

EX- PRISONERS' VIEWS

ON IMPRISONMENT AND RE-ENTRY

by Lukas Muntingh

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Civil Society Prison Reform Initiative,
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INTRODUCTION

In the past 15 years much research has been conducted on the prison system in South Africa focusing on governance, law reform and human rights. It is, however, of particular concern that the voices of prisoners and ex-prisoners had not been heard in the current discourse, one that has been dominated by the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), Parliament, service delivery organisations, academics and human rights activists. In essence, there has been a lot of talk about prisoners and ex-prisoners but there has been little listening to prisoners and ex-prisoners taking place. This marginalisation of prisoners' views in the discourse is in all likelihood symptomatic of their marginalisation in broader society. Poorly organised, lacking in the cultural capital to be heard, and often living on the edges of mainstream society, their experiences and views remain hidden and frequently ignored. This research was, in short, motivated by the need to develop and build knowledge about the challenges experienced by ex-prisoners during re-entry and efforts at integration.

The lack of understanding of what the challenges are facing ex-prisoners during re-entry has a material effect on the services being rendered. Services are often assumed to address the needs of ex-prisoners without verifying this, creating a disjuncture between known risks for re-offending, the articulated objectives of interventions and the actual interventions. Other research reviewing offender reintegration support organisations in South Africa concluded: "... that there is a fair amount of agreement between what rigorous international studies have found to be effective in offender reintegration, and what the South African organisations described as effective measures. At the same time, it was also found that there is not always a close match between the defined problem, the identified needs, the programme objectives and the envisaged long term impact."¹ This disjuncture is also facilitated by the lack of participation of ex-prisoners in designing and developing interventions, whether these are structured programmatic interventions or individualised engagement with ex-prisoners.

This research project gathered information from ex-prisoners about their experiences during and after imprisonment. Knowing what prison system users think and say about the system is important because they are ultimately the individuals who should benefit from the prison system. Moreover, listening to them deepens our understanding of what is being done correctly and should be built upon, but also where improvements are required. In the private sector such research is common in the form of client satisfaction surveys as well as more sophisticated analyses of customer views. It is in this sense that this research set out to gather information on the views of the "customers" of the correctional system in South Africa. Although this study involved only a limited number of participants, several important findings can already be made, based on what the customers of the DCS are saying.

A note on the format

The report makes extensive use of quotations from the research participants. These are integrated into the text. All quotations are printed in italics. Shorter quotations are kept in the paragraph whereas longer quotations are indented and in a separate paragraph. Where several participants' responses are cited in one paragraph, the different responses are separated by multiple full stops.

¹ Muntingh, L. (2008). *A Societal Responsibility: The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Prisoner Support, Rehabilitation and Reintegration*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.



METHODOLOGY

Focus group discussions

The study was qualitative in nature and used focus group discussions as the main data collection technique. Four focus group discussions with roughly ten participants each were planned, and in total 35 individuals participated in four groups as some of the groups had less than ten participants. The discussion groups were conducted in a semi-structured format in which the researcher posed specific questions and group members were invited to respond. Two groups were conducted in Cape Town, one group being predominantly isiXhosa-speaking and the other bi-lingual in Afrikaans and English. Two groups were also conducted in Johannesburg.

Once the data was collected, content analysis in respect of the themes was done as reflected in this report.

Selection and participation

In organising the focus group discussions, CSPRI requested two non-governmental organisations, Realistic and Khulisa, to identify participants for the discussion groups and make the logistical arrangements. Staff members from these two organisations also assisted in translations during the focus group discussion where this was needed.

Ethics

All participants were thoroughly briefed on the research project prior to starting the focus group discussions to ensure that they understood the purpose and that their participation was voluntary. All focus group discussion participants signed a consent form which is on file with the author.

Limitations

The group discussions lasted three to four hours but despite this duration some issues remained under-explored. As the groups progressed it was concluded that a selection must be made from the originally planned questions to explore only the most important issues to prevent participant fatigue during the focus group discussions. In the course of the discussion groups English and Afrikaans were used. Where participants were not conversant in any of these two languages, they expressed themselves in their mother tongue and the staff from Realistic and Khulisa assisted with the translations.

Themes explored

In summary, five themes were explored in the course of the focus group discussions:

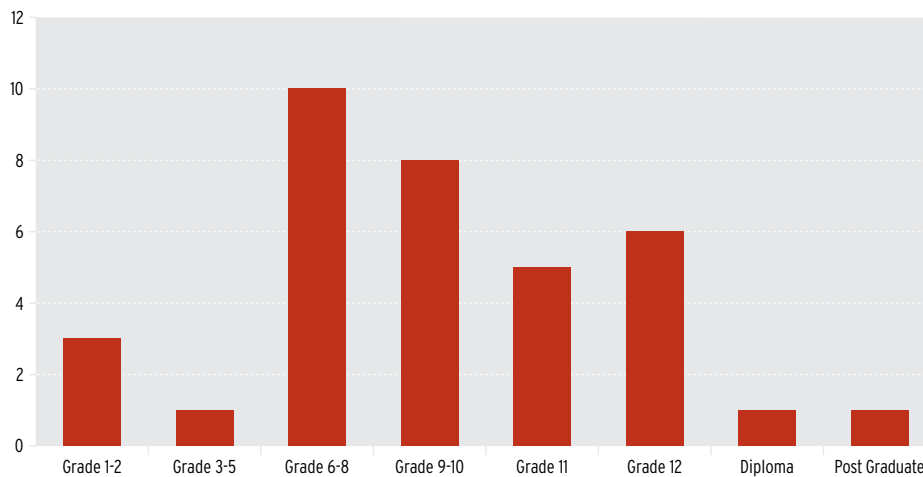
- experiences during imprisonment with reference to access to services and relationship with DCS staff;
- issues facing returning prisoners with reference to personal challenges;
- the interaction between ex-prisoners and their families after release
- impact of prisoner re-entry on communities and individuals' experiences of social interactions at community level;
- challenges to prisoner re-entry.



PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

A total of 35 individuals participated in the focus group discussions conducted. The average age was 36.4 years, with the youngest 18 and the oldest 56 years. All participants except one were male. The highest educational qualifications of the participants are presented in Figure 1. The data indicates that half of participants fall within the Grade 6 to Grade 10 band, indicating that their education was terminated in late primary school or early secondary school.

Figure 1: Educational qualifications of participants



The participants were asked to record on a pre-prepared form their personal history of imprisonment, reflecting only sentences of imprisonment and excluding periods spent in prison as an unsentenced prisoner. This is presented in Table 1. The average duration of the terms of imprisonment as well as the number of participants per number of terms of imprisonment is also indicated in the same table. The profile shows that the majority of participants had served more than one term of imprisonment, with the highest being six terms of imprisonment. The longest single period of imprisonment was 19 years.

Table 1: Imprisonment history of participants

TERMS SERVED	NR OF PARTICIPANTS	AVERAGE DURATION IN YEARS
One term only	13	4.4
Two terms	11	2.6
Three terms	5	1.6
Four terms	3	1.3
Five terms	2	2.5
Six terms	1	5

While no claim can be made that the sample is representative of South Africa's ex-prisoner population, the profile indicates that the sample has sufficient experience of the prison system to have well formed opinions based on their own experiences. It should also be noted since a large proportion of the participants have been released from prison on more than one occasion, they also have previous, as well as current experience of re-entry demands.



EXPERIENCES IN PRISON

For the purposes of structuring this section as well as subsequent sections, each section is headed by the core question posed and responses are then grouped under specific sub-themes.

What was the most difficult thing of being in prison?

The question drew a wide range of responses and these are reported on below according to a number of themes that emerged from the data. These themes are:

- loss of freedom and the daily routine;
- lack of personal safety;
- lack of information and confusion; and
- lack of proper care.

Loss of freedom and the daily routine

When you are inside, you can't do what you like. You are scared in there. There is no life in there.

As can be expected, a number of participants remarked on the loss of freedom and autonomy during imprisonment. Not being able to do as you please was, for these participants, the worst aspect of imprisonment. Even the simplest daily routines enjoyed outside of prison were remarked upon, for example: *When you are hungry, you cannot go to the kitchen and get some food. You must wait [for] when they serve meals.* Perhaps a more telling example of how the daily routine of the prison is experienced comes from a participant who stated that the most difficult aspect of imprisonment was: *Going to sleep at 3 pm which is the same time your child is coming out of school.* The awareness that there is a life on the outside and that family members are continuing with their daily routines, while time stands still in the prison, is undoubtedly a challenging experience for many prisoners. The loss of autonomy was well described as follows: *You can be what you like but you lose your freedom when the warders lock-up for the night.* The loss of freedom is a double experience; not only the mere fact of being imprisoned, but also being locked-up for the night, which can happen as early as 14h30.

It is just eating and sleeping, eating and sleeping, eating and sleeping, eating and sleeping.

The extent of boredom and idleness is well known in South Africa's prisons. Few prisoners have the opportunity to engage in even menial jobs in the prison or further education and training.² Prisoners frequently refer to this idle way of serving a term of imprisonment as "eet en lê" (eat and sleep).

