary in 1972 indicated their presumption of the maleness of their clientele.<sup>5</sup>

In 1976 the Prisoners' Aid Society became the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO), and with the name change came other changes that included the provision of services to women ex-prisoners as well as its more traditional male clientele. But even as late as 1987 in a conference paper written by the then CEO, VACRO's clients were still being referred to as male.<sup>6</sup> The Victorian Women's Prison Council, as the Consultative Council for Female Prison Reform was now called, was the only officially recognised advisory body in Victoria that was working with the government in developing policies regarding the needs of women prisoners. But this Council also had what was seen as a patronising and moralistic attitude to women. Although it had brought about some much needed improvements to the women's diet as well as organising classes in health, cooking, childcare, sewing and craft, in the end the Council were seen by some to give more attention to feminising the prison environment than to more practical things such as education or training that would assist women in gaining employment.<sup>7</sup> Women on release were also unable to get double beds through them unless they were married.

In other parts of Australia women were increasingly becoming active on issues involving women in prison. In Sydney a group of women including Wendy Bacon, now Professor Journalism at the University of Technology and Juene Pritchard now of SBS, founded a group called Women Behind Bars, which campaigned vigorously for the release of Violet Roberts and her son Bruce. Violet had been imprisoned in 1976 for shooting her violent husband in his sleep

after enduring more than 20 years of every variety of abuse at his hands. In 1980 the group lay siege to the prisons department building for over a month, hanging two banners over the front of the building with the words 'Justice for Violet and Bruce Roberts' and 'Jails Are The Crime; Women Behind Bars' <sup>8</sup>. This case and the community opposition to the injustice of Violet and Bruce's prison sentences would later see the criminal justice system accept the defence of provocation in such cases – previously the use of this defence was only allowed when the provocation occurred immediately prior to the death.<sup>9</sup>

Victoria experienced a ten-fold increase in the numbers of women in prison, from around seven in the mid 1970s to around seventy in the mid 1980s, a rise which is argued to have been caused by a flood of heroin into Australia and exacerbated by sharp increases in the fines for prostitution.<sup>10</sup>

Two women who had been education workers at Fairlea for several years had long been shocked by the conditions that they had witnessed, including a diet that allowed for only one piece of fruit per week, educational opportunities limited to two hours per week, and primitive fire-fighting equipment that in some cases consisted simply of buckets of sand.<sup>11</sup> One of the education workers, Chris Burnup (then Miller), was also on close terms with a third woman, Dr Linda Hancock, who was lecturing in Sociology at what was then Swinburne Institute of Technology and who had written many papers on girls and young women caught up in the juvenile justice system.

After trying for many years to effect change from within the system to little or no avail, in 1979 these three women began to consult with the then Shadow Minister for Community and Welfare Services and Women's Affairs, Pauline Toner. Around this time the decision was made to establish a formal group because they believed they would be in a better position to draw government and media attention to their concerns than they would as individuals, and so began the Fairlea Research Group (FRG), which soon grew to have a fairly large membership including ex-prisoners and other concerned women. One of the group's first tactics was to get Pauline Toner, who although she was Shadow Minister, was being denied access to the prison, to use parliamentary question time to bring issues at Fairlea Women's Prison to the Liberal Government's attention.

The group's next major action was more direct. The resurgence of feminism during the previous decade had led to the Victorian Government setting up the Anti-Discrimination Bureau and the

Women's Advisory Office in 1975, followed by the introduction of the *Equal Opportunity Act (EOA) 1977* and the establishment of the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity. It was apparent to the members of FRG that women prisoners fared far worse in many ways than their male counterparts and they decided that a strong case of sexual discrimination could be made under the EOA. In November 1981, FRG lodged a submission with the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, Faye Marles, using the Department of Justice's own reports to make their case, which was that women prisoners were discriminated against in numerous areas including accommodation, medical services, education, training, and recreational opportunities as well as regulations regarding visiting prisoners. FRG then put their submission together with women prisoners' comments and recommendations on the issues covered in the submission into a report called 'Prisoner and Female: The Double Negative', which was published some six months later.

That same year a group of women lawyers and law students involved in Community Legal Centres saw a need for services for women caught up in the criminal justice system, in particular women disadvantaged by race or ethnicity, disability or income. This group of women lawyers ultimately established the Women's Legal Resource Group (WLRG). The WLRG, which is now called Women's Legal Service, was established to provide women with free legal advice and information and agitate law reform.

One win for women prisoners and their children that occurred around this time was that children began to be allowed to stay with their mothers in prison beyond twelve months of age. The fight to achieve this had begun in earnest in 1979 when a woman called Helen Barnacle, who had been sentenced to 15 years in prison, discovered that she was pregnant days before her sentence began. Faced with the prospect of being separated from her baby when she turned twelve months old, Helen, together with supporters such as Dame Phyllis Frost who had lobbied on this issue for many years, fought intensely to have the Prison Regulations regarding children changed. By October 1980 they had achieved success in having the ruling changed to allow children to stay up until the age of five, but it was still a long battle to have the ruling actually implemented, and it wasn't until early 1982 before Helen's daughter Ali, who had been taken from her the previous year upon turning one, was returned to her mother, becoming the first child in Victoria allowed to remain with her mother in prison beyond 12 months of age<sup>12</sup>.

In February 1982, two months after the submission to the Equal Opportunity Commission, one of the FRG's fears was realised when there was a fire at Fairlea Women's Prison in which three women on remand died. As FRG had written many letters expressing fears about the likelihood and ramifications of a fire occurring, Chris Burnup and Pauline Toner went to the media, taking no pleasure in saying that they had predicted just such a tragedy, an action which prompted one government minister to label Chris as "naïve, dangerous and irresponsible".

The fire brought dramatic change for the worse to the lives of most of Victoria's women prisoners, as two-thirds of the women from Fairlea were transferred to B Annexe and Jika Jika at Pentridge Prison while Fairlea underwent reconstruction. Jika Jika Prison, which opened in July 1979, had been created by the Liberal Government as a men's maximum security wing for terrorists and high security prisoners and was designed as an electronically operated sensory deprivation unit. Prisoners in Jika Jika were constantly on camera even when toileting and showering, and women had to shower behind a clear glass screen with up to five, usually male, prison officers watching.<sup>13</sup>

In April 1982, two months after the fire at Fairlea, a State Election saw a Labor Government come into power for the first time since 1955. The new Government, with John Cain Snr as Premier and Pauline Toner now Minister for Community and Welfare Services, brought about a number of improvements to the conditions at Fairlea, but nonetheless there was still much to be done.

The mid 1980s saw the introduction of drug and alcohol programs into Fairlea, but at the same time prescribed drugs such as sedatives and tranquillizers were widely used as a management tool in prisons, with no thought given to prisoners being dependant upon them by the time of their release. Prisoners told the education workers at Fairlea that prison officers would bring around a tray of drugs of an evening and simply allow the women to help themselves to whatever they wanted.

In response to the rising numbers of women leaving prison with addictions a group of women set up the Women's Council on Homelessness and Addiction (WCHA) in 1984. WCHA had two major concerns: the huge difficulties facing women leaving prison, in particular those with children, in finding housing that was both stable and affordable, and the need for live-in detox programmes for women with children. At the time VACRO and church-based organisations were the only agencies providing support services to



prisoners upon their release, and neither took into account the differing needs of women.



**Above: Tree memorial outside Fairlea Prison gates.**

Source: Catherine Gow's archives.

# WOMEN AGAINST PRISON IS BORN

During this period, although conditions for the women who were at Fairlea Women's Prison improved in many respects, the majority of the state's women prisoners were still in either B Annexe or Jika Jika both in Pentridge Prison as the Fairlea reconstruction was not yet complete. The situation in B Annexe was so appalling that in December 1983 one woman, Phyllis Loomes had hanged herself there, followed by a second, Cheryl Veltmeyer in July 1985. By the time women were moved from B Annexe in 1989, though there were only 40 women in the Annexe at any one time, 4 women had died there. Around the time of Cheryl's death Amanda George came into contact with Linda Hancock of the FRG and proposed a meeting of concerned groups. By this time the FRG were frustrated from all their years of effort that had effected relatively small improvements for women prisoners, and seized upon the suggestion of getting together with other women who could continue their fight. As a result a meeting was organised and attended by members of the FRG, the WLRG and the WCHA, a meeting which of necessity was shrouded in secrecy as many of the attendees were in employment that prevented them speaking out against government policy.

This meeting saw the dissolution of the FRG but was to be the inaugural meeting of another group called Women Against Prison (WAP). WAP formed with the intention of educating the public on issues surrounding women and imprisonment and drawing public attention to what was happening to women in Fairlea and Pentridge Prisons. It had two main objectives: the overall aim of working towards ending the imprisonment of women, and secondly, improving services and conditions for women prisoners both pre and post-release. WAP was made up of women from diverse backgrounds and experiences, most of whom had had contact with the prison system either through direct experience of it as prisoners or as community workers working with the former, and included representatives from services such as community legal centres, women's health, the Prostitutes Collective and church organisations. These women were increasingly concerned about the growing numbers of women caught in a vicious cycle of addiction, poverty, homelessness and imprisonment and saw a desperate need for services that specifically addressed these women's and their children's needs.

From the outset it was apparent to the members of WAP that being able to move into stable medium to long term housing was a basic

necessity for women leaving prison in order for them to have any hope of getting the rest of their lives in order, and indeed if they had children in care was a prerequisite for regaining custody of their children. WAP members who had been in prison expressed the need for a supported accommodation service that catered specifically to women. At this time 'Four Flats' run by the Epistle Centre was the only government funded service providing supported accommodation to ex-prisoners, and as with VACRO its focus was on men. So WAP made the decision to apply for funding to set up such a service for women, and as a bonus could also be a base from which WAP could continue its activist work – in the words of Amanda George, 'a way of marrying funding, activism and service delivery.'

The form the accommodation should take was to be based on what women had told them, for example many women had expressed the desire to avoid shared housing after the forced sharing of living space and facilities that is a part of prison life. It was also decided that the service would be run by a collective, described in their current staff induction package as 'a non-hierarchical model of management, in which all Members collectively assume responsibility for organisational management and accountability'. The day-to-day work would be done by a paid project worker, while the Collective consisting of community representatives together with the paid worker would be responsible for the overall management and direction of the organisation.

## **FLAT OUT IS BORN**

In late 1986/early 1987 a modest eight page submission for funding was put together by Jude McCulloch and other members of the WAP collective and lodged with the Department of Human Services. Several months passed, by which time the submission was presumed to have been unsuccessful and was all but forgotten, until out of the blue in October 1987, WAP was contacted and called in to a meeting to discuss their submission. By this time some of the original group had left to do other things, but Jude and the remaining members attended the meeting, and upon being told then and there that their submission had been successful, managed to hide their surprise and act as though they had expected just such an outcome.

Nearly twelve months of planning occurred after the submission was funded, during which the collective had much work to do in planning and writing policies for what was essentially a brand new service. They wrote policies to cover every scenario they could think of,



(c) that, apart from the loss of liberty, a prisoner shall have all the basic human rights including all civil, political and legal rights, the right to adequate food, adequate shelter, clothing, privacy, adequate health care, meaningful work, leisure time, freedom of speech, access to information, freedom of religion, access to education. This shall also include the application of the laws of the land to prison situations and prisoners having the right to enforce these laws, e.g. health regulations, building regulations, industrial awards, etc.

(d) that prisoners shall be entitled to natural justice in all dealings within the prison system.

4. To work on any other matters which may arise out of or be related to the issue of imprisonment.
5. To work in this area with other interested groups.

PROPOSED PROJECT

- To purchase a number of dwellings to be available as medium term accommodation (up to nine months) for women or women and their dependent children upon release from jail.
- To provide project worker for 12 months to assist in the establishment and management of accommodation for female ex-prisoners.
- Liaise with relevant organizations.
- Provide an information and referral service to residents, particularly with regard to housing, social security, drug and alcohol agencies and support groups, material aid, employment, child care, women's refuges, Community Services Victoria (especially with regard to wardship of children) and health services.
- Provide individual and/or group counselling when required.
- Assist in the establishment of self help groups when appropriate.
- Encourage women to develop independent living skills.
- Secure ongoing funding for project worker position.

It is envisaged that the project worker would be an ex-addict or prisoner or have other life experience likely to be similar to that of residents. (1)

We believe that self contained flats would be the most appropriate form of accommodation, as privacy would be maximized. Half-way houses run on a communal basis, of necessity, have many rules.

including situations they thought unlikely to ever happen. One early policy was to exclude former prison officers from being considered for positions as support workers due to fears that the women would be less likely to trust the service if any of its workers had once been prison officers. The collective wanted to clearly separate the new service from the prison system.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1988 Flat Out Inc was registered. Founding collective member Amanda George explains why the name Flat Out was decided upon:

“Flat Out’s name came about for a number of reasons.... At first we envisaged that we would get flats for women when they got out. We also thought women might be working flat out on their backs 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 STEEP LEARNING CURVE**

Flat Out’s first office was a room in the same building as the Women’s Legal Resource Group, on the second floor at 31 Victoria Street, Fitzroy. By the time they opened there were approximately 120 women in Victorian prisons. Whilst the initial submission for Flat Out had requested one full-time worker the funding received must have allowed for two full-time workers, as the service began with three part-time workers officially working three days each, though they often worked many more hours unpaid.