Lack of personal safety

Even though the Constitution and the Correctional Services Act guarantee the right to personal safety, prisons remain dangerous places. A large proportion of the participants identified the continuous threat to personal safety as the worst aspect of imprisonment. The risk of being raped and/or robbed is real as noted in the following remarks: *The adjustment is hard the first time. You must protect yourself against sodomy... The first time I went in I was a Frans;³ the toughest was to defend yourself and not be sodomised or robbed. When you belong to a gang it is easier.*

While gang membership may bring some level of protection, the gangs have their own internal dynamics and codes of conduct which may place individual members at risk of punishment: *No matter how long I was in prison, and who I was there, you are always scared of everybody all the time. You don't know what is going to happen when they lock the cells at night.*⁴ The dilemma of receiving gang protection, but being simultaneously vulnerable to the gang's whims, was echoed by

² See discussion below under "Working in prison".

³ Prisoners who do not belong to one of the prison gangs, or number gangs as they are also referred to, are called "Frans". The origin of the term is uncertain.

⁴ The particular participant was a high-ranking member of the 26-gang.

another participant: *Not to be able to do your own thing is difficult - on the outside this is what I did but inside the first law of the number⁵ is, "jy mag nie maak en doen nie."* (you may not make and do).⁶ *This makes it very difficult; they can always find something that you did [for which there will be punishment].*

Gangs can have a pervasive influence on the level of personal safety in a prison and both prisoners and officials are at risk of gang violence. It is frequently the non-gang members, the Franse, who bear the brunt of gang coercion:

The fighting with the gangsters is the hardest. There were big numbers in the prison. When you are not part of a gang you are in trouble. They don't treat you the same, but if you are in a gang you are also in trouble. If you are not in a gang you don't get your full ration of food. Even the warders take side with the gangs ... I was at Brits (Losperfontein). There is a gang there, the Big 5, who is strong. I came from Johannesburg, so I was in trouble. They think that you want to apply your Johannesburg-knowledge there.

Avoiding the gangs is nearly impossible and the prisoners, who achieve this, do so at great personal risk. The following extract from the discussions tells the bizarre story of a participant who was assisted by a leading 26 gang member to avoid the gangs by using his influence with DCS officials to facilitate a transfer to a different section:

The officers tell you that they don't want gangs and smuggling and that you must focus on your ticket (serving your sentence). When you get inside the section there are different groups [gangs] there. They see the new people coming in and they go and speak to them, wanting them to join their group. If you don't want to join them, then the problems start. They steal your things when you have had visitors. They treat you badly until you want to join. When you join, then there are other problems. If you join the 28s they will say that the general needs a wife. In the 26 they say we work with money. The Big 5 says that we don't want any bad things and if we see anything, we report it to the officials. I ended up not knowing myself. I went to the officials and told them that I have a problem; the gangs threatened me and I don't want to join the gangs. The officials said if I wanted protection from them (the officials) I must buy them something. I said I don't have any money, but they said I must make a plan. Fortunately I met a guy from my township; we knew each other from seeing, but not each other's names. He was high up in the 26 gang and said to me that I must never join the gangs. He used his influence with the officials to have me transferred to the School Section. It did take three weeks but he made it possible.

While not all prisons are the same and even sections within prisons may differ in respect of levels of personal safety, the overall impression is that prisons are not safe and that this places an enormous strain on prisoners, especially first time prisoners.

Lack of information and confusion

Learning the ways of prison life is not easy and a number of participants remarked on the sense of bewilderment when first arriving at prison. The orientation of new admissions appears to be done in a fairly superficial manner, and little is done to explain to new prisoners how to stay safe and not be entrapped by older and more experienced prisoners. The following excerpt alludes to this:

Many things are very confusing - there is no induction programme - we are like a horde of rodents roaming in different directions. The experienced prisoners take advantage of the new prisoners. They say "I will help you", but they just want to steal your things. You cannot get it back because you are alone. You complain to the officials that you have lost your watch [it was stolen] but the prisoner working in that office [where you are speaking to the official] he overhears you and reports this to the gangsters and then you are in trouble.

As a consequence of the lack of information and orientation, engaging in criminal activity in prison appears, for some prisoners, to be the only feasible route to ensure survival and safety: *You must listen because you know nothing. If you get something from your family then you must share it, like dagga or money. "Dit is hoe jy vir jou 'n pad oopmaak in die tronk" (This is how you make a road for yourself in prison).*

Many things are very confusing - there is no induction programme - we are like a horde of rodents roaming in different directions.

⁵ The three dominant prison gangs 26-, 27- and 28-gangs are often collectively referred to by prisoners and in the literature as "the number".

⁶ Directly translated it means: "you may not make and do". The interpretation provided by the participant was that as individual you are not allowed to initiate your own activities and that approval from the gang leadership is required.

Variation between different prisons in respect of procedures also causes confusion for prisoners who were transferred from one prison to another: *There are different procedures for different centres, and when you question it, they just say that this is how they do it here.* It is perhaps not so much that there are differences between prisons, but not receiving an adequate explanation that is the main source of frustration.

New admissions appear to be left to their own devices to learn what is really happening in prison and what the underlying rules are. Knowing how to avoid danger and possible traps are critical for new admissions. The importance of decisions made early on during admission has been underscored by other research, especially in relation to gender identity. A new prisoner who is coerced into sexual activity at an early stage will carry the label of being a “*wyfie*” (a female) and be at great risk of further sexual violations during his term in prison.⁷

Lack of proper care

The dignity of prisoners is undermined by the incompetence of the warders.

Numerous comments described the lack of proper care, especially medical, as the most challenging aspect of imprisonment. From the comments made, the lack of care points to a sense of being ignored, or of not being recognised as a person. The sense of not being recognised as a person was described not only in relation to the individual participant himself but also to prisoners in general.

Much of this frustration was aimed at medical staff in the DCS: *When you go to the clinic you see sick people there, but they (the nurses) don't care. They just sit there and talk about their weekend and what their plans are. If you are sick and you need to go to the bathroom you are washed by another prisoner; it is not the nurses that care for you.*

The routines of the prison, which may exist for good reason from a management perspective - such as the weekly visits by a general medical practitioner - do not always meet the needs of prisoners: *After two weeks I got chicken pox and I went to the nurse but she said I must wait until next week because the doctor is now not here now. Being ignored is the worst. Some participants held very strong views on the nature of care received during imprisonment: You are not treated like a human being. The food is bad and you don't get medical treatment; they treat you like an animal. People die in front of us because they don't get help. When you lay complaints, it takes a long time to get a response.*

The lack of proper care was also remarked upon in respect of particular prisons: *At Mangaung, there they do everything on paper (according to the book). You can't speak to a person; they just throw the rules at you and just say that this or that is not their job. At Leeuwkop Maximum the healthcare was very bad; a person can lie there dying but they will do nothing. When you are sick, you are treated by other prisoners.*

The fact that the DCS is in a process of transformation and that the policy emphasis has shifted to rehabilitation, as described in the White Paper on Corrections in South Africa, did not escape the attention of the prison population. This has created many expectations that were often frustrated by the situation at ground-level. One participant described it as follows: *When you start reforming yourself, there is no support. The attitude of the warders does not support prisoners' rights.* Participants also remarked on the attitude of the warders towards the new approach in DCS: *The acceptance of the new system [as policy position] was good but the warders did not accept it. The warders are not transformed.* Having a desire to transform oneself and “achieve rehabilitation” was well articulated by the participants and the sense of frustration experienced through a lack of support and the attitude of officials must have been demoralising.

They don't treat people right. They make us believe that they are God; they treat you harshly. They are not aware that we are also human. They don't give respect.

How are inmates treated by warders?

Prisoners and warders are in close daily interaction and from the responses the nature of these relationships has a profound impact on prisoners. The overwhelming sense gained from the participants was that the relationships between prisoners and warders are negative, characterised by manipulation and are often violent. The manner in which prisoners are viewed by warders and the expectations of prisoners in respect of the duties of warders, appear to create an inherent tension in these relationships. On the other hand, it must be emphasised that the participants also reported positive interactions with warders and several examples were cited of warders who have had a positive impact on their lives. These will be dealt with in a later section.

⁷ Gear, S. & Ngubeni, K. (2002). *Daai Ding: Sex, Sexual Violence and Coercion in Men's Prisons*. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

While numerous instances of ill treatment were reported by the participants, this was also balanced by a sense that the behaviour of a prisoner would also influence the way he would be treated by the warders and also that not all warders are the same: *It depends. There are different warders. They are not the same and it depends on how you handle yourself ... It depends on the institution; it [the prison] has a particular climate. They tell you one thing but the practice is different. Zonderwater is good as well as Mangaung. They treat you like you are human.*

Violence, coercion and manipulation

Incidents of extreme violence inflicted upon prisoners were reported by several participants. Some of these are related to incidents that took place in the 1980s, such as the ritual beatings of prisoners by warders for stabbing another warder, as well as the placement of prisoners on spare diet and in solitary confinement. Such incidents were also reported by Steinberg in his book, *The Number*. Fortunately the punishment of spare diet was abolished and solitary confinement is now far more regulated and also overseen by the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS). The extent to which mass assaults by warders on prisoners still occur is uncertain, but a number of cases have been confirmed in recent years.⁸ Every year a significant number of prisoners die due to unnatural causes (murders, suicides and accidents), but very little information is available in the public domain about these deaths.⁹ Similarly, a high number of complaints are received from prisoners by the JICS as well as the DCS alleging assaults by staff or fellow prisoners.¹⁰ It is against this background that it must be accepted that the occurrence of violence, both prisoner on prisoner and warder on prisoner, in South Africa's prisons remains unacceptably high.