On the workers’ first day there were no desks or other furniture, just an empty office, and the day was spent planning how to furnish the place and in getting to know each other. In the words of one of the first workers it was both “exciting and daunting”. A couple of months were spent in planning and organising the new service, with a major part of this making contact and building relationships with other services involved in related areas such as drug rehabilitation, women’s refuges and prisons. Trish Luker on the Collective was employed at Sybylla feminist Press, so Sybylla’s designer Sue Miller was commissioned to design Flat Out’s logo, the 2 storey rickety house, which logo is still used 20 years on.

Despite now having paid workers the rest of the Collective were kept busy doing most of the correspondence until the workers had gained confidence in their writing skills. When they finally opened for

business the workers were at first still mainly occupied with administrative tasks, but plans would change with a phone call, and as word of their existence spread more and more of their time was taken up with direct support work. They very soon found that they didn't have the resources to come close to meeting the demand, the level of which exceeded all expectations and forced them to turn away far more women than they could accommodate.

Initially Flat Out rented flats to accommodate women leaving prison, but complaints from neighbours about noise and comings and goings at all hours attracted the attention of the police in some instances, and soon it was realised that the privacy limitations inherent in flats made them less than desirable for the women's needs. As a result Flat Out began to rent houses instead: this gave the women more privacy and space, but also meant that the organisation now needed to employ casual gardeners and maintenance people.

There were difficulties in finding suitable private rental properties as the funding was limited, forcing Flat Out into the cheaper end of the market where there were fewer properties available, a situation which was often greatly exacerbated during periods of general low rental availability. Flat Out also found estate agents at that time were often wary of renting to welfare organisations. At first Flat Out didn't have a car, and as not all the workers had their own cars, house-hunting sometimes had to be done by public transport and on foot. Other problems encountered in these early days included that often at the end of the lease Flat Out incurred extra expenses to get properties back in to shape in order to both get their bond back and to maintain good relations with the estate agents. Women sometimes left behind furniture, clothing and rubbish that the workers would then have to deal with, and it happened on occasion that men moved in with the women, then the women moved out and the men remained, necessitating further policy writing on what to do when these situations arose. On a more personal level, there was always the difficulty of finding a balance between the women being isolated on the one hand versus that of them connecting with old lifestyles and ending up back in prison.

An initial policy had been to employ women who had been in prison as support workers, and indeed such workers had a great rapport with their clients and gave the workers with no direct prison experience invaluable insight into many of the situations they encountered in their work. However before too long it was found that the nature of the work often put such people in situations they were not equipped or supported sufficiently to deal with. As happened

with the women they were working with there were problems with connecting with old lifestyles, for instance putting workers with drug histories in situations with people still using heroin proved too much temptation to a couple of workers in the early years. One ex-prisoner found it very difficult when Flat Out was unable to help with accommodation and would promise houses they were then unable to supply. These problems led to a policy rethink, after which women with such histories were more likely to be employed in research, advisory or other roles rather than in direct support positions.

In keeping with WAP's dual aim of not only providing a service but of working to improve conditions for women in prison, in these early years Flat Out workers' workload included designated time allocation for community development and campaigning on issues affecting women in prison, and many of the workers volunteered extra out-of-hours time to campaign work.

Initially there were two separate telephone lines, one for Flat Out and one for WAP, with the latter used largely for lobbying and campaigning work. While the workers were always aware of the two separate roles, there were moments of confusion in remembering which telephone was which. Flat Out workers didn't take on front line activist work in their official role, keeping more to lobbying and advocacy.

*Some memories from the early years...*

*One worker who after several negative pregnancy tests was at a loss as to why she was feeling so out of sorts, eating mountains of chocolate and tired, until a young ex-Flat Out client who was staying in a women's refuge the worker was also working for insisted that she go and get tested again, whereupon she found out that she was six months pregnant. After the birth, in keeping with its feminist ideals the Flat Out Collective allowed the worker to bring her baby to work.*

*Another support worker who had come with a history of drug addiction and resultant prison experience, is remembered amongst other things for responding to any cause for celebration or commiseration by saying 'Let's go out and eat'.*

# CAMPAIGNING STEPS UP - Wring Out Fairlea

The late 1980s saw a surge in deaths in custody in Victoria. In 1987 five male prisoners died in a fire at Jika Jika while protesting against the inhumane conditions there, following which Jika was officially closed down by Jim Kennan, Minister for Corrections in the Labor Government, who described it as an “electronic zoo”.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, six weeks later after a name change from Jika to K Division and little more than the removal of the electronic doors, women from Fairlea were sent there for drug treatment. The following year the nearby B Annexe Pentridge was finally closed after the deaths of four women who had hanged themselves there over the preceding years.

Fairlea Prison had its own problems, as that same year eight women went on a hunger strike to protest against conditions and in particular the enormous number of strip-searches being carried out on the women. Although strip-search guidelines state that a female officer should be present if available, there has never been a requirement for such, making the procedure both more humiliating and traumatic for the women, particularly so considering the very high numbers of women prisoners that are survivors of prior sexual abuse, as well as arguably more open to abuse by prison officers.

Lawyers on the Flat Out Collective including Shelley Burchfield, Amanda George and Jude McCulloch, who at the time were working in various Community Legal Centres, kept themselves busy writing numerous papers on this and other women and imprisonment issues, and Flat Out/WAP organised several conferences. Flat Out quickly developed a high level of credibility both within the prison and community sectors and with government agencies and its opinion began to be sought out by such bodies.

In June 1988 Amanda George and Jude McCulloch co-authored ‘Women and Imprisonment in Victoria: A Report’, published by Fitzroy Legal Service. The Report argued among other things that community-based correction was more appropriate than prison for women offenders and that health services at Fairlea were totally inadequate. It also made a number of recommendations on issues such as social security offences, prison discipline proceedings, children of prisoners, housing and needle exchange. The Report’s now iconic front cover design, depicting hands joined going through prison bars was also done by Sue Miller from Sybylla Press. The



Report which was illustrated by Judy Horacek's cartoons also included statistics to back up its findings, such as that:

- that the women's prison population had increased 450% in the previous 10 years compared to a rise of 12% for men;
- 85% of women prisoners in Victoria had drug addictions and their crimes were a result of the addiction;
- that the suicide rate of women in prison was almost five times higher than for women in the general community while men's suicide rate in prison was three times lower than in the community.<sup>15</sup>

To raise community awareness and understanding of these and the other wide range of concerns raised in the Report, WLRG, WAP and other organisations formed an umbrella group called the Coalition Against Women's Imprisonment (CAWI). The Coalition decided on an ambitious plan to try and get the Fairlea Women's Prison completely surrounded by a circle of people, called Wring Out Fairlea. This action was inspired by the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camps in the UK which surrounded US bases there. The CAWI needed to get 1000 people there to completely surround the prison. The CAWI hired the sports field alongside Fairlea Prison (under the name 'The Northcote Women's Hockey Club' to give some protection against being forced to leave) on the date of the planned action. A stage was organised and bands booked for entertainment that could be heard over the wall. Over the years of Wring Outs, women's bands such as *Nice Girls Don't Spit*, *Scream Pretty Peggy*, *Rapunzel Gets Down* and *She Go-Go* played as well as *Ruby Hunter*, *Archie Roach*, *Tiddas* and *Helen Barnacle*.

In the 1980s women in prison could ring any phone number on the outside (now you can only have 10 numbers authorised for you to ring and none can be media). Community Radio 3CR, Melbourne's community based radio station had had a long running interest in prison issues and had a prison programme called *Doing Time*. Women from CAWI were also involved in 3CR so over the weeks leading up to the Wring Out, women at 3CR recorded a number of phone interviews with women inside prison about their issues of concern for later broadcast and to produce radio announcements encouraging people to attend the Wring and show support for women inside.

To build interest in the issues in the Report over a couple of weeks staggered media releases were sent out by around fifteen different women's organisations in CAWI, each focussing on a different aspect

relating to the imprisonment of women. Then at a televised Media Conference around the issues in the Report, an announcement was also made about the action the following weekend to surround Fairlea Prison. The title 'Wring Out Fairlea' was chosen to symbolise a women's action - wringing of washing, wringing of hands, and to creating a ring encircling the prison. During the first Wring Out 3CR broadcast the bands and the day live from action and women inside Fairlea were able to ring the station and do live talk back and say what they were hearing from inside the wall.

The 1988 Wring Out was to be the first of four such actions where eventually up to around two and a half thousand people would hold hands and attempt to encircle the prison, some calling out messages of support to the women on the other side. Entertainment and bands was also organised for each Wring Out, and one regular group of performers was Somebody's Daughter Theatre. This theatre group had begun with women inside Fairlea in 1980 with the assistance and direction of a then student at the Victorian College of the Arts named Maud Clark, and an outside troupe consisting mainly of ex-prisoners started up in 1991. Members of the company write and perform plays and songs based upon their life experiences, and have put on performances in a variety of forums including theatres and national and international conferences.

Throughout these years WAP and CAWI continually lobbied for improvements to the procedure of strip-searching women, and in 1989 women in Pentridge's G Division who had been sent there from Fairlea as punishment protested against the 'squat and cough' part of the strip-search routine. Shortly after this Karen Watson who was being held in G Division took her own life, following which WAP held a protest outside the prison. The following year this part of the strip-search was finally stopped after a coroner's report into Karen's death said that it could be perceived by the women as degrading.<sup>16</sup>

In March 1990 CAWI held the second 'Wring Out Fairlea', with the main concerns being those of women being imprisoned for welfare fraud, inadequate healthcare for women prisoners including a lack of women doctors, and issues regarding children such as separation from children and the lack of childcare for women on community based orders leading to them defaulting and ending up in jail. Other concerns raised included the need for support upon release from prison such as housing, income, training and employment and assistance in reuniting with their children.



*Above: Amanda George speaking to the media at a protest organised by WAP outside G Division Pentridge after Karen Watson's death. Source: Flat Out's archives.*

Barwon Maximum Security Prison in Lara had opened the previous year as a general men's prison and for women classified as high risk, In April 1991 women prisoners there brought a complaint to the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, Moira Rayner. The complaint argued that women prisoners held in Barwon Prison were discriminated against both directly and indirectly when compared to male prisoners. Examples of the former were women's access to education, training and employment as well as facilities and services, and the fact that women prisoners were being targeted for 'intrusive and excessive strip-searching'. Indirect discrimination occurred as a result of standard rules being applied to all, something which had a greater effect on women due to their lower numbers. As a result Moira Rayner initiated an Inquiry, and shortly after the Labor Government with Joan Kirner now as Premier established a women's policy committee within the Office of Corrections, which included some community members and a former women prisoner. They developed a report which published in June 1991 called 'Women Prisoners and Offenders: The Agenda for Change'. The report recommended improvements regarding the treatment of women offenders, and established a committee to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. As a result, during the following twelve months improved health and education and training programs were established for women in Victorian prisons.

However in February 1992, after fourteen months of the Equal Opportunity Inquiring into Barwon Prison the Equal Opportunity Commission released its report which found that discrimination in many forms did indeed still exist for women in Barwon Prison, and began what would be many months of negotiations with the Office of Corrections in an attempt to address the problems. But before any resolution could be reached a new State Government was brought into power, something with drastic ramifications not only for women prisoners but for many Victorians.

## **VICTORIA GETS JEFFED**

The October 1992 state elections resulted in the Liberal-National Coalition Government being elected with Jeff Kennett as Premier. Within days of the election the Government commenced its privatisation agenda which ultimately resulted in the selling-off of the majority of the state's publicly-owned assets. Victoria's prison system would not be exempt from this wholesale sell-off, despite lessons that

should have been learnt from Australian history as well as from overseas experience, where private prisons were already in place.

Prisons had been run as privately owned profit making enterprises in England until the nineteenth century when the state took control due to intolerable rates of cruelty and abuse and deaths from starvation.<sup>17</sup> In Australia, the appalling conditions suffered by convict transportees who arrived in the Second Fleet, which resulted in more than half dying either en route or soon after arrival, is another historical example of private contractors putting profits before people's lives. At least one of the ships' captain's actions is alleged to have included reducing the prisoners' rations to starvation levels so that the resulting surplus could be sold at the inflated prices that were being paid in the fledgling colony which as yet was unable to fully feed itself. While this allegation couldn't be proved to have occurred, circumstantial evidence including the prisoners' dreadful condition upon arrival, the captain's past record of having starved convicts on another ship, allegations that they had overstated their tonnage by half, and the fact that they did have an abundance of food to sell upon arrival indicates that more than likely it did occur.<sup>18</sup> While most historians place the blame for the starvation and other horrors of the Second Fleet on gross deficiencies in the writing of the transportation contract, the simple fact that it was (and is) necessary to write contracts in such a way so as to prevent such horrific abuse in the name of profit says much about the dangers inherent in a private prison system, and indeed in any situation where the care of society's most vulnerable is undertaken for profit.