An alleged recent incident was described by a participant as follows: They treated us brutally. They beat everyone and they used electric shocks.¹¹ This is what happened in February 2009 at Pollsmoor. They just storm[ed] into the cell and spray water in there, over everything. A much profiled incident from 1996 was related as follows: *In 1996 the Taakmag (DCS Task Force) came to Pollsmoor and they beat up everyone. It was all over the newspapers but nothing was ever done about it. Nobody cares about them (prisoners).*

Being manipulated by warders was noted by several participants. This relationship appears to oscillate between coercion and giving special favours as described in the following two statements: *Maybe he (the warder) had a bad day at home, now he comes here and klaps (slaps) the nearest prisoner, but afterwards he gives this prisoner two extra slices of bread and the prisoner is just too happy to get the extra bread. And: Maybe he takes the prisoners out on special duties; to go and clean the Head of Centres' yard. This is a big thing - to work in the Head's yard. And maybe the warder even gives them some tobacco and the prisoner is happy; he is working for tobacco. It is degrading.* Manipulation by warders also impacts on a prisoner's social standing in the prison as described in the following quote: *There are warders who, for no apparent reason, like certain prisoners but this changes from time to time. Today he likes you but tomorrow it is another guy, then you start thinking and start plotting against this other guy. The result is that jealousy starts, you start asking whether this guy is maybe an impimpi (a snitch) and that is why the warder likes him more.* Prisoners may also do favours for warders but this may not always be rewarded, as described in the following extract: *Officials use[d] to come late at night and ask for a cup of tea and you help them because you think that he may help you again. But the next morning he treats you as if you are an informer; they will even say something to the gangs about you and then you are in trouble.*

The threat of the warders placing inmates at the mercy of the gangs was also reported by participants. A prisoner who has in some way offended a warder may find himself in a very difficult situation. This was particularly noted when a prisoner is perceived by an official to be "clever" and may have challenged an official: *If you complain too much, they will throw you in the backroom where they know you will be raped; maybe they have even arranged it with the gangs. They will tell you straight: "Jy moet net slim trek, dan gebeur die dinge" (You must just try and be clever and these things will happen).* The

8 In June 2005 prisoners were subjected to a mass assault at St Albans prison in Port Elizabeth (The Herald "Court victory for St Alban's prisoners", 24 April 2006). In April 2007 three prisoners were reportedly beaten to death by warders at Krugersdorp prison (The Mail and Guardian "Warders in court over violent prison deaths" 17 April 2007).

9 Civil Society Prison Reform Initiative. (2007). *Submission to the Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services by the Civil Society Prison Reform Initiative (CSPRI) in Response to the Department of Correctional Services Annual Report 2006/7*, 31 October 2007.

10 In 2007/8 the JICS recorded 1004 complaints alleging assaults by officials on prisoners and 1489 alleging prisoner on prisoner assaults. (Office of the Inspecting Judge of Prisons. (2008). *Annual Report of the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons 2007/8*. Cape Town: Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons, p. 17). In 2007/8 the DCS recorded 855 complaints alleging assault by official on prisoner or prisoner on prisoner. (Department of Correctional Services. (2008). *Annual Report 2007/8*, Pretoria: Department of Correctional Services, p. 48).

11 The participant was referring to the electric riot shields used by DCS that can discharge an electric current when pressed against a person.

indifference of some officials towards sexual victimisation was also remarked upon: *Prisoners are treated very badly - you are the whole time manipulated by officials. They turn a blind eye to what is happening, especially when a young prisoner comes in and an older prisoner wants him in his blankets.*

Corruption

Despite the efforts and progress made by the DCS to combat corruption, the participants related numerous incidents of petty corruption as well as manipulation of prisoners and gangs by officials. Corruption in the DCS has been extensively investigated by and reported on by the Jali Commission¹², but petty corruption appears to be persistent: *It all depends on what the gang leader can offer the officials. I went to five or six prisons so I have some experience. If you want to go to hospital the male staff will tell you that they don't have time. So you go ask the female staff to escort you, but they will not do it unless you pay them something, like a cool drink.* While not all warders engage in petty corruption, those that do not are reportedly under pressure from their colleagues who do: *Other officials will pressurise officials who do not ask for bribes. This asking for small bribes for doing things that they are supposed to do is ingrained in the system; it is part of the culture.* Conflict and tension between warders was also remarked upon in a broader sense in relation to the new direction that the DCS has taken following the White Paper on Corrections: *All these new policies are good but they are not trained to implement them. They are very domineering. Those warders who want to implement the new policies are brought down by the others [who oppose it].*

Members are not forced to bring in drugs - it is their choice ... It's all about choices - they all have choices, but they are just greedy.

Receiving visitors was an important issue in relation to corruption. Visitors are a source of money as they can pay money into the account of the prisoner. Prior to the adoption of a "cashless society" in South Africa's prisons, the availability of cash inside prisons created enormous problems for the DCS. The cashless society has not, however, seemed to have eradicated the problem. One respondent described it as follows:¹³ *If you get any visits, they (warders) tell the gangs to rob you. You can get anything in prison if you have money; the officials will get it for you. If you want to go to hospital you need money. You need to buy the officials something like a cool drink to escort you to the hospital.* The importance of visitors was also related to the attitude that warders may exhibit to a particular prisoner: *If you don't get visitors you are treated like shit, but if you get visitors and your people look decent, they will respect you inside.* In this sense, money gives prisoners respect and power.

The participants were not blind to the pressures felt by warders from gangs: *Some members are corrupted because they are intimidated by the gangs inside and outside. I feel sorry for them ... Members are also stabbed by prisoners because they are arrogant.* The relationship between warders and gangs raised varied opinions which were in some cases racial in nature: *The coloured members get friendly with the gangs - they don't seem to have boundaries. This is different with the black members. With them they will quickly let you know where the boundaries are ... The influence of gangs over members is more with coloured members than with black members.* The issue of race appears to extend to a broader tension that may exist in the DCS staff corps as remarked upon by one participant in Cape Town: *The staff is also racially divided between blacks, whites and coloureds - this is a cold war [between them] and the prisoners suffer.*

It was, however, stated by a number of participants that the decision of a warder to collude with the gangs and, for example, bring in contraband was that official's decision: *Members are not forced to bring in drugs - it is their choice ... It's all about choices - they all have choices, but they are just greedy.*

At Leeuwkop (Youth) the norm was to rehabilitate and if management is pushing rehabilitation then it becomes difficult for warders to be negative.

The new and the old systems

As noted earlier, the DCS is engaged in transforming the prison system and its vision is articulated in the White Paper on Corrections. This transformation process is characterised by an underlying tension between officials supportive of the White Paper's vision on the one hand and, on the other hand, the adherents to the "old way" of managing prisons and prisoners. This tension is manifested in various ways ranging from the administrative procedures that need to be followed to acknowledging the inherent rights of prisoners under the Constitution and the Correctional Services Act. The rigid bureaucratic procedures developed under the previous regime are often at odds with the broader and more visionary

¹² In 2001 the President appointed a judicial commission of inquiry, headed by Judge T. Jali, to investigate corruption, maladministration and human rights violations in the Department of Correctional Services. The Commission held public hearings in addition to its other investigations. The Commission made numerous damning findings regarding corruption and the violation of prisoners' rights.

¹³ The participant was imprisoned at Boksburg Correctional Centre from 1995 to 1998. The situation may have changed since then.

policies developed in the wake of the White Paper. Given the human rights foundation of the Correctional Services Act, and more particularly the emphasis on rehabilitation in the White Paper, it is not surprising that prisoners support the “new way” and often demand that they have access to the services espoused in the White Paper. The realities at operational level may in some cases prevent the immediate implementation of the goals of the White Paper, but in other cases it appears that the attitude of officials and their willingness to engage with prisoners in a constructive manner are at the heart of the problem and a source of great frustration amongst prisoners.