The Government decided to apply its privatisation ideology to the prison system despite problems being apparent in existing private prisons both overseas and in Queensland. In 1990 the Queensland Coalition government had opened the first private prison in Australia, following a trend that began in the 1970s in the southern parts of the United States. These prisons tend to have high levels of prisoner unrest, as borne out by an analysis of a 1997 United States national survey of state prison privatisation which concluded that privately run prisons had much higher rates of assaults and other disturbances than state run prisons.<sup>19</sup> In order to reduce staff and thus overheads, private prisons tend to rely on high levels of electronic surveillance which was one of the aspects of the infamous Jika Jika Prison inside Pentridge that drew sharp criticism for its dehumanising effect.<sup>20</sup> Flat Out, WAP and others were primarily concerned about the ethics and end results of private companies profiting from punishment, including the influence large companies

could have on government policy given that higher prisoner numbers would lead to higher profits, and commercial confidentiality being used as a shield against freedom of information law to hide information about prison operations and incidents. The latter of these concerns at least would prove to be entirely well-founded.<sup>21</sup>

The Kennett Government brought with it a tough law and order agenda including increased police powers and ending the early release of prisoners for good behaviour. These policies resulted in longer sentences, greater criminalisation and massive increases in the numbers of people in prison in Victoria. It has been argued that this law and order agenda was society-driven, that as people come to feel more insecure due to perceived changes such as the decline of family values and a loss of social cohesion that their attitude towards offenders becomes more punitive<sup>22</sup>, but this argument is greatly undermined by the fact that it is indisputable that media influence plays a large part in shaping many community beliefs and attitudes.

An added reason for the increase in the prison population, and particularly in the number of women in prison, was the allowing of gaming machines into Victoria. These machines had been first introduced in 1992 by the previous Labor Government but the new Liberal Government vastly increased their numbers, including doubling the size of the new Crown Casino. With this growth came a substantial rise in the number of women, and in particular Vietnamese-Australians, imprisoned in Victoria for gambling-related fraud. Although insufficient reliable and objective data exists to prove that the proliferation of gaming machines has caused such increases, small scale studies, anecdotal evidence and the experience of those working with women in prison support this view.<sup>23</sup> Figures do show that since the advent of gaming machines the proportion of women as problem gamblers has increased from 14% to 40%.<sup>24</sup>

Another reason for a general rise in the numbers of people imprisoned in Victoria was the Government's closure and subsequent sell-off of the remaining institutions for people living with intellectual or psychiatric disabilities, a process that had begun in Victoria in the 1980s. People with such disabilities are more likely to breach non-custodial orders and thus incur a custodial one, and with Magistrates no longer having any alternatives to prison, the end result was massive increases in the numbers of such people in prison. This was reminiscent of the early days of Victoria's colonisation when such people were incarcerated alongside criminal offenders in the State's prisons.



The Kennett Government also drastically cut the funding to many community organisations, forcing many if not most to either close down or merge with other organisations. Flat Out, which by this time had moved to 409 Johnston Street Abbotsford, was one of very few such organisations to survive this period without a forced or coerced merger or de-funding. The Flat Out collective decided that any merger would destroy its unique characteristics and eventually mainstream it. It was better to die with dignity than succumb to the voiceless mediocrity of mainstream.

Earlier in 1992 prior to the state election Flat Out had joined with a number of other organisations to form the Women and Imprisonment Group (WIG). In May that year WIG organised a conference entitled 'Changing A-genda: Women, Imprisonment and Law and Order'. The papers from this including some by women inside, were later published by Fitzroy Legal Service in a book entitled *Women and Imprisonment*. In October at an Australian Institute of Criminology conference Amanda George delivered a paper entitled 'Strip-searches: sexual assault by the state'.<sup>25</sup> 1992 also saw the beginning of Sisters Inside, a women in prison advocacy organisation that was established in Queensland by ex-prisoner now lawyer Debbie Kilroy. One major concern shared by these two groups was the high numbers of women in prison who have histories of sexual abuse, making the humiliation and degradation of being subject to strip-searches an even more terrible ordeal for most women prisoners. In a related issue, it wasn't until 1992 that women in Victoria's prisons finally were given the option of being able to see a woman doctor, although quite often one wasn't available at the time. During the time when the prison doctors were all men, women prisoners made numerous allegations about receiving internal examinations for complaints such as headache and earache.<sup>26</sup>

Although Indigenous organisations, Flat Out, WIG, Community Legal Centres and many others had been active on the subject of deaths in prison for several years, the issue came to the fore around this time. This was due to a steep rise in the numbers of women, particularly young women, dying either in prison or shortly after being released that occurred in the early 1990s. Other organisations and individuals including the St Kilda Mission and Bev Fabb, the Uniting Church Chaplain at Fairlea had also publicly expressed their concerns. In March 1993 Flat Out and other concerned individuals organised a memorial for women who had died in or soon after leaving prison

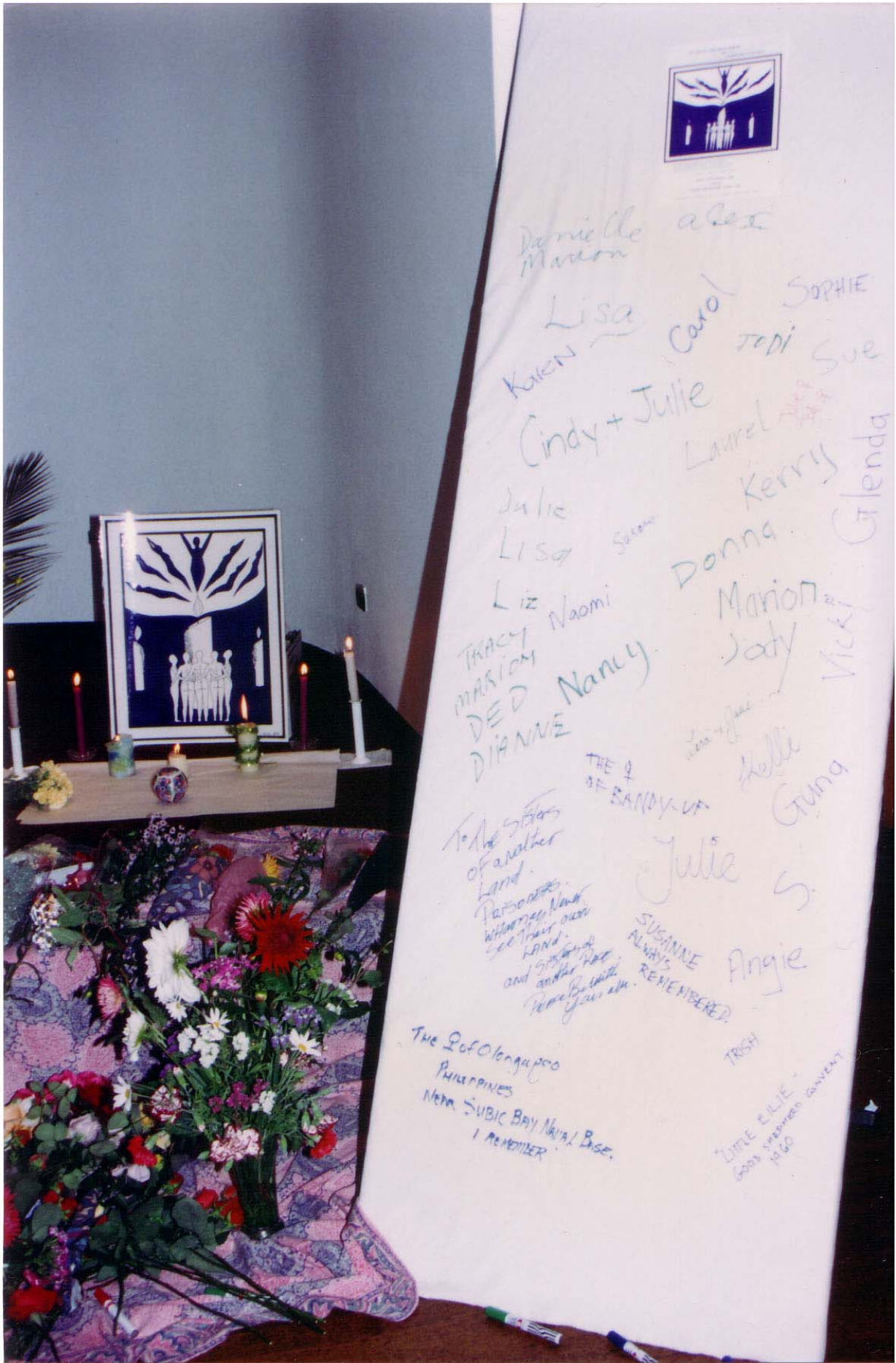


Photo taken at the Memorial held at Melbourne Town Hall.  
 Source: Flat Out Archives



which was held at Melbourne Town Hall. At the memorial Somebody's Daughter Theatre performed a play which told the stories of some of the women who had died, at the end of which they sent out a plea for someone to do something about the crisis. Sandy Cook and Sue Davies, Senior Lecturers for the School of Law and Legal Studies at La Trobe University, responded to their call and offered to research the issue of prison-related deaths, and so began a project that was to last many years. The project, entitled *'Sentenced to Death? Women, Imprisonment and Post-Release Mortality in Victoria'*, encountered many difficulties along the way, including attempts by the Office of Corrections to thwart it.<sup>27</sup> The Victorian Coroner's Office then took notice and began its own research into the deaths, but its motives in doing so were seen as an attempt at diluting the impact both of the academic and social research that was already in progress such as Cook and Davies' project and the increasing media attention such deaths were receiving.<sup>28</sup>

With the election of the Kennett Liberal Government in late 1992, rumours had circulated that the Government planned to close Fairlea Women's Prison and move all women prisoners (and their children) to Jika Jika (K Division) pending the construction of a new privately operated women's prison. This prompted women in Fairlea to bring another Equal Opportunity action, including requesting an interim order preventing the prison's closure for 28 days to allow for further investigation of the issues involved. The rumours also spurred Flat Out to action, and the Collective joined with a number of other groups to form the Save Fairlea Women's Prison Coalition (SFWPC). The irony of going from working towards the closure of prisons to fighting to save one was not lost on the activists, but the Government's plans for women prisoners gave them little choice. The major objectives of the SFWPC were not only to try to save Fairlea to prevent the transfer of the women to Jika Jika where conditions were far worse but also to fight against the overall Government agenda of prison privatisation. Other aims included raising public awareness of the wide range of issues that are raised when women are imprisoned as well as of the reality of what actually goes on inside prisons. One action towards achieving these ends was that a third Wring Out Fairlea, this time organised by the SFWPC, was held on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1993.

The Equal Opportunity Commissioner Moira Rayner had spent around twelve months in fruitless negotiations with the Office of Corrections over the now long-running Equal Opportunity case at Barwon Prison when the rumours of the Government's plans for women prisoners finally made it into the mainstream media. The

Commissioner realised that such a move would sabotage the Equal Opportunity's Commission's Inquiry and many years of work, so on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July she referred the Inquiry to the Equal Opportunity Board, something for which lawyers from the Flat Out Collective did the legal work through their community legal centres, assisted by pro bono lawyers. At the same time the Commissioner sought an injunction to prevent women being moved from Barwon on the grounds that such a move would interfere with the Commission's Inquiry. However the Government's reaction to the Commissioner's efforts was to move 20 women from Barwon to Fairlea on the same day that the application was lodged, and more significantly, to begin moves to abolish the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, causing Moira Rayner to lose her job.

Amongst a range of strategies aimed at fighting the Government's plans to move all women prisoners to Jika Jika, the SFWPC had decided to set up a 24-hour-a-day vigil outside the gates of Fairlea, both as a protest and to enable a close eye to be kept on the prison to watch for any prisoner transfers that may be done in secret. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July the Fairlea Vigil was launched. Although the Vigil began with the thought that it would likely last two weeks or so, a diary was kept by the vigilantes because in the words of Catherine Gow, a key organiser, "We never document our own struggles". This diary, which by the end consisted of three volumes, has indeed proved to be a valuable record, both of the Fairlea struggle and of wider events occurring in Victoria during the last months of 1993. The diary also managed to get into the prison by various means so that there was a communication channel between the vigil and women inside Fairlea and women inside were able to contribute to it.

It was only via *The Sunday Age* on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December that the Government finally confirmed the rumours that Fairlea and Pentridge would be replaced by three privately owned and operated prisons and importantly that women and children would not be sent to Jika but would remain at Fairlea until the new private women's prison was built. This change was a huge back down by the government and was a result of SFWPC's vigil and tireless campaigning which garnered enormous ongoing media interest. The campaign had triggered widespread opposition by an eclectic assortment of groups including community, women, union, church and students opposing the move to Jika and significantly it included women members of the Coalition Government itself.

The following day the SFWPC held a press conference at the Vigil outside Fairlea to announce the first community victory against the Kennett Liberal Government with the Government's announcement that women and their children would not be moved to Jika Jika. Their victory was somewhat overshadowed by another event that day, as on the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> of December the State Government ordered police in full riot gear to charge a peaceful picket at Richmond Secondary College (RSC), assaulting many people with their batons in the process.<sup>29</sup> There were strong links between the RSC and the SFWPC as many people were opposed to both closures, and students at RSC had made a fire drum with the words 'Save Fairlea Prison' cut out of it for the vigilantes, who had until then attempted to keep warm huddled around a small kerosene heater. Following the win the Fairlea Vigil began to wind down, with the final day being Christmas Day 1993 which was celebrated with a Christmas-cum-Victory lunch, with Boxing Day spent packing and cleaning up the site after a total of five months' occupation.



*Top: The Fairlea Vigil site*

*Below: The fire drum made by RSC students for the Fairlea vigilantes. Source: Catherine Gow's archives*



**Some of the many banners made by Women Against Prison and related groups**

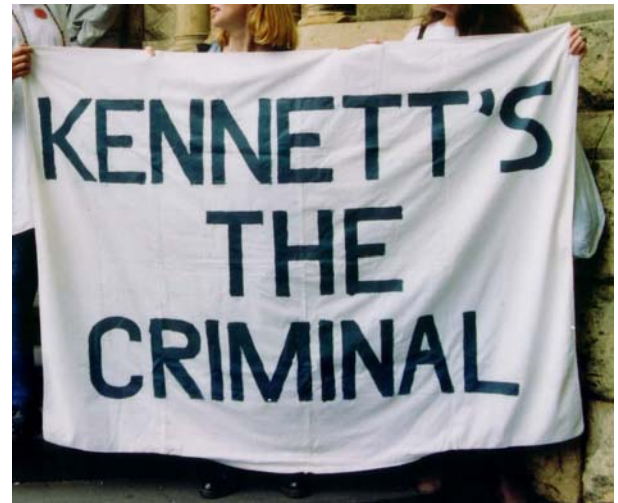
1.



*Catherine Gow and Amanda George*



2.



3.



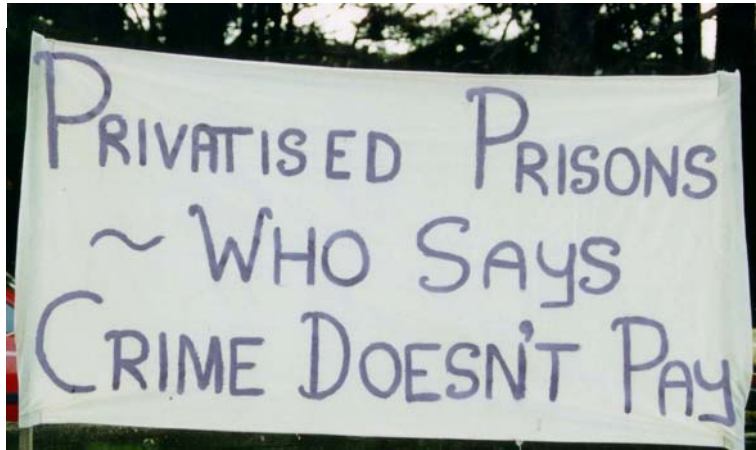
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5.



6.



7.



8.



9.

*Flat Out friend Doris and workers Karen, Dallas and Katie holding the banner that is displayed on their staff-room wall.*

Source: Photos 1 & 9 – Flat Out archives

Photos 2 - 8 – Catherine Gow's archives



Tuesday 19/10

8:00am - Another vigil in wind blowing. tarp has torn & into the van. The flag is flying breeze - a symbol of freedom

We are winning. Leaks from ranks indicate that some male now joined the ranks of those & closure. So the gov. is crumbling struggle!

12 midday 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov-

I would like to add to my defence that although there is a tendency for people to laugh this stems from the fact that they (the laughers) do not understand the insight into capitalism & patriarchy shown by the words "Money Money Money must be funny in a rich man's world" is astounding.

28/10

It's pouring with rain and there were gale force winds a few hours ago. The tarp is still holding up however and its bloody fantastic to have this caravan to shelter in. I'm still in shock over Moira Rayner's sacking - it seems the skies have opened up in outrage too. Even more reason now to make to vigil vocal tomorrow night & on Tuesday. Kenn government seem determined to rid this state of any systems of justice, particularly

Nb - Research worker in Fairbairn came out & told us women were now being stripsearched not only after friend/family visits - but after professional visits (such as hers) The "expletives deleted"

Janet.

See next Tues

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Nov.

I just berated Cath for not participating in the now long running Doggy Song comp led fearlessly by the beautiful (if a little twisted) Amanda. Her defence is that she actually specialises in one group of the 70's & she will not see their great name dragged through the mud of Fairbairn. She says they are not doggy (contrary to popular opinion) they are actually the philosophers of the 70's and sadly misunderstood. Hmmm...

Saturday 4 December 7.30am.  
Who would have believed that we would still be here in December. I can remember sitting here on Day one & being a little naive I thought we would be here about 2 weeks but no, 135 days later & I still feel stronger & even more committed



Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> 9.30am

I don't believe what I'm reading! Does this mean we've won?? It must mean we've won!!  
\* Fairlea & the Coburg jails will be closed, but not until replacements have been built "!!!!"  
I can't believe my eyes!! Can we trust them??  
And I've been sitting here with my paper rolled up because it's so wet - had this news in my hand for hours & I've only just read it!!! Quick! Someone arrive! Someone tell me I'm not imagining things!?! I feel like jumping up & d

Sunday Age p.1

22/11

At about 7am, the prison officers appeared to have <sup>had</sup> a meeting in the car park. Some were in plain clothes. They voted ~~on~~ had a ~~vote~~ vote, & when the meeting finished some went into the prison while some left the area.

MONDAY morning 13/12 see p.6 for transcript  
Kennett, Wade and Co. must have further offended the Age. Good report.  
Arrests occurring at (R.S.C.) Police of course broke their agreement not to allow scabs in without informing the RSC Committee. Police attacked one of the pickets. Split heads

lot of blood. sex's attacked pickets.  
Peaceful resistance - linked arms, sitting. Everyone disciplined. Police committed violence in front of media. Many p. nearly run over by heavy vehicles.  
Can the mindless masses still approve of this criminal government still??

Thursday 5:35 p.m.

Well, everything quiet here but some worrying developments at Jilca. I've had a lovely afternoon here with Liz. I'm taking some time away from the vigil to recharge my batteries and try and gain some perspective on things. After those months here I'm pretty exhausted but still very hopeful and determined that we will win. But there are so many things that this government is doing (sickenening, unthinking, vengeful policies) that make me sad to the bone - so I need to take some time off. Keep on fighting and talking about

15/12/93  
Here we sit at gym while it's all happening inside. The officers + other staff are mostly inside (including lots of off duty staff who have come in especially) to hear what has been decided about the future of Fairlea. The tension mounts!  
The meeting is over & the news is - Fairlea stays open at least until June '94, tenders being called for a new women's prison to be built in Melbourne for 125-150 women - a private prison! - to be opened by end of 1996. So good news - Fairlea stays open, but we need to fight the private prison. The struggle continues.  
Sue

Sunday 28/11/93

A woman who works inside Fairlea said that they heard an 'unofficial' report that Fairlea is not closing that there has been an increased funding of \$5 million - who knows!

Friday 24 Dec 7.30am  
Like those before me, I still haven't come to terms with the fact that WE HAVE WON! We have definitely won, we all knew that without the vigil the g would have been moved to Jilca. Lets not underestimate our collective power.



In January 1994 the SFWPC held a public meeting to discuss where to go from there since Fairlea had been given a temporary reprieve. Although the fight to stop women and their children being moved to Jika Jika had been won, there was the greater battle against the Government's announcement in the longer term to close Fairlea and replace it with a privately-owned and operated prison. The meeting resolved to form a new campaign group to fight the privatisation of prisons - the People's Justice Alliance (PJA), with a focus on women in prison but also on prison issues more broadly. In February and again in August the PJA ran public forums on the topic of prison privatisation.



Chardonnay from Swords

**No Private Prisons**  
**No Women in Men's Prisons**  
**Empty the Bottle**  
**and the Prisons**  
To support the People's Justice Alliance ph 416 4215

*Above: Wine label from one of PJA's many fund-raising campaigns.  
Source: Catherine Gow's archives*



# BATTLING THE PRIVATISATION AGENDA

On the 8<sup>th</sup> June 1994 the Government announced that the new privately owned and operated women's prison would be built in Deer Park, and called for tenders. Once built this would become the first private women's prison in Australia and the second such in the world, the first being in New Mexico, USA, and once it opened Victoria would for a time top the world in having 80% of its women prisoners incarcerated in privately owned and operated prisons. Flat Out, the PJA and others again expressed grave concern about the many issues involved with having profit centred corporations running the State's prisons. Many community groups who had been working on a voluntary basis with women prisoners also expressed concern about the proposed privatisation, as by continuing to work on a voluntary basis they would in effect be contributing to the profits of a privately owned company.

During 1995 the paperwork requirements for Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) increased, reducing the time Flat Out workers could spend during work hours on campaigning. However PJA kept up this work, and its activities that year included picketing Westpac Bank over its involvement in financing the development of the private prison. PJA also got together with the Coburg Brunswick and the Essendon Community Legal Centres to lodge a submission on private prisons to an Industry Commission inquiry. One of the main points of the submission was the conflict of interest between reducing crime and profiting from higher imprisonment rates and longer sentences, private prison operators being known to lobby governments for tougher law and order policies. There had been much community opposition in most places proposed as possible new prison sites, but the decision was made to build the women's prison at Deer Park, despite the site being poorly accessible by public transport. There were also issues about contamination levels at the Deer Park site due to its prior use as an Australian Defence Industries site for testing and storing explosives, but the Government refused to release documents to back its claims that the contamination was at low levels.

By 1996 Flat Out had moved to 20 Smith Street Collingwood. This year saw great change for the worse for women imprisoned in Victoria, as before its end Fairlea would be closed and the women

would be delivered into the hands of Corrections Corporation of Australia, a subsidiary of Corrections Corporation of America, one of the largest private prison companies in the world. 1996 also saw the PJA become involved in the formation of the Women and Imprisonment Group (WIG), whose demands included that access to children should be considered a right not a privilege, an end to the strip-searching of women prisoners and for prisons not to be privatised, and had the ultimate aim of working towards ending the imprisonment of women completely.

On Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> May just before the women were to be transferred to the new prison which had been named the Metropolitan Women's Correctional Centre (MWCC), WIG organised a fourth and final 'Wring Out Fairlea', again outside the prison to express community anger at the prison's closure and the transfer of women into private hands and to show solidarity with women inside. This Wring Out also focussed on the widespread use of psychiatric drugs on women prisoners and the high numbers of drug-related deaths amongst recently released women prisoners. Women inside the prison could hear the entertainment and speakers and threw sheets over the wall with messages inscribed. On a lighter side entertainment was provided by musicians including Tiddas and Ruby Hunter and a children's activities tent was thronging with children.

**FAIRLEA IS CLOSING!**

**Wring out Fairlea**  
ENCIRCLE FAIRLEA WOMEN'S PRISON BY LINKING ARMS



**Sun. 19 May '96**  
12-4pm. Action at 2pm.

Opposite Fairlea, Yarra Bend Rd (off Heidelberg Rd)  
Fairfield (Melways 44-H2)

**Ruby Hunter,  
Tiddas & more!**

Bring your friends, family  
and picnic lunch

**Kids Activities**  
Auslan interpreter  
Food for sale

The wring out will be on  
come rain or shine

**All welcome!**

Women to be SOLD to USA company

Left: Poster from the final Wring Out.  
Source: Flat Out archives.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1996 at the official opening day for the MWCC, PJA and WIG organised a protest that included handing out leaflets and throwing 'blood money' (fake money stained with red dye) at the attending politicians. Protestors also wore gags with \$ signs on them to symbolise the gagging of information about the prison contract and prison conditions under Freedom of Information because of the commercial confidentiality of the contracts. The protest gained widespread media coverage. The prison operators took their own photographs of the protest and when individuals who had taken part returned two days later to attend the public open day they were refused admission on the grounds that they had been photographed at the protest the week before.

A week after the official opening, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1996, the first women were moved into the MWCC. At Fairlea, women had been able to have six hour visits with their children on Saturdays but under the new prison contracts they were only entitled to one hour, with any extra hours being up to the discretion of the prison operators, who also had the power to deny visits as punishment. As visits require extra staff which would eat into the company's profits, getting more than one hour was unlikely, so as a result of this policy the day after their arrival the women signed a petition demanding that the six hour visits be reinstated, and during the following week reinforced their position by holding a sit-in. There were many other problems at the new prison. One of these included an inexplicably insufficient clothing provision for the women, and what clothing was supplied was nowhere near warm enough for the bare, windswept site at Deer Park. In response to the opening of MWCC, the PJA along with others including Christa Momot, Rhonda Gotcher and Catherine Gow established the Advocacy Program for Women in Prison to provide para legal information, advice and advocacy.