One participant summarised this tension as follows: *Hulle sê, “Ngconde Balfour se gat. Hy is daar bo en ek is hier onder” (They say to you: “Ngconde Balfour’s¹⁴ arse. He is up there and I am here at the prison”)... The officials are bitter and so they go out (of their way) to spite us. They are not interested in us. You must see the Blue Route Mall (a shopping mall near Pollsmoor Correctional Centre) at 12 pm; it is full of brown uniforms. The sense of not being regarded as important was further described as follows: They only want to go home; they are not interested in the prisoners. Lack of accountability amongst officials further affirmed a sense of being ignored. The participants were also aware of the pressures under which DCS officials work: It is because of overcrowding. They are stressed and that is why the divorce rate in DCS is so high, but the prisoners are the scapegoats.*

Participants, however, were appreciative of situations where the prison management emphasised rehabilitation services and treated prisoners well: *It is also about what management says. At Leeuwkop (Youth) the norm was to rehabilitate and if management is pushing rehabilitation then it becomes difficult for warders to be negative. From this remark the importance of leadership displayed by the prison management is evident. Similar remarks were also made in respect of Manguang Correctional Centre. Participants were, however, critical about how unit management was implemented in the DCS and one described it as follows: With unit management and [the system of] case officers the officials were more frustrated than the prisoners and when Popcru¹⁵ took over the department they just left us. The reference to Popcru is not entirely clear, but the overall impression is that the focus shifted away from prisoners and was focussed on the internal labour politics of the Department.*

Managing gangs

Managing prison gangs and limiting their negative impact on the prison has been a long standing problem for the DCS. There is at present no gang management strategy in place although it is reportedly under development. Participants were critical of the influence that the gangs wield in some prisons and the role given to them by officials: *The warder must show you, when you arrive, where your bed and cupboard is. Why must the gang tell me where I must sleep and where my cupboard is?* Fundamentally the participant was asking who is in charge of the prison; the gangs or the warders. There is also not a consistent approach in DCS regarding the separation of different gangs into different cells. Some argue that separating gangs in different cells creates the ideal opportunity for one gang to plot against another, whereas another point of view holds that separation prevents violence between prisoners after lock-up. One participant questioned the first approach: *They don’t understand how the gangs work; they throw everybody together in one cell, gangsters and Franse (non-gangsters).* While the merits of separating different gangs may still be argued, it needs to be an accepted minimum standard that those prisoners who do not belong to a gang, are separated from those that belong to a gang.

While prison gangs have a negative impact on prison management, they also serve as a significant governance mechanism. Rivalries between gangs can result in violent and often fatal confrontations. Maintaining the peace may prompt some prison managers to look the other way to ensure that existing power relationships are not destabilised, as described in the following quote: *Each prison has a gang that rules the sections. It is different at different prisons. At Brits, where the Big 5 is big, there was a 28 (-member) who came from Johannesburg. He wanted to do his own thing there, but he was very quickly disciplined by the Big 5. It was probably arranged by officials.*

¹⁴ Mr. Ngconde Balfour was Minister of Correctional Services from 2004 until March 2009.

¹⁵ Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union.

Responding to complaints and requests

You can complain at the IPV but that does not help. The warders tell you straight in your face: We are in charge not the IPV.

An effective complaints mechanism is fundamental to a safe prison. Unresolved complaints and complaints that are not effectively dealt with, or where prompt and comprehensive feed-back has not been provided, have the potential to escalate into violent confrontations between staff and prisoners. The Independent Correctional Centre Visitor (ICCV)¹⁶ system established by the Correctional Services Act of 1998 was a great stride forward in making South Africa's prisons more transparent and providing access to an independent complaints mechanism. However, the ICCVs (formerly known as IPV's or Independent Prison Visitors) appear to be undermined by some DCS officials, as remarked upon by one of the participants: *You can complain at the IPV but that does not help. The warders tell you straight in your face: We are in charge, not the IPV.* The DCS also have its own internal complaints mechanism to which prisoners have access on a daily basis. Even in dealing with serious cases, such as rape, the participants agreed that the system leaves much to be desired: *When sodomy happens, there is no immediate assistance. If you lay a charge against another prisoner, they (the other prisoners or gang) will be on your case quickly, so people withdraw the charge.*

You keep on asking for feed-back on a request or something but they don't tell you anything. Then they tell you "Jy is 'n swaar asem" - it means you are always complaining and talking too much.

Dealing with less serious issues was also reported by the participants as a major source of frustration: *You keep on asking for feed-back on a request or something but they don't tell you anything. Then they tell you "Jy is 'n swaar asem" - it means you are always complaining and talking too much ... They just tell you to stop nagging.* One participant, who was a long term prisoner, described it as follows: *People suffer inside and they need somebody to talk to. After 20 years you complain about everything but they tell you that you must accept that this is prison.* Underlying this particular response is a sense of alienation and the need to engage with somebody on an interpersonal level. However, the prison environment is not conducive to such interaction and the complaints mechanism becomes a proxy for counselling and a mechanism to attract attention. Concern was also expressed about the confidentiality of complaints and it was alleged that if a complaint is lodged, especially one of a more serious or sensitive nature, it soon becomes public knowledge.

The only female participant in the focus group discussions related a number of incidents where she had made requests and these were either ignored or became a source of great frustration: *In prison I had my eyes re-tested and needed new glasses. I waited four years for the new glasses. The same with my dentures; only I never received them. If you want to acquire any skills in prisons, you have to fight for it. When I wanted to write my matric[ulation] exam there was no member to escort me to the examination venue. I went to the Head of Centre. I was crying in the Head of Centre's office begging her to let me write exam. It was 10 to 9 in the morning and the exam was starting at 9 o'clock.* Another participant spoke highly of the opportunity he received in prison to further his education, but also voiced frustration about the lack of support from officials: *The only thing I gained [in prison] was education. You can decide to study. When you want to write exams, nobody knows what is going on. If you don't organise something yourself, nothing will happen.*

Requests for transfers are a contentious issue and the JICS recorded 17,291 complaints in 2007/8 concerning transfers.¹⁷ Requests for transfers are frequently not approved and one participant explained how the system can be manipulated: *Even if you wanted a transfer you can apply five or six times and nothing will happen but there are certain activities that will get you a transfer quickly. If you assault another prisoner then they will transfer you from one prison to another.*

How are prisoners treated by professional staff?

It is well known that the DCS has significant shortages of professional staff, such as social workers, educationists, nurses, psychologists and doctors. These professions are, however, critical for meeting the legislative requirements in the Correctional Services Act and the implementation of the White Paper on Corrections. Table 2 lists the vacancy rates for these professions in the DCS.¹⁸

16 The Correctional Services Amendment Act (No. 25 of 2008) changed their title from Independent Prison Visitor (IPV) to Independent Correctional Centre Visitor (ICCV).

17 Office of the Inspecting Judge of Prisons (2008) *Annual Report of the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons 2007/8*, Cape Town, p. 17

18 Department of Correctional Services (2008) *Annual Report 2007/8*, DCS, Pretoria.

Table 2 : DCS Vacancy rates in selected occupancies

POSITION	NR. OF APPROVED POSTS	FILLED POSTS	VACANCY RATE
Social workers	602	384	36%
Educationists	565	443	22%
Nurses	971	635	35%
Psychologists	116	34	71%

Despite these shortcomings, the study explored with participants what their experiences were of services received from professionals during imprisonment. While positive experiences were noted, a range of problems were identified.

Accessing services

From the discussions it became clear that accessing services, especially of social workers and medical staff, was problematic. Access was reported to be controlled by security staff who often discourage or prevent a prisoner from gaining access to a social worker. In the previous section under 'Corruption' it was also reported by some participants that small bribes needed to be paid to secure an escort to take a prisoner to a social worker or nurse. One participant reported that his motives for wanting to see the social worker were questioned by security staff: *Sometimes it is difficult to get permission from the warder to get to see the social worker. You ask them and they say (in isiZulu) "you are washing your eyes" (meaning: you only want to see her because she is female).* One participant alleged that requests for medical attention were denied and that a concoction of painkillers was given if prisoners had medical complaints: *Where nurses are concerned I have noticed that if a prisoner complains, the section head will just ignore the complaint. Maybe they will get you some "pynwater" (painwater) - it is water mixed with Disprin and Panado in a big bottle and this is what they give you if you have a medical complaint.* While it can be argued that security concerns make it difficult to provide medical services after lock-up time as there is only skeleton staff in place, one participant raised his dissatisfaction in this regard: *With regards to doctors; if you get sick in the middle of the night there is nobody. They can come, but they don't want to.*

Accessing a social worker, probably as a result of staff shortages, also resulted in delays: *The system dictates the red tape that must be followed to get to see a social worker. It takes very long, easily four weeks. They always idle in certain cases, so it takes long to get a response on your problem.* The shortage of social workers was remarked upon by several participants: *At Pollsmoor Female there were no social workers for African prisoners, only for coloured prisoners. The social worker only comes on Tuesday and Thursdays¹⁹ ... At Oubiqua there is only 1 social worker for 500 prisoners ... They need re-training; the current system is not working. The social workers are not enough; there was one social worker for 1,100 prisoners; that can't work.*

It then appears that difficulties in accessing services are not only a function of staff shortages, but that informal controls and even petty corruption can also restrict access to professional services.