As part of the Liberal Government's 'tough on crime' policy, in 1997 magistrates lost the option of any alternatives to prison when sentencing people for breaching court orders. This affected women inordinately as they were far more likely to have to breach community work orders due to an inability to find child care to enable them to fulfil such orders. During this same year *The Age* newspaper revealed that Victoria Police had been spying on community organisations including community legal centres and activists, and as a result the Fitzroy Legal Service and many concerned individuals got together to launch the 'Abolish Political







*This and previous page Blood Money Protest at the opening of the privately run MWCC. Source: Amanda George. Photographer Sharon Jones*

Police' campaign. The revelations also prompted many people to apply to access for files their ASIO and Police through FOI whereupon their applications were initially denied, but the Fitzroy Legal Service ran test cases on appeal and eventually won.

In June 1997 the State Government established the Transitional Housing Management (THM) program to manage the tenancy of and co-ordinate access to transitional housing. This resulted in Flat Out and many other SAAP funded agencies having to hand over their properties to newly established THMs such as Women's Housing Limited (formerly Statewide Women's Community Housing Service), Homeground (*aka* Argyle St), Salvation Army East Care and St Vincent de Paul. Under this system some houses are reserved for Flat Out clients, and for extras they need to apply and compete with other agencies, with the Transitional Housing Service determining who gets what based on need and suitability.

Problems continued at the new women's prison at Deer Park. In July 1998 an Indigenous woman who had been raped several times in her life, the last time being six weeks prior to her incarceration at MWCC, underwent a forced strip-search that involved being held face down by 4 officers and having all of her clothing cut off with a knife. Two months later she hanged herself there. Her experiences and subsequent suicide gave the Flat Out Collective, PJA and WIG added impetus in their long-running fight to change the regulations around the strip-searching of women prisoners.

In 1998 Flat Out published *The Road to Nowhere*. Helen Carnaby a Flat Out worker spent a year doing extensive interviews with women who had been inside, housing agencies, real estate agents and a variety of welfare organisation. The research and particular the women's voices showed the devastating road to nowhere that women faced on release because of the appalling lack of post-release support and housing. The research and report was funded by *The Stegley Foundation, Poola, Annamila and the Victorian Women's Trust* and it was then and continues to be instrumental in educating government and non government service providers on the profound difficulties women experience post-release.

After years of coping with only having temporary accommodation themselves, by 1999 Flat Out had moved to relatively permanent offices on the premises of Collingwood Community Health Centre at 365 Hoddle Street. During the same year Flat Out's funding

increased, enabling the service to expand from three to five full-time workers. The increase in funding was tied to providing an Alcohol and Drug Supported Accommodation Service, and Flat Out spread the two full-time positions across five workers so that each worker spent 40% of her working hours doing such work.<sup>30</sup> One of the causes Flat Out members took up during 1999 was to begin lobbying the Government to address the issue of storage of people's belongings while they were in prison as many women lose everything they own while inside.

The State elections in September 1999 saw the Kennett Government's defeat and the return of a Labor Government, this time with Steve Bracks as Premier, and the return of some hope to the many people who had suffered under the Kennett Government's policies. There was no time for hope for some women in the state's prisons, however, and in the six weeks leading up to Christmas that year, eight women died soon after leaving the MWCC. In response to this horrific situation, members of Flat Out joined with others including the PJA, the Advocacy Program for Women in Prison, women who had experienced the prison system and families of women who had died to form the STOP (Surviving Time Outside Prison) campaign. One of the first to draw public attention to such deaths was Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company, whose performance *Tell Someone Who Cares* back in August 1996 had been about women dying soon after leaving prison.<sup>31</sup>

Yet despite all this, in June 2000 Flat Out was still the only organisation providing women specific alcohol and drug supported accommodation services for women leaving prison, with the result that the demand for such services was nowhere near being met. In August 2000 members of Flat Out and STOP together with Catherine Gow organised a forum at North Melbourne Town Hall called 'Voices from the Inside' to draw attention to the issues women face on release and give women who had been inside a public platform to speak.

In October 2000 Flat Out accepted a contract from VACRO to provide Housing and Information Referral services at Tarrengower Women's Prison, a minimum security prison for women which had opened in 1987. This was the first such service for women prisoners in Victoria. That same month the new State Labor Government cancelled the contract with CCA and resumed control of the prison because of CCA's disastrous management of the prison which saw extraordinary



high levels of self harm and violence, constant staff turnover and teargassing amongst a litany of other problems.<sup>32</sup> Shortly afterwards the State Government renamed the MWCC the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) in honour of the many years Dame Phyllis had spent working to improve conditions for women prisoners. Soon Flat Out workers began visiting the prison on a fortnightly basis.

## **THE FIGHT AGAINST STRIP-SEARCHES STEPS UP A NOTCH**

The return of the women's prison to State control brought some improvements to the prison but subjecting women to strip-searches both before and after contact visits continued. Amanda George was invited to give a paper on the MWCC experience and prison privatisation at the 'Women in Corrections: Staff and Clients' conference held in Adelaide October 2000. The conference was organised by the Australian Institute of Criminology in conjunction with the South Australian Department of Correctional Services. Amanda George and about 20 other conference attendees all prison activist or working in prisoner support organisations including Debbie Kilroy from Sisters Inside, Karen Fletcher, then coordinator of Queensland's Prisoners' Legal Service, prison support worker Jade Blakkary, Somebody's Daughter, Canadian activist Kim Pate from the Canadian Association of Elisabeth Fry Societies and others from WIG and PJA arrived the day before the conference and held a strategy meeting to discuss what protest possibilities the conference offered. Prompted by the Queensland Minister for Corrections' recent erroneous claim that Queensland didn't strip-search women prisoners combined with the activists' shared views on strip-searching, they decided to form a coalition against strip-searching and that same afternoon wrote and printed off pamphlets containing facts about strip-searches with the heading 'Sexual Assault by the State'.

On the day of the planned action the group contacted ABC TV news and suggested that they attend the conference, telling them simply that 'something' was going to happen, and upon arrival at the conference organised helpful venue staff to turn off the air-conditioning in preparation for that 'something'. Then just before a keynote panel of Women Corrections Heads from across Australia and Canada, one of the whom was the then Commissioner of

Corrections in Victoria, Penny Armytage, one of the group asked the MC if she could interrupt the proceedings to give a five minute talk. The other group members were scattered throughout the audience, and upon being given the nod, Karen Fletcher stood up and yelled out 'Prisoner George!' 'Prisoner Blakkary!', and Amanda, Jade, Debbie and Kim stood up and walked up onto the stage. Karen in the role of a prison officer called out the standard prison strip-search instructions and Amanda and Jade proceeded to remove their clothing as instructed, with Debbie and Kim assuming the role of officer observers. As each piece of clothing was removed statistics about strip-searches were read out, with the first being that 89 percent of women prisoners have histories of being sexually abused.

Other members of the group went around the conference floor handing out the pamphlets they had printed the previous afternoon. The protest had the desired effect of shocking the audience into a stunned silence. Even for those prison officers whose job entailed carrying out strip-searches, having it done publicly on stage put the search into a different light. For some bureaucrats whose departments order the searches, it was the first time that they had witnessed a strip-search in the flesh. Many of the attendee's came up after and said they supported the action, including officers, although several callous reactions were also observed.<sup>33</sup> ABC Media coverage meant the issues received national attention, and no matter what the topic of their paper, virtually every speech given during the remainder of the conference brought up the subject of strip-searches. Soon afterwards Penny Armytage the Victorian Commissioner of Corrections initiated a review of strip-search procedures in Victoria. Some years later there was a change in strip-search procedures because it was shown in a strip-search reduction pilot at the women's prison, that reducing the number of strip-searches didn't result in an increase in urine positives in prisons or contraband found.<sup>34</sup>

## **SIGNS OF HOPE**

The new Labor Government increased the sentencing options available to magistrates with the aim of reducing the numbers of people in prison, and increased funding for services aimed at women offenders, especially where the offence was drug related, but after a

slight decrease the numbers of both women and men imprisoned in Victoria continued to slowly rise.<sup>35</sup>

In May 2001 Flat Out ceased providing Housing and Information Referral services at Tarrengower Women's Prison as by this time the Collective felt that the service could be better provided by an agency that concentrated on such services. In August STOP held a rally on the steps of Parliament at which Amanda George spoke about privatisation. In November 2001 after lobbying by Flat Out, the STOP Campaign and other groups, and the release of research around the high rates of women's drug related post-release deaths, the issues finally got a response from Corrections when they established the Corrections Housing Pathways Initiative (CHPI). CHPI was a partnership between Corrections Victoria, Office of Housing and Human Services. CHPI was specially set up to address the lack of support and the high rates of reoffending and drug-related post-release death. It was established as a pilot program attached to the Transitional Housing Management program. This pilot was set up to provide pre and post-release support in three Victorian prisons including the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, providing thirteen designated houses for women exiting DPFC and a Housing Placement Worker attached to Women's Housing Ltd to work with women in the DPFC leading up to their release.

CHPI represented an extremely significant shift both in funding and approach. It was the first time that Corrections took some funding responsibility for post-release housing and support and it saw the Corrections entering into partnerships with the other government agencies. In the past Corrections took a view that once prisoners were out the gate, then that was where their funding responsibility ended. The partnership approach with other government agencies represented a belated holistic approach by Corrections to the plethora of issues prisoners face pre and post-release.

This funding created a turning point for Flat Out as it had never taken Corrections funding before on the basis that Flat Out did not want to be identified as or being in the position of being part of the extending prison system. This was for a number of reasons. The collective did not want to be vulnerable to any pressure from Corrections in how it worked with women and did not want women to feel that there was a confidentiality issue with information they gave Flat Out being shared with Corrections. The Collective was also concerned that if Flat Out was in some way reliant on Corrections for funding, there was a real possibility of self-censorship when it came

to criticising the prison or Corrections Victoria. After months of discussion however it was decided to participate in the pilot and see what happened.

Flat Out got funding for 1.5 workers to provide 6 weeks of support pre relapse and 6 months post-release. It was found that women seized the opportunity to access the CHPI support service, with most women wanting to secure public housing is the preferred housing option on release. However with the new multi-government agency approach women also expressed the view that they were having to report to too many organisations on release with little time to get on with anything except fulfilling reporting responsibilities.

## **Key issues identified by women post-release**

A major reason for women wanting to enter the CHPI program was for re-unification with children. This created complex public housing applications as most women did not have children with them on release, yet need to secure accommodation which would be deemed suitable in support of disputed applications before the courts or when negotiating with departmental representatives or family members before their children were reunited with them. On release women also often had with outstanding debts that needed immediate payment which resulted in women finding themselves managing their families on incomes well below acknowledged poverty levels. In addition women had frequently lost all personal and household belongings and were trying to reestablish themselves and their families with extremely limited personal and organizational supports. Education or employment was not seen as an immediate priority by women. They said they could not contemplate either until they had the housing security and reunification with children.

Flat Out identified that the CHPI was often inaccessible to Indigenous women which exacerbated the post-release barriers that Indigenous women already experience. To ensure that Flat Out provided culturally responsive services the organisation engaged in training and networking with Indigenous services.

In its commitment to deliver programs which work respectfully and consultatively with all women Flat Out did an agency wide evaluation of service provision with service users and also hosted a collaboratively managed forum with them. This forum was informed by the evaluations women provided and allowed service providers to get together and exchange and exploration experiences on the CHPI

programme. Importantly it allowed agencies to engage in a frank dialogue with funders about post-release issues as identified by women.

Despite highly successful outcomes for its clients, when the pilot was extended Flat Out lost its funding. However it was then sub-contracted by Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Centre to provide support for women with a moderate to high risk of reoffending and with identified high needs under a new funding hat called Bridging the Gap.

Flat Out's expertise and success working with women identified as being 'high need' or 'high risk' is a unique characteristic of the organisation. It comes about because of its flexible, realistic and non-judgmental approach to working with women, all of which speaks of the extraordinary high skill and commitment of its workers.

Since 1999 Flat Out has received funding from the National Illicit Drug Strategy (NIDS). NIDS funds support women post-release who have experienced drug use in relation to their offending. Once again a key issue that impacted on outcomes for women was the lack of appropriate housing options on release - essentially not enough public housing available! There is also a continuing crisis in the level of detoxification beds that are available for them - women are sometimes having to wait 2 -3 weeks to get into detox. A decision to withdraw requires immediate support and a bed, but women find themselves back using drugs if nothing is available. Detox centres still do not provide appropriate accommodation and facilities for women with children. This has been an ongoing articulated demand and unmet need for women since the Women's Coalition on Homelessness and Addiction was formed in the 80s. Other issues arise with women finding it difficult to access appropriate health services and finding it hard to source sensitive professionals who are non-judgmental. Also transitional properties located in outer suburbs were being offered to women which further isolated them from family and friends and their networks.

In 2002 Flat Out presented a workshop at the first Sisters Inside conference in Brisbane and became a member of AWIPN, the Australian Women in Prison Network<sup>36</sup>. This network later facilitated the research and lodging around Australia of Equal Opportunity/Antidiscrimination/human rights systemic complaints by women in various prisons.<sup>37</sup>

The numbers of women imprisoned in Victoria continued to rise over this time, more than doubling in eight years from 6.6 per 100,000

adult women in 1995 to a peak of 14.3 in 2003.<sup>38</sup> But in 2002/2003 the Labor Government introduced a program called the Criminal Justice Diversion Plan (CJDP) which led to a small but significant decline in the overall incarceration rates (to 12.3 per 100,000 in 2004<sup>39</sup>) and to lesser sentences. This resulted in a reduction in the amount of time Flat Out members needed to spend supporting women in court.

## **‘Call me by my first name’ Forum and Publication**

In 2003 Flat Out’s Siobhan Muir-Smith worked with a group of Flat Out’s clients and a community development student to conduct a one day forum called ‘*Call me by my first name*’ at Richmond Town Hall. The forum title was born in response to the way women imprisoned are referred to by their surname. The purpose of the forum was to raise awareness amongst community agencies, government departments and to those individuals with a genuine interest in problems women face pre and post-release. Prior to the forum Flat Out facilitated workshops and interviews with women who had a history of imprisonment to ascertain the issues they wanted addressed with the wider community. These work shops called “*Finally have your say about prison issues- Tell us how it is*” highlighted how things had changed at the women's prisons over the years.

Three main issues identified by the workshops were the scarcity of housing options, the uncertainty of women gaining housing post-release, a lack of consistent and intensive support as well as medication and medical issues. Women also discussed the differences in the operations of the prison between when it was private and when it was run by the State. Women also recollected witnessing extreme violence when the prison was private and experiencing traumatising treatment by the prison including teargassing. Flat Out workers described that they had not heard such in-depth descriptions of prison life during their usual contact with clients and said that it seemed some women share their stories with each other and seek solace in their common experiences, whereas other women cope with these distressing memories of prison by themselves. For Flat Out workers, knowing that the women in their programmes have to deal with this lurking trauma as well as the trauma of reintegrating into the community added another layer of insight into the women’s strength and tenacity.

At the Richmond Town Hall forum which came out of the workshop, a great number of women thoughtfully and enthusiastically presented their own real and honest accounts of prison life to a packed attentive audience of community/housing/drug and alcohol/health and corrections workers and community members. So that the learning and stories from the day could be used to educate others, Flat Out recorded the day and then paid women at the DPFC to transcribe the proceedings of the forum. With funding from the Annamila Trust and The Victorian Women's Trust, *'Call me by my first name'* was published and launched in 2007 at Flat Out to a packed crowd by Moira Rayner, the former Equal opportunity Commissioner. Three women who had been incarcerated spoke about their lived experience and *'The Fairleas'* made their *début*.

*'Call me by my first name'* is a valuable collection of women's voices speaking about their experiences of incarceration and also the battles women confront on release from prison. It has been enthusiastically received by people in the community who work with women who have been imprisoned so as to better understand the nature and complexity of the issues their clients face. It available free online from Flat Out's web site<sup>40</sup>



*Call me by my first name* launch; Source Flat Out archives



In 2003, as a result of the ongoing problems at the women's prison notwithstanding the public takeover of the prison and the fact that there was little specific women's prisons policy, (especially because for almost 8 years the government abrogated responsibility for women's prison policy because it had handed women over to Corrections Corporation of Australia) the government set up a Women's Correctional Services Advisory Committee. The committee was set up to provide advice and have input into the development of women's prison policy and research and provide a forum for discussion of ongoing issues that arose in the women's prisons. Liz Thomas, a Flat Out worker, was asked to participate on the committee as a community representative.

This committee was responsible for a policy framework being developed for women prisoners called Better Pathways, which was at last, gender specific. Better Pathways resulted in significant capital works being funded for DPFC, particularly for mental health services and programmes as well as an array of policy initiatives<sup>41</sup>. A long overdue focus was given to post-release support.

In 2005 Flat Out's Dallas Taylor assisted Sisters Inside, the Queensland women's prison support and advocacy service, in organising Sisters' biannual conference called *Are Prisons Obsolete?* The 3 day conference with international and Australian presenters was held in Melbourne with 300 attendees. Many of Flat Out's clients made presentations to the conference.

In 2006 Flat Out was successful in obtaining funding from The Reichstein Foundation, RE Ross Trust and the William Buckland Foundation for a 3 year project with Terry Hannon, a collective member being employed as a researcher, to look at the consequences for children at each stage of the criminal justice system of women being arrested and imprisoned. An aim of the research was to build a comprehensive picture which allowed a realistic assessment of the fiscal and social costs involved when a primary caregiver is given a prison sentence. Cherry Grimwade who was also on the Collective provided a great deal of input to the project which interviewed 15 women who had been inside as well as police, sentencing magistrates and judges, barristers, solicitors and children's carers. One of the significant findings of the report was there were no protocols by Victoria police on how children should be dealt with their parents were arrested, and DHS had no protocols with Victoria police concerning children in these circumstances. Corrections Victoria still takes no information from prisoners at reception regarding their

status as a primary care giver with dependant children or any information regarding the children's current risk status. The basic statistic of how many children prisoners have is not collected so it is not possible to say how many children are affected by their parent's incarceration. The groundbreaking report *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process: A review of policies and legislation affecting children with incarcerated parents*, was jointly published by Flat Out and VACRO in 2006. It made a number of recommendations and is available online<sup>42</sup>. A fundamental recommendation was that when sentencing adults, court processes should acknowledge the existence of children and incorporate a planned approach to the children's new situation.

**Flat out** and the  
Women's Office of the Law Students Society  
presents Ex-Tiddas star....

# Lou Bennett

For a night of good karma and great music  
with

## Surrogate Turnip

### Saturday 10th Dec

International Human Rights Day

**FLAT OUT** @ The Empress  
714 Nicholson Street, Nth. Fitzroy

All proceeds go to Flat Out, an organisation which provides housing and support services to women pre and post release from prison.

**Doors open 9pm , \$20/\$15 (conc)**  
Tickets available on door or for pre-purchase  
call catherine on 0401031089

Right: Poster for a Flat Out fund-raiser.  
Source: Resource Centre,  
Corrections Victoria.

# FLAT OUT SPEAKN'... IN 2008

*We walk a fine line between being in the prison and fighting the prison system...even after women have left us if they go back inside we always touch base with them...just to say look darl there's someone lookn' out for you...just to see how life's going...lots of women have no one to visit them...it must be terrible knowing threes no one to visit you... so we keep contact so they know someone's caring about them...*  
Billi Clarke

*We don't want your type of woman here* DHS funded rooming house responding to a request for a room for a Flat Out client

At twenty years of age Flat Out is one of the longest running women's collectives in Australia. While there are now other organisations providing assistance to women on release from prison, including VACRO, Epistle Post-release Service, St Kilda Crisis Centre, WISP Melbourne City Mission, Brosnan Centre, Women's Housing Limited and Sacred Heart Mission – Women's Service, Flat Out remains the only organisation in Victoria that provides such services specifically for women.

For twenty years Flat Out Inc has not only done all it can to successfully settle women exiting prison back into the community but has worked tirelessly on addressing the systemic issues affecting women imprisoned in Victoria. Its members are dedicated and non-judgemental women who have worked to assist women leaving prison for almost two decades now, and Flat Out remains unique.

Women in prison have little power or control of their lives, so it has been a priority of the service to be clear about what we were able to provide. How we would do it, if we couldn't, why not and to be timely in our response and respectful of the women we support. On too many occasions, women doing time have been given incorrect information, none at all or were confused about the process. Flat Out is committed to not being a part of this systemic abuse and continues to improve on these areas of our service delivery and view this as an ongoing project.

The concept of incarceration as a solution has been embraced by the community out of fear, propaganda and the priorities of governments. We are happy to lock people up at a huge cost to the public purse, but we can't seem to want to fund basics, such as; housing, health, education and employment. Flat Out is committed to focusing on the big picture and promoting understanding.

Flat Out moved from its long time home in Collingwood to 54 Pin Oak Crescent, Flemington and thanks to the *Lord Mayors Fund* updated our computers. We also hit the new century and established a website. We have also received funding from the Andy Inc. Trust to assist us with finding funding for a permanent building (donations welcome and deductible) as well as some projects that remain under wraps.

There have also been changes made to the collective model as it has stood for the last twenty years as a number of the workers have found increasing difficulty juggling the stresses inherent in direct support work with the ever-increasing administrative workload on top of the responsibilities workers have in managing the service in the collective model. The often slow decision making processes of the current model have resulted in frustration for workers, and some have expressed the view that what worked in the '70s may need to change to meet the demands of the present world. As a result of discussions at Collective Meetings and Planning Days in response to ongoing frustration from workers the flat structure of workers has changed to one where there is now a co-ordinator.

## **'Difficult' Women?**

Flat Out's particular success in working with women that other agencies find 'challenging' has resulted in us obtaining funding from a new DHS pilot called the Intensive Case Management Initiative (ICMI) to specifically work with these women. The women targeted for support are women who present with complex and high needs that often prohibit them from accessing mainstream services. Things such as major mental health issues, acquired brain injury (ABI), 'aggressive confronting demeanours' and other behaviours that prevent women from even getting in the door of many services. Only 6 women are worked with at any time. Flat Out has found that some women did not get proper assessment within the prison, even though

they have been inside a long time, so that conditions such as ABI which significantly impact on a persons' behaviour and would certainly have impacted on their behaviour and consequent 'management and control' in prison, have gone undiagnosed and untreated.

## **Indigenous Women**

Although Flat Out still uses its old rickety house logo, a new design for our pamphlet and website was done by koori artist Karlene Clarke. The organisation is also strengthening its work with Indigenous women. Indigenous women are over represented in Australia's prison and legal systems. Flat Out has always been aware and responsive to this alarming issue, but many barriers have made it difficult to respond appropriately and effectively over the years. Recently, Flat Out has made significant attempts to broaden its network with Indigenous women, services and workers. These networks and connections have been both internal and external to the prison in a commitment to narrowing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous referrals to Flat Out, and more widely to the sector. Flat Out is working hard to establish itself as an appropriate, responsive and approachable service. In particular the new funding we have received under ICMI will specifically target Indigenous women whose complexity of needs marginalises them from accessing support services.

We continue to reflect and assess how the referral process is or is not working for Indigenous women; integral to this is feedback from women. In order for us to get this feedback, this year Flat Out is planning to run Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) specific focus groups out at DPFC to better understand barriers, concerns and issues related to the referral process for Indigenous women and their families.

In our commitment to being a service where Indigenous women feel they are a part of, we have made an effort to provide a holistic, flexible and informal environment, one which listens and responds to identified needs. Upon request from a few of the Indigenous women we work with, we display Indigenous Art (being rented on loan from some of the women), we have the Koori Mail delivered regularly, and one of our women donated her own flag to put up in Flat Out to signify our absolute dedication and commitment to working with Indigenous women in more practical ways.

Outside of our day to day case work, Flat Out remains vocal about Indigenous issues and political and structural inadequacies that contribute to the discrimination and inequity Indigenous women face. We remain committed to speaking out about the greater issues which so disgracefully impact on the lives of Indigenous women...and all women.



*Painting by Melinda Naden  
Displayed at Flat Out office*

## **Recreation and Fun**

Flat Out Workers are committed to working with women in ways that are fun and not so talk focussed so with funding assistance from *Streetsmart* we have got together with groups of our women to look at what recreation ideas take their fancy. Many women said they wanted to do paintball, but this can't be done if you have a criminal record! Other suggestions were painting, screen-printing, making dreamcatchers and basket weaving. We have acquired screen printing materials and have been doing T shirt screen printing workshops with women in Flat Out's back yard. We are trying if possible to employ women as sessional trainers who have been inside and have these skills for the groups. We have approached koori elders to take basket weaving and one woman who has a floristry training and works now as a florist will be providing flower arranging sessions.

Flat Out used the *Streetsmart* social inclusion funding to purchase a camera to document the groups and to take photos of women and their children. When women go inside they often lose all their personal possessions including photos, so we use the camera to give women these precious images. Christmas party photos complete with Santa and elves, for women and their children have been a feature of Flat Out for years. These parties have been funded *Annamila P/L*, who have consistently supported a wide variety of our activities for over a decade.

One of Flat Out's recent purchases was a badge making machine, which has been incredibly useful and fun to use. Flat Out has made a variety of badges with different slogans on them to ensure that people know who we are, and what we think! Flat Out make badges free of charge for women who access Flat Out, and for a small fee for other organisations/workers who may wish to be a bit flamboyant!

## **Money for this and that...it makes all the difference**

Flat Out also received \$10,000 from *Annamila*, which we are stretching over two years as a miscellaneous fund to use when you can't get money elsewhere for things. These things can make all the difference to women, whether it is paying for a haircut before a job interview, Met ticket to get to parole, methadone, food vouchers, birth certificates, photo ID (because you leave prison with no ID), a fishing rod or a guitar.