Attitude of staff and quality of service

The participants noted a number of instances where they had positive experiences of professional staff, especially social work services: *When I went to the social worker she was nice. She enabled me to meet people who I have victimised.* Participants did, however, feel most aggrieved by the perceived attitude of professional staff towards prisoners: *The nurse sees a "bandiet"²⁰ and this is a problem. I went to see the doctor but he did not even ask me any questions. He just decided what was wrong with me and said I can go. I then told him that I have problems and that he needs to listen to me. He said he doesn't have time and I told him that he will make time for me now.*

Some participants were extremely critical of professional staff in their comments: *I have a personal thing against social workers because they are lazy ... The social workers are only pushing time.²¹ You go there and they say yes-yes but nothing*

If you don't have a heart to work with people you should not work in prison. In prison the prisoners come with a lot of complaints and you must be willing to listen and assist.

¹⁹ This participant was released from Pollsmoor Female in 2008 and the racial categorization is probably a function of language.

²⁰ "Bandiet" is now regarded as a derogatory Afrikaans term for a prisoner. There is no English equivalent.

²¹ "Pushing time" (Afr. stoot tyd) is an expression usually reserved for sentenced prisoners focussed on completing their sentences. The reference to social workers "pushing time" is thus an idiomatic attempt to equate them to prisoners serving a sentence.

happens. They talk bubblegum language. A white social worker can't relate to a coloured prisoner, they don't know where they come from ... They only want to sit in the sun outside ... The social workers have lost their professionalism in prison. They see the prisoners as very dangerous persons that are not entitled to any treatment. The social workers and the nurses have become more like security officials ... There is no professional treatment from these professionals.

One participant expressed his satisfaction with services from professional staff but also noted a general dissatisfaction with the general quality of services and the delays experienced: *Some of them work very hard but most of the time they don't want to work. You make a complaint or request but they always like to postpone, even when you are sick they say come back tomorrow. The social workers are the same; they say come back or make an appointment we are busy now. If you report corruption to the social worker they say that we cannot help, especially if the social worker is private or from an NGO. They will listen to your story and maybe take it to the head but that will only help you to get a transfer. While there may be valid reasons for delays in services, the impression was created that in some cases these reasons were not communicated to the participants during their imprisonment: I waited for the social worker to contact my family but it did not happen ... I waited for 1 month to receive my tablets. They did not even do a proper diagnosis ... You are not treated well. I am still waiting for my N5 certificate from the Department of Education from last year November. The results were submitted to Education by DCS but nothing has happened.*

Two participants described a general sense of not receiving support from neither professional staff nor warders: *Some prisoners want to develop themselves but the warders don't want this [to happen]. So there is resentment from the warders. Social workers are doing nothing. They just sit in the sun the whole day. You ask an official to open the gate for you and he gets very angry because you are disturbing him ... There is no system that works. You are lucky if somebody does something for you. Another participant questioned the skills and attitude of social workers and their commitment to working with prisoners: The social workers need thorough training. If you don't have a heart to work with people you should not work in prison. In prison the prisoners come with a lot of complaints and you must be willing to listen and assist.*

There is no privacy at the doctor or the nurse. Everyone will know when someone has been sodomised.

Privacy during consultations with social workers and medical professionals was identified as a problem by two participants: *There is no privacy at the doctor or the nurse. Everyone will know when someone has been sodomised ... While they (social workers) are taking your complaint or request there is an official present so there is no confidentiality. After you leave, the official will talk to the social worker and tell her things like that you make a lot of complaints or you cause problems.*

The relationship between security staff and professional staff was commented on by a number of participants who felt that security personnel exercise undue influence over professional staff. One participant described an incident following a violent altercation between prisoners: *We were taken to the doctor and were made to squat with our hands in the air for a long time while waiting for the doctor. When we were given stitches, the warders tell the nurse or doctor they must not inject you (use local anaesthetic).* A more general sense of suspicion was expressed by another participant: *The warders also scare the social workers with security issues and this makes the social workers scared of the prisoners.* One participant explained how medication has also allegedly been used to deal with so-called difficult prisoners: *If you complain too much they give you a pill and you will see those prisoners, shuffling in the hallway.*²² One participant, who furthered his education during imprisonment, complained that when security searches are done, prisoners' personal belongings are strewn all over the cell: *When the Taakmag (Task Force) comes and does a search they throw everything out including your text books; they don't show any respect.*

Working in prison

The Correctional Services Act requires that, "Sufficient work must as far as is practicable be provided to keep (sentenced) prisoners active for a normal working day and a prisoner may be compelled to do such work".²³ Work performed by prisoners serve several purposes: it keeps prisoners busy during the day and prevents idleness and boredom; it increases the capacity of the prison system to maintain itself through production and maintenance; and prisoners can, depending on

22 The pharmaceutical Largactil has been associated with a "shuffling walk" and referred to as the "Largactil shuffle" by prisoners in England and Australia. There is no evidence to indicate that Largactil is used in South Africa, but the symptoms described by the participant indicate that this could be the case. (See Largactil, available on <http://www.depression-guide.com/largactil.htm>. Accessed 5 June 2009, Shoobridge, J., Vincent, N, Biven, A, Aillsop, S. Adelaide. (2000). *Using Rapid Assessment Methodology to Examine Injecting Drug use in an Aboriginal Community*. National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA)/Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council of SA (ADAC)/Lower Murray Nunga's Club (LMNC), p. 93.

23 Section 40(1).

the nature of the work, acquire skills and develop a work ethic. It is unfortunately the case that very few prisoners are in fact working in the prison. Of the 115,000 sentenced prisoners in custody on average in 2007/8, only 20,174 were performing work, and more than half of these were working through job opportunities created by the private sector.²⁴ It should also be borne in mind that many work opportunities may not keep a prisoner busy for the full day, but may only be for a few hours per day or not even every day.

In the above reference was already made to participants' comments about boredom, referred to as "eet en lê". Participants noted two issues around work opportunities in prison from their experiences. Firstly, that work opportunities are not only scarce, according to participants, but were manipulated (by correctional officials) in their experience and often open to corruption. Secondly, those prisoners who did perform work, especially those supporting professional services such as education, were not properly acknowledged or remunerated for their work. Participants described their experiences as follows: *There are certain jobs that you can do in prison. But if you lay [too] many complaints and requests, they will take your job away from you again and you will be placed in a "eet en lê" section ... You must also pay a bribe to get a job in prison ... There are warders who are educators but they do very little to assist in actual education. It is mostly the prisoners that do the education ... They ride on the backs of prisoners. They are just interested in the merits they can get, but you don't even get a thank you ... I had to do a lot of the social workers' administrative work.*

The few prisoners who are given the opportunity to perform work in prison earn a gratuity for this. While this is not payment in the strict sense of the word, for many prisoners this will be their only income to cover some continuous expenses such as toiletries but also enables them to save money for when they are released. The scales at which the gratuities are paid are extremely low and it is thus a bone of contention. Even at the highest end of the scale a prisoner will earn R1, 200 per year at 2006 scales. One participant, who worked as an educator during his term of imprisonment, expressed himself as follows: *People are also aggrieved about the money they earn. I earned R98 per month for being an educator. Others earn as little as R14 or R9 per month. The result is that people do other extra things to supplement their money.*

Gratuity per month for prisoners performing labour

Prisoners performing labour in prison receive a gratuity based on the complexity of the work and three levels with different notches are provided for. The figures below are for 2006 indicating the monthly payment received

<i>Level I:</i>	<i>Level II:</i>	<i>Level III:</i>
<i>Notch I: R 9-24</i>	<i>Notch I: R43-56</i>	<i>Notch I: R75-24</i>
<i>Notch II: R17-16</i>	<i>Notch II: R50-16</i>	<i>Notch II: R87-12</i>
<i>Notch III: R26-40</i>	<i>Notch III: R58-08</i>	

What makes a good warder?

Participants were in agreement that not all warders treat prisoners badly and that there were indeed a significant proportion of warders who performed their job well and treated prisoners with respect. It was against this background that the question was posed: what makes a good warder? The participants emphasised three broad traits characterising a good warder: good communication skills and respect; showing integrity and fairness; and having a passion for the work and encouraging prisoners. The participants also noted that being a so-called "good warder" has its challenges in a work environment where colleagues may not necessarily be supportive of a colleague exhibiting these positive qualities.

Communications skills and respect

Treating prisoners with respect and listening to them appear to be core qualities of a good warder. From the participants' responses it was clear that the worst experience of being imprisoned is to be ignored, or to be made to feel as something sub-human. Warders who listen and give, presumably constructive, feed-back were regarded as meeting an important

²⁴ Department of Correctional Services. (2008). *Annual Report 2007/8*. Pretoria: Department of Correctional Services, p. 53.

requirement of being a good warder: *He listens and keeps his word ... If he can listen and is a man of his word ... People that listen ... Do they greet you like another person? ... If he treats you as a person.*

Providing feed-back and explaining a decision, even if it did not go the way of the prisoner, was also regarded as a positive trait: *He shows respect. He helps if he can and if he can't, he explains to you why. There is communication ... They come back to you after an incident and talk to you. One warder spoke to me through a whole night when I was in a difficult spot, encouraging me to hang in because I have potential. It is somebody who does his work. He understands how a person should be treated.*

One participant related his experiences as follows: *I met three people that were good to me; two were women. They treated me like a human being. The one would come (at Mangaung) and sit on my bed and talk to me. She could relate to me like another human. At Leeuwkop, I met a warder who, when you asked him for something, he will actually give you feed-back.*

Integrity and fairness

Demonstrating integrity and treating prisoners fairly were noted as positive characteristics in warders: *[He is] A person of integrity. There is a member at Pollsmoor with whom I argued regularly but we would always reach consensus. If he can say he is sorry [it is good]. He won't smuggle, he is fair. He does not lie ... He does not discriminate or give favours to some prisoners ... A good warder is somebody who, if he promises something, takes personal responsibility [for it].*

Fair treatment also had an alleged racial dimension to it, as explained by a white participant: *White warders won't help white prisoners; they are scared of being accused of favouring white prisoners. If I wanted some assistance I would go to a black warder.*

I have seen warders who have a lot of heart and passion.

In the prison environment where corruption can be endemic and prisoners are entirely dependent on officials, fairness and integrity bring a measure of emotional safety and security as well as predictability into the relationship between prisoners and warders.

Encouragement and passion for the work

Working with prisoners is by all accounts a difficult and demanding task requiring particular skills, but perhaps above all, requires a particular attitude towards the work. The participants in the discussion groups were quick to identify this attitude as a key characteristic for a good warder and described it as a "passion for the work" and "having a heart for prisoners" as well as "having a commitment to serve prisoners".

Demonstrating this passion for the work was remarked upon in several ways by the participants: *I was on the Recreation Committee and this warder did a lot for us. He would take us out to events, sport and choir. But it is often the situation that you have one warder who is committed but when he is not there, then nothing happens. There will not be sport that day when he is not there ... [But in respect of the helpful warder], when you make a request for an event for example, he will work on it and support you. He will support you for the positive things.*

One participant related in a fair amount of detail his positive experience of a warder when he was admitted to a youth prison. From his description it is clear that the official went beyond the call of duty and showed a special interest in him. It was perhaps this level of sincere interest shown that he appreciated most:

When I went in, I was very young. You first go to the Observation section. I was there for two weeks and people there tell many stories. There was a Family Day [event] and my parents left something that had to be returned to them. This one warder took this thing and returned it to my family as he lived in the same township. He also used the opportunity to speak to my family about me. This warder then came back and he spoke to me and he said: "You are going to be here for 10 years and you have been here for two weeks. What is your plan? Why don't you go to school and get your qualifications." He also said: "Your friends on the outside are not waiting for you, when you come out they will have jobs and qualifications, what are you going to do?" It is because of him that I started going to school. It was fortunate that my appeal was successful and I was released. He even visited me after my release. He motivated me a lot because he was very direct about what the options were.

Another participant relates a similar story of being given practical advice and then assisted to be placed in a section that was more conducive to his goals: *The social worker at Boksburg said to me: "It's up to you, I cannot change you. You can do Grade 12 in here, it's free of charge." I was in B-section, which is a very difficult section, and she assisted in getting me transferred to another section that was better for when you are learning and doing education.*

The challenges of being "a good warder"

Being regarded as "good warder" is, however, not without risk and participants identified the problem quickly. A warder who acts against a dominant negative sub-culture can find himself isolated and not being able to rely on collegial support: *The majority are corrupt. They will work out the good warder ... Good warders do not stay long; they get frustrated and there is a lack of recognition. They create enemies for themselves.* The researcher enquired about a particular official by name who is well known for his innovative approaches and the response from participants confirmed the earlier descriptions in this regard: *He is regarded as fair, but [he] was worked out for allegedly causing conflict. Good warders are treated badly by the system.*

There is of course the risk that the so-called good warder can be misused or may even doubt his own boundary-setting with prisoners: *I saw warders with a good heart and then every prisoner wants to go to him and ask for assistance. After a while he thinks that people want to take advantage of him and that maybe they think he is an idiot. It is then that they start changing or they leave the prison and find other employment.*



AFTER PRISON AND RE-ENTRY

What is most difficult about being out?

The participants described a wide range of challenges they faced upon release and thereafter. Some of these were immediate, such as finding accommodation, while others dealt with more enduring issues, such as reconnecting to society and the community. Four main problems areas emerged from the discussions:

- finding employment;
- re-establishing family relations;
- re-connecting to community and society; and
- the allure of the prison.

Finding employment

Finding employment after prison was perhaps the challenge foremost in the minds of the participants. In the case of the two focus groups in Gauteng, none of the participants found employment in the first six months after they were released. Having a criminal record and having spent time in prison became, according to the participants, a categorical exclusion from employment: *[The hardest is] [F]inding a job. You are constantly up against these walls. Everyone is prejudiced ... You want to start a new life but you can't find anything to do. No job. Your friends don't come around and say here is a job ... Even if you have skills, you apply for a job and you fill in the forms. Then there is the question: do you have a criminal record? You think of not telling the truth. But you know if you are honest they will not respond honestly ... You come out of prison and you want to be honest but you need to lie about being in prison in order to get by ... You go for an interview. They would tell you that they'll call you but they never do. There is just no response. I have applied for jobs at nine places before I found work; it is the (criminal) record every time.* Even for those who have found employment, this may not be the end of their employment problems as explained by one participant: *And if you have a (criminal) record, then they underpay you. I am now discriminated against because of a workplace injury. The boss doesn't want to claim workmen's compensation because he has had a problem with the CCMA (Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration). The employer can also call (DCS) Community Corrections (if they have a problem with you). They are just like the warders.*

You come out of prison and you want to be honest but you need to lie about being in prison in order to get by.

The issue of honesty when applying for employment seems to be a double-edged sword: if a criminal record is disclosed on application then it results in rejection, and if it is not disclosed but discovered later it can be used against the employee as proof of his dishonesty. A participant from one of the Cape Town groups explained that he was able to find employment but never disclosed his criminal record or time spent in prison to his employer: *I work at [name of large retail chain] but I keep quiet about prison; maybe they will find out. Maybe they know and will use it against me later.* A participant who used his time in prison well explain the application and interview processes as follows: *I went to school in prison and achieved a lot. I made many job applications but I can't say anything about a criminal record in these applications. It is only when you get to the interview that you try and convince them that you are able to do the job but they don't want to listen. As soon as the [criminal] record comes out, you know it is over.*

One participant explained that he wanted to start his own business but was discriminated against by a development financing institution: *[The worst is the] [D]iscrimination against you. I wanted to start a business and went to Umsobomvu [Youth Fund] for a loan but they would not accept me because I am on parole.* Another participant went back to his previous employer who was initially agreeable to take him back until they found out that he had been to prison: *I was working at [name of business] and after prison I went back there for my job. They asked me where I [have been] and I said that I was in prison. They just said take your stuff and go, we don't employ criminals.*

It is also a generally accepted notion that many ex-prisoners do not know how to find employment. Many come from such economically marginalised environments that they have had little contact with the formal economy and its employment practices: *They [DCS] need to train people on how to look for employment - how to communicate properly, how to conduct yourself in an interview.*

Re-establishing family relations

They always keep my history in their mind. I disappointed them many times.

Admittedly many former prisoners have subjected their families to hardship, disappointment and even victimisation. Building a constructive relationship with families and establishing a level of trust emerged as a major challenge once released from prison. While in prison, the strained relationships with families could either be ignored or managed from a distance, but once released they need to be confronted. Families may also have certain expectations that may either be unrealistic or not part of a new life plan as described in the following excerpt: *As time goes by people change. It is my difficulty to reintegrate with my family. I still can't talk to my children. As time went by (after release) they realised that I will not fulfil their expectations (to give money). Your family expects you to provide the money; they don't ask where it comes from (he was not willing to engage in crime anymore). The children want the money I "owe" them after I have been in prison for 20 years. Also if you don't have a shelter (house) - they kicked me out. If you can't integrate (meet their needs) they see you as the enemy.*

Participants had a good sense that based on their past behaviour it may not be that easy to be accepted by their families again: *Gaining respect and trust from your family. It is difficult for your family to trust you again ... [The hardest is] for your family to accept you ... They always keep my history in their mind. I disappointed them many times. ... There is also discrimination in the family. I borrowed some money (R50) from my uncle but he doesn't trust me that I will pay it back. ... I did three long sentences. When I got home it was OK for the first two weeks. But if you don't bring in anything (money) it is difficult. They hide the food and their wallets.*

While in prison family circumstances may also change dramatically making it impossible for them to return to the family: *I came out and I did not have a father or a mother ... I faced many challenges. I was raised by my single mother. When I got back to her house after prison, there was nobody in that household working (all were unemployed). It was my mother, my sister and her two children living in that shack. I could not stay there. Fortunately my friend helped me with a place to stay ... Things were never the same again. My grandmother can't talk anymore (due to a stroke). The house in which we stayed belonged to my grandmother but now it belongs to my uncle. I had a dream; I wanted to become a merchant.²⁵ It is now my uncle's house and I could not do these things there. There was no space for me in the house, so I was sleeping on the stoep.* In this case it was perhaps better that family circumstances changed.