The \$20 women must pay to access public dental care has been a big call on the fund lately. We have had a lot of women who when they are in prison with dental problems end up getting teeth pulled. This happens because there is an enormous need for dental care at the prison which is nowhere near met, so rather than women being given a 'dental plan' of appointments, say for a number of fillings, or a plate, they are having one appointment and are getting multiple extractions. So women leave prison with very few teeth. We used the fund to give one woman Sustagen because she couldn't take solid food, so many of her teeth had been recently removed. Being in a position to pay the \$20 for the dentist makes a huge difference for women, to their health, their self esteem and their marginalisation.



## **The bad housing news**

The housing crisis that is affecting the general community means that accommodation for our women is becoming increasingly scarce. Attitudes that discriminate against women who have been in prison are now openly flourishing amongst some government funded housing providers. We are the bottom of the rung in the housing desirability market and this is going to be the greatest crisis we face in the next 5 years.

## **Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People**

The lived prison experience of women is the most important issue that Flat Out can promote. The impact of incarceration is without question a human rights issue. Homelessness, poverty, sexual/physical abuse, drug addiction and mental health issues are common place with women in prison. The absence of appropriate supports throughout their lives has led to incarceration. Unless the stories of these women are told, understood and responded to, the current status quo will continue; lock them up, let them out and lock them up again.

To this end, Flat Out was delighted to be asked to auspice the Centre for the Rights of Imprisoned People (CHRIP) which has received funding from the Reichstein Foundation the RE Ross Trust and the Helen McPherson Trust. CHRIP, <http://chrip.blogspot.com/>, is a community based organisation that first met in 2004. Then a meeting convened by the Federation of Community Legal Centres was attended by activists, housing organisations, people with the lived experience, welfare groups, legal services both private and community managed, Aboriginal organisations as well as church and charity groups to look at what could be done to reverse the trend towards ever increasing incarceration as a solution to community breakdown. These groups recognised the need for a centre that works towards the decarceration of imprisoned people in Victoria through a social justice framework, recognising that the imprisonment of people directly impacts on their human rights.

CHRIP receive funding to set up a pilot Prisoners Legal Service at Brimbank Melton Community Legal Service which was launched in

June 2008. It also received funding from the Legal Service Board and Victoria Law Foundation to initiate “Inside Access”: a specialist legal service for prisoners with mental disorders and/or intellectual disabilities running from the Mental Health Legal Service.

CHRIPS’ main focus however will be to educate the community utilising a community development framework. CHRIP aims to deliver a vision of an alternative to a world that relies and spends so heavily on prisons when funding human rights in the community – the right to housing to be free from violence and discrimination would produce more socially beneficial outcomes which must ensure greater community safety and cohesion. CHRIP actively works with people who are inside and who have experienced incarceration so that their experiences reach the wider community and their expertise in this issue is used.



*Above and left: Santa and elves at a Flat Out Xmas party.  
Source: Flat Out Archives*

# WHAT WOMEN SAY ABOUT FLAT OUT

Mel said "I reckon Flat Out are deadly, they even came to see me in prison and in hospital, and no one ever did that before, I didn't realise workers could be like this and no make me feel like a fucking loser".

*"My needs were great. I didn't know how to talk to anyone. I was a very aggressive person who didn't now knows how to communicate verbally thanks to Flat Out"*

**"You are always very supportive** even after a relapse into the drug scene and not judgemental about the choices I make just extreme support to help me change. I will be staying in contact with you because you are the best support I have ever had and have ever been able to talk openly with."

*"You rock, I love your work"*

Alí, who has been working for us for over a year and has never be housed this long in her life said, "Flat Out has meant life to me, actually owning my own life" ... and "Flat Out helped me work out that women need to breathe together ... just breathe"

*"At Flat Out I received service that went far above and beyond just finding me a place to live"*

Zoe said "I have never before now finished a parole, never had a place and never knew anyone to give a shit about me before, but when I realised that my worker from Flat Out ACTUALLY gave a fuck, I thought I might be worth something, even if it is just a bit of worth".

*"You guys know how to work with us mob, and yous get it 'cause yous wanna get it.... you don't put us in shitty offices and talk shit to us like posh people do, yous are real."*

**"I think it's a great organisation and very beneficial...Flat Out were always reliable and willing to assist....Every issue I had was assisted with...."**

"I'm doing great and I truly believe Flat Out has a lot to do with that....thanks for everything"

***"I am really sad that I'm not with Flat Out anymore I don't get any help only a food voucher once every few months..."***

"Flat Out is helping me going back to TAFE and also helping with my housing and general day to day needs. They are wonderful to me."

*"I only wish it never took me to 2002 to know Flat Out existed"*

**"I get a great deal of emotional support as there isn't anyone else I can turn to"**

"I've had more support here than anywhere"

Sue's story 'Very few begin their imprisonment with a desire to hurt anyone. Their desire is a simple one....to survive and there are people here today who have helped many, including myself to do just that. Of course I am referring to the gang at Flat Out. I have known of the work they do with women in crisis for many years although my involvement with them was indirect.

It was only when Corrections finally passed the mandate that all parolees securing accommodation through the Women's Housing group were to have their own counsellor that I became one of their clients.

I have always been an independent and self sufficient person who rarely, if ever, felt that I was in need of help. On the contrary, I was the only one who normally gave the advice, not being one who took it. Of course in the past, I have seen counsellors and analysts when it was required of me for one reason or another and I dutifully attended. I went through the motions sitting attentively and left after mentally compiling next week's shopping list or picturing my home, imagining how it would look with the furniture rearranged. It would depend on the length of my session.

My involvement with Flat Out proved to be very different indeed. The counsellor assigned to me was Liz Thomas and I will forever grateful that she came into my life when she did. Needless to say there were official guidelines to adhere to, not to mention the paperwork to be completed. There's nothing like a corrections order, in triplicate of course, to gauge its way through a forest. Liz was absolutely professional without any of the formalities I had come to despise. We went shopping, met for coffee, did lunch and she managed to always keep it relaxed while at all times doing what I needed and what was expected of her.

## WOMEN IN PRISON

*'The women we work with continue to inspire us with their strength, doggedness, vulnerability and fight. It is a continual education to have the privilege to share the awful secrets and sorrows of so many of their lives. We work, hoping more of them will live.'* - Amanda George

Although women can find themselves in prison for a wide variety of reasons, the far greatest majority of women in prison are there for property crimes or drug offences – with 79% of women inside for non-violent offences.<sup>43</sup> Other figures indicate that of the women in prison for homicide, around 80% are there for killing a male partner after being subjected to years of physical violence and abuse. A high number of offences are drug or alcohol related. Figures from the *Victorian Prisoner Health Survey* of 2002 indicate that 44% of women prisoners have suffered sexual abuse and 68% emotional abuse as a child or adolescent<sup>44</sup>, while other sources including a NSW taskforce report on women in prison in 1985 indicate that around 70 to 80 per cent were survivors of sexual abuse more generally.<sup>45</sup> On the whole most women in prison have had poor educational opportunities and nearly 80% were unemployed prior to imprisonment<sup>46</sup>. And while in Victoria Indigenous women make up less than 1.5 % of the general women's population, they are 15% of the women's prison population.

Other figures from the *Victorian Prisoner Health Survey* show that women prisoners are 1.7 times more likely to be living with mental illness than are male prisoners, and that 30% have a history of attempted suicide while 60% suffer from hepatitis and 40% from asthma.<sup>47</sup> In 2002 84.5% of women in prison were living with mental



disorders if one includes drug or alcohol problems in the definition of mental disorders, or 64% if such problems are excluded.<sup>48</sup>

Women in prison are discriminated against in many ways, too numerous to detail here<sup>49</sup>, but many reports, including most recently the Prison Discipline Regime Review of October 2004, show that the number of women prisoners charged with offences while in prison is double than that of men.<sup>50</sup> Reasons for this are believed to be due to rules of behaviour designed for men that don't take gender differences into account.<sup>51</sup>

Still no statistics are kept of the numbers of prisoners with dependent children despite a request back in 1988 to a National Corrections Committee because children weren't considered relevant to prison management (of men).<sup>52</sup> While male prisoners with children usually have partners to care for the children while they are in prison, most women prisoners do not, with most of their children being placed in the care of relatives or friends while almost a quarter are under state supervision. Losing contact visits with children constitutes the greatest threat hanging over women and is the most effective social control a prison has over women with children.<sup>53</sup> 64% of women commit offences whilst under the influence of drugs<sup>54</sup>, and while Corrections Victoria doesn't keep figures on prisoners with disabilities, figures from NSW indicate that 12-13% of the prison population there is made up of people living with intellectual disabilities.<sup>55</sup>

Many workers commented on the remarkable resilience of some women, and at being amazed at how they could keep a sense of humour despite being to hell and back.



## THE WORKERS

*'I am inspired to be part of something that sits outside the box, part of something that is inclusive and changing. Part of an organisation that takes the responsibility of advocacy seriously – Billi Clake*

*'Over and above the day to day dramas of working with women whose lives tend to be chaotic and constantly facing dramas with social security, human services, corrections, men, dealers, lawyers – our workers have dealt with some extraordinary things – dead women in houses, guns, violent partners in houses and ..... assisting a birth. The work is so much about life and death it requires pretty special people for the job.'* - Amanda George

Flat Out workers come with a wide range of life experience, though many have previously worked in other welfare-related areas such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol and community housing. When workers and ex-workers were asked why they were drawn to work at Flat Out, the most common reason given was because they had strong feelings about the inequities faced by women in prison and a desire to work for change to improve the situation. Other reasons include having a keen interest in the complex reasons behind women's imprisonment, while others were inspired by women already involved with Flat Out, with Amanda George's name featuring most heavily.

Decision making is done by consensus, with smaller decisions made at weekly staff meetings while larger ones wait until the monthly collective meetings. Between the monthly meetings, workers write agenda items for the next meeting on a whiteboard, then prior to the collective meeting a staff or team meeting is held in order to debate

the topics to determine and clarify the team's overall position on each. Workers and the rest of the Collective members meet annually to make the strategic planning decisions and carry out service evaluation, and these meetings are facilitated by an external person. They are usually held over two days, and while they involve a lot of hard work, from all accounts time is found for a lot of fun to be had as well.

As well as their day-to-day work with the women and organising the odd conference or forum, workers find time to lobby companies to donate goods such as food and toiletries, and gifts for Christmas and Mother's Day when Flat Out organises parties for the women.

Above and beyond their work with women leaving prison, Flat Out workers have initiated and organised many things to benefit women still in prison, one example being a book drive in the early 90s which collected books for the library at Fairlea, greatly improving its resources.

Most workers reported many positive things about working for Flat Out. Several noted that it was empowering to work in an organisation that worked for change. Several expressed the view that they felt privileged to have been given access to the women's life experiences, to witness their strengths and to learn from them. One also stated that she found that working with women whose lives were very different from her own gave her insight into aspects of her own life.

Many ex-workers reported that by the time they left Flat Out they were suffering from exhaustion and burn-out, with one reporting being troubled by a pervasive sense that she was going to end up in prison herself. This worker expressed the view that there should have been a de-briefing process in place, and some time after this Flat Out allocated money for such de-briefing.

When asked whether being involved with Flat Out had changed them, apart than leaving them with burn-out, common responses were that they learnt an enormous amount, particularly about issues of drug use and the injustice of the legal system. Some commented that initial prejudices and judgemental attitudes were soon broken down, others that it deepened their understanding of women's experiences, strengths and survival.

*A couple of car stories:*

*One worker needed to transport some filing cabinets back to Flat Out's office so she tied them to the roof of her Honda Civic. Somewhere along the drive back to the office they fell off, without her noticing the loss.*

*Another worker had Flat Out's account books in her car when the car was stolen and set on fire, destroying the lot.*

## **THE COLLECTIVE**

*'The collective over time has incorporated a spectrum of committed, quiet, funny, loud, inscrutable, mad, innovative, opinionated, angry, perplexed, thoughtful, strategic, tireless, dog owning, bolshy, food loving and surprising women.'* - Amanda George

Flat Out Collective members come from all walks of life but all share a commitment to improving the lives and opportunities for women in and leaving prison. Among the Collective members are a number of lawyers who have devoted much if not all of their lives to doing all they can to address the inequalities and discrimination that women in particular suffer under our legal system, a system which also functions quite differently and often produces very different outcomes for the well-off than it does for people on low incomes.

Collective members are required to be female, committed to feminist philosophy and the process of a Collective structure, accept the Constitution of a Collective, and attend at least three collective meetings annually. Being on the Collective involves supporting the workers, writing policy and correspondence, liaising with government departments and organising conferences and forums.

From interviews with workers the main benefits of a collective system of management given were that it was empowering, that one learns a wide range of skills, and the sharing of knowledge. At one of Flat Out's annual strategy meetings the Collective deemed the benefits to be: self-determination; personal responsibility; ground-up processes; challenge to the dominant paradigm; limits territorialism and empire-building; enshrines feminist principles; skills development; flexibility; inclusive decision-making; everyone has a voice; ensures workers'

rights; transparency in decision-making; and finally, it's fun, we like it.

The major challenges that collective management brings as compared to traditional hierarchical systems as given by the workers were that the decision making and problem solving processes are cumbersome, there was insufficient support at times, and that it was very demanding of the workers, particularly on the occasion when there has been a worker who was not a team player. While the collective system appears to be hardest on the workers themselves, non-worker Collective members can also suffer from burn-out.

The main reason given for the Collective's continued survival was the commitment of its members both to issues of women and imprisonment/social change and to the collective structure itself. Others include the fact that there has been continuity in the Collective thanks to people who have remained members for many years, some since its inception.



# APPENDIX

## CHRONOLOGY OF ACTIVIST GROUPS CONNECTED TO FLAT OUT

**1979** - Fairlea Research Group (FRG)

**1981** - Women's Legal Resource Group (WLRG)

**1984** - Women's Council on Homelessness and Addiction (WCHA)

**1985** - FRG dissolves and prison sub-group of WLRG and the WCHA form Women Against Prison (WAP)

**1988** - WAP establish Flat Out, and together with others form the Coalition Against Women's Imprisonment (CAWI)

**1992** Women and Imprisonment Group formed (WIG)

**1993** - Flat Out join with a number of other groups to form the Save Fairlea Women's Prison Coalition (SFWPC)

**1994** - The SFWPC becomes the People's Justice Alliance (PJA)

**1998** - The PJA joins a broader coalition in forming the Victorian Deaths in Custody Watch Committee (DICWC (Vic))

**2002** Flat Out becomes a member of the Australian Women in Prison Network (AWIPN)

**2008** - Flat Out auspices and is part of Centre for the Human Rights of Imprisoned People (CHRIP)

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<sup>1</sup> 'Prostitution regulation in colonial and early federal Australia', in Roberta Perkins' *Working Girls: Prostitutes, their life and social control*, online at:

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/lcj/working/ch2-1.html>

<sup>2</sup> Christina Twomey, *Deserted and Destitute: Motherhood, Wife Desertion and Colonial Welfare*, 2002, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Emma Russell, *Fairlea: the History of a Women's Prison in Australia 1956-1996*, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Hannon, Appendix I 'An historical perspective' from her research report *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process*, 2006.

[http://www.vacro.org.au/Children\\_Unintended\\_Victims/PDFs/Discussion\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.vacro.org.au/Children_Unintended_Victims/PDFs/Discussion_Paper.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Sylvia E. Morrissey, *A Brief History of the Prisoners' Aid Society and V.A.C.R.O. 1872-1997*, 1997, p. 13, VACRO.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Leyshon, 'Victorian – but not old fashioned', 1987, in Sylvia E. Morrissey, *A Brief History of the Prisoners' Aid Society and VACRO 1872-1997*, 1997, p. 20, VACRO.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Chris Burnup.

<sup>8</sup> These banners are now held in the National Museum of Australia as part of its National Historical Collection.

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Bacon has written innumerable articles and papers on issues affecting women in prison including 'Women in Prisons' in 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Chris Burnup and Amanda George.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Chris Burnup.

<sup>12</sup> 'Don't Let Her See Me Cry' Helen Barnacle Random House

<sup>13</sup> Rikki Dewan, 'In and out of prison', in Women and Imprisonment Group, *Women and Imprisonment*, 1995, p. 59, Fitzroy Legal Service.

- <sup>14</sup> For more on Jika Jika Prison see 'It's Back to the Future: Have the Lessons of Jika Jika Been Forgotten?' by Bree Carlton & Craig Minogue, [http://www.justiceaction.org.au/ICOPA/icopaXI/icopaXI\\_docs/pdfs/CrltnB\\_Mino.pdf](http://www.justiceaction.org.au/ICOPA/icopaXI/icopaXI_docs/pdfs/CrltnB_Mino.pdf), and Bree Carlton *Imprisoning Resistance: Life and Death in an Australian Supermax* 2007 Sydney Institute of Criminology Series Federation Press and Tony Vinson's 'Victoria's Prisons: From Solitude to Sociability' [http://www.jss.org.au/media/reports/victorias\\_prisons.pdf](http://www.jss.org.au/media/reports/victorias_prisons.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Fitzroy Legal Service, 'Women and Imprisonment in Victoria: A Report', 1988.
- <sup>16</sup> Amanda George, 'Strip-searches: sexual assault by the state', in Women and Imprisonment Group, *Women and Imprisonment*, 1995, pp. 62-63, Fitzroy Legal Service.
- <sup>17</sup> For more on the history of British prisons see Michael Ignatieff, *A Just Measure of Pain: The penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution*, 1978; and on private prisons the John Howard Society of Alberta, *Private Prisons*, 2002, online at: <http://www.johnhoward.ab.ca/PUB/respaper/privpr02.htm>
- <sup>18</sup> Michael Flynn, *The Second Fleet: Britain's Grim Convict Armada of 1790*, 1993.
- <sup>19</sup> Lenny Roth, 'Privatisation of Prisons', Background Paper No. 3, 2004, online at: <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/publications.nsf/0/ED4BA0B9D18C2546CA256EF9001B3ADA>
- <sup>20</sup> Bree Carlton *Imprisoning Resistance: Life and Death in an Australian Supermax* 2007 Sydney Institute of Criminology Series Federation Press
- <sup>21</sup> Coburg Brunswick Community Legal and Financial Counselling Centre v Department of Justice (1998) 15 VAR
- <sup>22</sup> Arie Freiberg, 'Explaining Increases in Imprisonment Rates', 1999, online at: <http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/outlook99/freiberg.pdf>
- <sup>23</sup> A number of sources back this up: see Yuka Sakurai & Russell G. Smith, 'Gambling as a Motivation for the Commission of Financial Crime', Australian Institute of Criminology, <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi2/tandi256.pdf>; Dept of Justice, 'Community Impacts of Electronic Gaming Machine Gambling, Part A', Ch 9, [http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/GRP\\_Reports\\_Files6/\\$file/PartAWAVic05Sect5.pdf#xml=http://search.justice.vic.gov.au/isysquery/irl4111/10/hilite](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/CA256902000FE154/Lookup/GRP_Reports_Files6/$file/PartAWAVic05Sect5.pdf#xml=http://search.justice.vic.gov.au/isysquery/irl4111/10/hilite) More Than Just Talk, 'Gambling: National pastime or national disease?', <http://www.lcsa.org.au/Publications/Discussion%20Guides/3%20Gambling.pdf> and Tasmanian Greens Submission, Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, 2003; and interview with Chris Burnup.
- <sup>24</sup> The Vietnamese community in Australia has been particularly susceptible to problem gambling for a combination of reasons: in Vietnam gambling is only legal for three days a year over the new year period when it is seen as a reward for working hard all year, and this view and experience of gambling coming together with the ready availability of gaming machines in Australia (with some venues particularly targeting Asian communities), coming on top of the stresses of moving from what was usually a rural village situation surrounded by extended family to a high rise flat in an Australian city, have led to particular problems. For more information on women and gambling see: Productivity Commission 1999, *Australia's Gambling Industries*, Report No. 10, AusInfo, Canberra; also Sarah Brown et al, *Healthy, Wealthy & Wise Women: The Health Impacts of Gambling on Women in Melbourne's Western Metropolitan Region*, 2000.
- <sup>25</sup> This latter paper and many of the papers from the former conference were published in 1995 under the title 'Women and Imprisonment'.
- <sup>26</sup> Amanda George, 'The Big Prison', in Women and Imprisonment Group, *Women and Imprisonment*, 1995, p. 22, Fitzroy Legal Service, online at: <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/proceedings/16/George.pdf>
- <sup>27</sup> Sandy Cook and Susanne Davies 'Neglect or Punishment? Failing to meet the Needs of Women Post-release' in *Harsh Punishment* 1999 Davies and Cook, Northeastern University Press
- <sup>28</sup> Email from Amanda George and see Cherry Grimwade Diminishing Opportunities: Researching Women's Imprisonment p291 in *Harsh Punishment* *ibid*
- <sup>29</sup> For more information on the fight to save Richmond Secondary School see Stephen Jolly's *Behind the Lines*, 1996.
- <sup>30</sup> *Flat Out Annual Report* July 1999-June 2001.
- <sup>31</sup> For more on this issue see Susanne Davies & Sandy Cook, 'Dying Outside: Women, Imprisonment and Post-release Mortality', 2000 <http://aic.gov.au/conferences/womencorrections/cookdavi.pdf>
- <sup>32</sup> Amanda George *The New Prison Culture: Making Millions from Misery in Harsh Punishment* Northeastern University Press Sandy cook and Sue Davies 1999, 'Tales of a Private Women's Prison: Writ in Women's Lives.' *Hecate* Vol 28, 2002 George. A, 2003 *Women Prisoners As Customers - Counting The Costs Of The*

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<sup>33</sup> For more on this action see Kris Olsson's *Kilroy Was Here*, 2005, pp. 230-236.

<sup>34</sup> Jude McCulloch and Amanda George 'Naked Power: Strip-searching in Women's Prisons' in *The Violence of Incarceration* 2009 Ed Phil Scraton and Jude McCulloch p.107 Routledge

<sup>35</sup> Department of Justice, Court Services:

<http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/CA256F82000D281D/page/Sentencing+Monitoring-Sentencing+Outcomes?OpenDocument&1=90-Sentencing+Monitoring-&2=20-Sentencing+Outcomes~&3=~>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.awipn.org.au/research.htm>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.sistersinside.com.au/reports.htm#HR>

<sup>38</sup> 'Statistical Profile of the Victorian Prison System, 2000-01 to 2004-05', Corrections Victoria, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; also: Department of Justice, Court Services:

<http://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/CA256F82000D281D/page/Sentencing+Monitoring-Sentencing+Outcomes?OpenDocument&1=90-Sentencing+Monitoring-&2=20-Sentencing+Outcomes~&3=~>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.flatout.org.au>

<sup>41</sup>

[Http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb9fdb0de75f791/Better\\_Pathways\\_Integrated\\_Response\\_Womens\\_Offending\\_Reoffending\\_Policy%20Document.pdf](http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb9fdb0de75f791/Better_Pathways_Integrated_Response_Womens_Offending_Reoffending_Policy%20Document.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Terry Hannon [http://www.vacro.org.au/Children\\_Unintended\\_Victims/Project\\_Overview.htm](http://www.vacro.org.au/Children_Unintended_Victims/Project_Overview.htm) Children: unintended victims of legal process. A review of policies and legislation affecting children with incarcerated parents

Flat Out Inc. and the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

<sup>43</sup> Corrections Victoria 2004b Better Pathways An Integrated Response to Women's Offending and Re-offending Discussion Paper

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<http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/DOJ+Internet/resources/file/eb1f5b4aaf391ad/04%20-%20Part%20B1%20Case%20flow%20and%20defendant%20tables%20-%202014%20Nov%2003.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Department of Justice – Deloitte Consulting, *Victorian Prisoner Health Survey* (February 2003), cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

<http://www.sistersinside.com.au/media/VICComplaint.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Jude McCulloch, 'Women, Prison, Law and Order', in Women and Imprisonment Group, *Women and Imprisonment*, 1995, p. 8, Fitzroy Legal Service.

<sup>46</sup> Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, Department of Justice Victoria, *Statistical Profile: The Victorian Prison System 1995-96 to 1998-99* 2000 (Inset), cited in Penny Armytage et al, 'Women in Corrections: Getting the Balance Right, 2000

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/womencorrections/armytage.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Department of Justice – Deloitte Consulting, *Victorian Prisoner Health Survey* (February 2003), cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

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<sup>48</sup> Office of the Correctional Services Commissioner, Department of Justice, *Draft Framework for Working with Women in Prison* (2002), cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

<http://www.sistersinside.com.au/media/VICComplaint.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> For more on the discrimination faced by women prisoners see Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

<http://www.sistersinside.com.au/media/VICComplaint.pdf>

& Linda Hancock (Ed) *Prisoner and Female: the Double Negative*, 1982.

<sup>50</sup> John Darcy Dugan, Vivian Roche, Ian Tucker, *The Prison Discipline Regime Review: Report to the Correctional Services Commissioner into prison discipline provisions sanctions and privileges* (June 2003) 22, cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

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<sup>51</sup> Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

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<sup>52</sup> Minutes of the National Correctional Statistics Meeting, 29<sup>th</sup> September 1988, cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)  
<http://www.sistersinside.com.au/media/VICComplaint.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Amanda George, 'The Big Prison', in Women and Imprisonment Group, *Women and Imprisonment*, 1995, p. 17, Fitzroy Legal Service, online at:

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/proceedings/16/George.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> see EN 40

<sup>55</sup> Jim Simpson, Meredith Martin, Jenny Green for New South Wales Council on Intellectual Disability, *The Framework Report: Appropriate Community Services in New South Wales for Offenders with Intellectual Disabilities and Those at Risk of Offending* (2001), cited in Pia Cervari et al, 'Request for a Systemic Review of Discrimination Against Women in Victorian Prisons' (April 2005)

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