²⁵ "Merchant" is used as a slang term especially in the Western Cape for a person dealing in illegal and/or stolen goods and liquor.

Re-connecting to community and society

Participants who served longer terms of imprisonment explained that they experienced great difficulties in reconnecting to society and their communities: *The world has changed in 13 years. You are lost when you come out. Nobody helps you to learn the new things ... On the short [term] it is easy - people are happy to see you again, but on the long term it is difficult.* Another participant, who is now assisting other former prisoners, described an incident involving a released long term prisoner: *Some of the prisoners are just kicked out of prison. We found a man (released prisoner) sitting and crying on the island on the N7 (highway near Goodwood correctional centre) because he did not know what to do and where to go.*

A general sense of suspicion and alienation was described by a number of participants. At the core of this was, according to the participants, a belief by community members that an offender cannot change: *Some people (neighbours) don't trust me to come into their house. They will say welcome, but, "just wait there at the door please" ... They greet you with a huge smile but with serious hate behind it. Then they turn around [to their friends and neighbours] and say "don't allow him to come near your children". They only trust you when you have money. If anything goes missing, you are the first suspect.* The participant went on to describe the following incident: *During a [church] service a cell phone went missing and the pastor [who knew he had been in prison] announced this during the service. This happened right in front in the church and I was sitting at the right at the back. When the pastor announced that a phone has gone missing, everyone turned around to look at me.*

In the two Gauteng groups participants related a number of interactions that they have had with DCS officials after their release. They described these as extremely hurtful and embarrassing: *The stigma that the community attaches to you is very hard to deal with. Even DCS officials when they meet you after you have been released still stigmatise you. At a recent [DCS] event at Emperor's Palace it was like that again. They call you an ex-offender and this is very negative. Is one to remain an ex-offender for the rest of your life? If I divorce my wife, will I forever be her ex-husband; is that what people will call me, the ex-husband of [name of wife]? I have even heard DCS officials calling somebody an inmate (in isiZulu) on the outside. What does that mean? ... Even after prison, when you meet DCS officials they will say: I can't believe that you are still out, when are you coming back?*

Former prisoners are frequently returning to the same communities and same social networks. Dealing with the same social networks can be a challenging experience and requires self-discipline, but this may come at a cost: *With the old friends you need to be very firm and have self-discipline ... They expected me to be the same but when they saw that I have changed, they said that I am scared or maybe an informer. This is very hard... At first they accepted me. They ask lots of questions about what happens in prison, they ask if people have sex with each other and this happens. All these questions are really mental torture. Remembering and trying to forget what happened in prison may indeed be a very difficult part of re-entry.*

Two of the participants described how they have become involved in development projects to the benefit of the community, but even in this they were facing challenges of stigmatisation: *I and two other guys are running a development project for children in my community, but there are only two children from my street there. I had to relocate to another street to start this project where people did not know my face ... Mostly I do community projects. One project I help with is to take learners to prison to show them what happens in prisons. I am just there to monitor and guide. The programme stopped due to the xenophobic attacks. The programme re-started but now at [name of prison] they are saying that they don't want ex-prisoners to guide the learners.*

It was noticeable during the four group discussions that only one participant raised the relationship that he wishes to restore with the victims of his crime but reported that *"they don't want to forgive me"*. Despite all the talk about restorative justice at policy level, there is little evidence to suggest that it has filtered down to operational level.

The allure of the prison and the gang

Five of the participants described the challenges they faced upon release and how these have tempted them to return to prison or to join a gang on the outside: *When you come out, there is nobody for you. You stay with other people and you cannot do as you please. Then you start thinking back to the prison. That is why some prisoners don't want to go out. "Ons*

Some people (neighbours) don't trust me to come into their house. They will say welcome, but, "just wait there at the door please".

Even after prison, when you meet DCS officials they will say: "I can't believe that you are still out, when are you coming back?"

Going back to the gangs was the only option for me. Their house is never closed.

wat wetgeslaan het” (We who made the law in prison)²⁶ decided who could go out and who can’t. When you go out we said “jy het die hekke gekry” (you received the gates) but then you had to work for us from the outside.

For some of those gang members released, the loss of social standing and a support network was significant: *You hear the voices [calling] from prison. The compliments you received [when you were there] like “his number is standing strong”. On the outside I don’t have any money. The voices are calling you back; they say go and steal. When I go out for the day, I wear an extra set of clothing underneath just in case I get arrested so that I have an extra set of clothing in prison (when awaiting trial) ... I had great expectations [when leaving prison] but I am not finding employment. Going back to the gangs was the only option for me. Their house is never closed. It is difficult for people coming out of prison. I have seen men who made the law²⁷ in prison who are now [reduced to] begging and foraging on the streets of Cape Town²⁸ ... They called me “No fear” because I fear nothing. I thought of joining the 4th camp²⁹, but decided against it.*

Years of prison routine brings its own challenges when a person returns to family life and even the smallest deviations can become a source of significant stress: *You leave the prison and get R8 or R20. But when I saw how the Cape has changed, I became scared. You still have the mindset of a “bandiet”. You arrive at home but you have developed these habits in prison – by 5 pm everything must be cleaned up and everyone had their supper. But at home you see at 9 or 10 pm the children are still walking around and haven’t bathed yet. You don’t get the space to adapt. So you go back. It is easier to deal with this problem in prison.*

Post release support services

Studies on prisoner re-entry is a fast emerging field in especially US-based research and seeks to understand what happens to prisoners when they are released, and in particular what hurdles they face.³⁰ Returning prisoners typically face challenges in four dimensions:

- **Issues facing individual returning prisoners:** Returning prisoners confront a range of personal issues that jeopardize their chances of succeeding in the community and avoiding reoffending. Substance abuse, mental illness, lack of accommodation, being HIV-positive or having Aids, being unemployed and having low educational qualifications are some personal challenges faced by released prisoners.
- **Impact of prisoner re-entry on families:** Returning parents have to resume or start assuming the role of parent in a family set-up that often faces significant challenges. Families may in themselves experience deep-seated problems and therefore have great difficulty in accepting a family member or parent that has been in prison. The incarceration of a parent remains an important indicator for future delinquency amongst children.
- **Impact of prisoner re-entry on communities:** There is increasing evidence that certain communities and indeed certain families contribute disproportionately to the prison population and that high incarceration communities are destabilized in a variety of ways.³¹ The net effect is large numbers of predominantly young men circulating through the prison system on a continuous basis from these communities.
- **Challenges to prisoner re-entry:** “Returning prisoners confront a number of challenges that make it difficult for them to gain access to jobs, benefits, or services that might assist in their transition back into the community”.³² Unlike the USA, there are few barriers that legally exclude released prisoners from state assistance, but poor support services, uncoordinated services or absence of services to released prisoners and their families remains a significant problem.

In the course of the discussion groups, three issues were explored, namely post-release support received from DCS through its Community Corrections Directorate, the relationship between released prisoners on parole and their parole officers, and support received from non-governmental and faith based organisations.

²⁶ “Ons wat wetgeslaan het” is a reference to the powerful prison gang leaders who interpreted and applied gang law and rules.

²⁷ See Note 26.

²⁸ Afr. “Ek het gesien manne wat wetgeslaan het daar binne, skarrel nou op die strate van Kaapstad.”

²⁹ Afr. “die vierdie kamp” or street gangs.

³⁰ Baer, D, et al (2006). *Understanding the Challenges of Prisoner Re-entry: Research Findings from the Urban Institute’s Prisoner Re-entry Portfolio*. Washington: Urban Institute, p. 1

³¹ Clear, T. (2007). *Imprisoning Communities – How Mass Incarceration Makes Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods Worse*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³² Social, Economic and Workforce Programs Division. (2004). *The Challenges and Impacts of Prisoner Re-entry*, NGA Centre for Best Practices. Available on <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/REENTRYBACKGROUND.pdf> Accessed 16 May 2008.

Post-release support from DCS

Effective post-release support must start with effective release preparation to reduce the risk of re-offending and increase the potential for successful re-entry. The participants were in general dissatisfied with the manner in which they were prepared for release. One participant described the pre-release programme used by the DCS as follows:

The pre-release programme from DCS does not really help. They tell how traffic lights work; green means go and red stop. But we know these things, this is not useful. How do you really prepare a person for release? You are really just dumped outside. We need a proper reintegration programme. DCS must at least try to have a reintegration programme. There are different options but they need to try harder to make it work, like learnerships.

The participants were asked if they had received any information from DCS regarding available resources to former prisoners, such as the names and contact details of government departments or non-governmental organisations. From their responses it was evident in all four groups that such information was not provided: *I had so many expectations but because of challenges DCS never gave me options or steered me towards opportunities ... I did not receive any information about where I can go for assistance ... They only told me to behave myself and adhere to the rules ... I only received my medical profile to take it to the clinic ... I was only given the contact details of the community corrections office ... Apart from [name of NGO], nobody received any information about service providers. ... No, from DCS you don't get any information.*

Active support from DCS as well as other agencies appears to be lacking as described in the following statements: *I spoke to the Parole Board chair and he promised to come back to me but he has not come back to me. ... I waited for 5 years and they still have not come back to me ... In the past few months I have been to DCS Community Corrections, [name of NGO], and Department of Social Development. Not one of these institutions gives a shit about me. DCS is not interested. Welfare [Department of Social Development] says it is a DCS problem. Everyone has an excuse.*

While a number of participants described being on parole as a positive experience, the overwhelming majority criticised the overt policing function which parole supervision has been reduced to. Positive experiences were described as follows: *The parole supervision helped me. I have 3 years' parole. I just had to submit myself to it; it was difficult but I did ... My experience of parole is the same. The parole helped me. I had a very supportive parole officer.*

On the other hand, the emphasis on ensuring that parolees abide by their parole conditions has apparently supplanted other aims supportive of successful re-entry: *They did not explain parole conditions to me, they just said you must stay at home ... I received no assistance. They are only interested in parole violations. One day I was working and they said it was a violation and I explained that I was working and they just said: what is important to you, work or parole? ... You must just sign that you are at home. The DCS Community Corrections likes to embarrass you - they want to publicly humiliate you at your workplace. They come there in their uniforms and just barge in saying "sign here, sign here" and then they walk off ... They come into your house and walk around in it as if it is their house; they go to the kitchen and the bedroom and look around. I did not invite them in ... They just intimidate you. ... If you rent (accommodation) at people, Community Corrections [officials] come there and it is embarrassing, so you need your own place.*

Relationship between parolees and parole officers

At an individual level, a significant number of participants reported that they experienced the relationship they had with their parole officers as positive: *I could call my parole officer if there was a problem. He was able to think outside the box. He even asked why I did not apply for amnesty for my parole ... I had a good relationship with my parole officer and I am lucky with him. He has integrity. He is flexible and he knows I am involved in many community activities, so I will sometimes be late ... I am also fortunate. I was told communication is the key. I don't have a problem with my case officer. He is understanding. When you are arrogant with them, they can play that game with you as well. ... I have a good relationship because [name of NGO employee] facilitated contact between me and Community Corrections.*

Parolees are assigned case officers, referred to above as parole officers, but the case officers are not the only officials who monitor parolees and the case officer may not be available at the local community corrections office when the parolee is contacting him or her. A number of participants remarked on the lack of coordination in the Community Corrections offices of DCS: *I had a good relationship with my parole officer but when he was not there it is a problem - they don't pick up the phone or if you leave a message, they don't pass it on ... It is sometimes difficult to get hold of your parole officer. You leave*

In the past few months I have been to DCS Community Corrections, [name of NGO], and Department of Social Development. Not one of these institutions gives a shit about me. DCS is not interested. Welfare [Department of Social Development] says it is a DCS problem. Everyone has an excuse.

I am subservient to them because they can make a decision that can adversely affect me. So I say, let me give him what he wants even if this is not really who I am.

a message for him but he does not get it. Or it is a different person that comes to visit and he does not understand your situation. These things cause problems with Community Corrections.

In the middle of the night they knock on the door in a loud and disrespectful manner. They scream outside the house "Correctional Services" so that the whole neighbourhood can hear.

Participants were, however, deeply offended by the behaviour of some Community Corrections officials in the execution of their monitoring duties as reflected in the following comments: *In the middle of the night they knock on the door in a loud and disrespectful manner. They scream outside the house "Correctional Services" so that the whole neighbourhood can hear ... They make a big noise in the middle of the night. Even at a wedding they came to monitor the best man (laughs) ... They just want to show that they are in charge. They take bribes because they want to supplement their income ... Sometimes you just quickly go the tuck-shop to get something and that is when they arrive. You hear your family calling for you and you run to get there but they just drive off and leave the piece of paper saying that this is a violation and you know that you are in trouble ... At Benoni they have these special monitoring operations and they come with 25 vehicles, guns and bullet proof vests. It is really scary. And all you need to do is sign that you were at home ... They come with a very nasty attitude. In front of your wife they want to humiliate you.*

While some officials seem to be flexible in the monitoring of parolees, some of the participants reported a level of inflexibility and also remarked on the practical difficulties of being on parole and trying to find employment: *The home visits are also difficult because you go and look for jobs between 8 am and 12 pm but they come there when you are not there. They also knock off at 4 pm so if you are little late from a piece job, you are in trouble. If you found a job, they want verification that you are employed and then you must tell your employer that you are on parole and then you lose the job ... On a Monday I went to the hospital with my child, so I went to Community Corrections on the Tuesday to go and explain (why I was not at home on the Monday) but my monthly meeting was scheduled for the Thursday. Nobody was interested in helping me so that I don't have to come in on the Thursday again for the monthly meeting.*

Parolees are obliged to attend a monthly meeting with their case officer at the local community corrections office. Attending these meetings and looking for employment while trying not to violate parole conditions appears to be a major problem for parolees: *Transport to and from the office is expensive. You must be looking for work and it takes your money or you have not been paid yet, or you end up at a place that has no phone; how must you let your parole officer know that you will not be at home today. You get piece jobs at short notice and you take it, but they (DCS) may come and visit. You take that risk. I found such work and had 7 or 8 violations. I had to take my employer there (Community Corrections) as a witness to explain why I was not at home when they came looking for me.*

Some of the participants questioned the purpose of monitoring parolees, arguing that this form of supervision will not prevent crime: *People will commit crime if they want to and the supervision will not make a difference. ... The monitoring system will not stop people from committing crime. They should be more interested in what happens to people when they leave prison ... We have introspected and we have decided not to commit crime anymore.*

Support from NGOs and FBOs

The participants of the four groups involved in the discussions were associated with four organisations, namely Khulisa, Realistic, GRYM (Get Real Youth in Mission) and Focodi (Former Convicted Offenders Development Initiative). The participants had made contact with these organisations prior to release or after their release and became actively involved in them. Two of these organisations, GRYM and Focodi, were established by prisoners who then continued their activities for the benefit of prisoners and ex-prisoners after their release. All the participants were consequently recipients of support services rendered by these organisations. Some of them have found employment through their involvement in these organisations, while others remain unemployed. That prisoners and ex-prisoners are starting their own organisations is seen as a positive development but it is also indicative that existing organisations with a mandate to render support services to ex-prisoners may not be meeting their needs.

Given the large number of prisoners released every month in South Africa, it is unlikely that these organisations, some of which are unfunded, will be able to continue to meet the need. However, an important advantage of these organisations is their strong involvement in community structures and cooperative relationships with other local community based organisations. They may also have a closer link to local level political structures and local government as noted in the following comment: *If you are not part of the ward committee you will not know what is going on. It is at the ward committee that the IDP (Integrated Development Plan) is discussed.*



CONCLUSIONS

For many observers of the South African prison system the information presented in the above will not be new; much of this has, perhaps in more abstract way, been noted by the Jali Commission, the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services and other researchers. This research project did, however, attempt to make an additional point than to merely present information about the prison system in South Africa; namely the importance of seeing prisoners and former prisoners as important stakeholders in the discourse on imprisonment and the critical importance of **listening** to them. In the course of the discussions undertaken for this project, it became increasingly clear that it is not the loss of liberty that is the most challenging aspect of imprisonment, but rather “not being listened to” – to be ignored, trivialised and pushed aside. This research is an attempt to counter that experience at the level of prison reform.

From the discussions it was evident that prisoners keep a very close eye on prison officials; they are constantly watched, their actions and statements analysed and ruminated on by prisoners. Events and interactions that may seem insignificant to officials may have great importance to a prisoner or group of prisoners. While many positive aspects were noted, there is reason for concern: violence, coercion, manipulation, corruption, and aloofness were some of the problems identified. The relationship between prisoners and officials are important to overall system performance and research from England concluded that a hostile, superior, contemptuous, or dismissive attitude by staff members constitute an attack on the prisoner’s self esteem leading to resentment against both the officials and the values and standards he symbolises.³³ The feedback on what is a “good warder” provides some answers on what is required. It is based on these daily interactions that individual officials develop identities in the eyes of prisoners but also the institution itself develops a particular identity. Participants in the research were able to easily identify prisons which they felt were well managed and where prisoners were treated properly by staff, but the opposite was also true.

The information from this project builds on the notion of morality in prison³⁴ and emphasises the importance of the minutiae of daily interactions between prisoners or parolees, as the case may be, and officials of the DCS. Respect, humanity, fairness, order, personal development and well-being have been identified in other research as dimensions of the moral performance or moral climate of a prison.³⁵ Although this research did not explore each of these concepts in detail, the responses from participants clearly pointed in the direction of these characteristics of moral performance, and also extended these to post-release experiences and, in particular, their interactions with officials after release.

It is common cause that the South African prison system is a system in transformation; reinventing itself from the apartheid era prison characterised by brutality and punishment, to one that emphasises human rights and rehabilitation. It is, however, in this transitional phase that tensions are emerging between prisoners and prison management. The struggle is no longer for basic rights to be recognised in law or policy, but rather that the recognised rights and stated objectives of the correctional system are implemented. The boredom and idleness noted in the group discussions are indicative of prisoners’ demand for education, training and work opportunities in the prison system. The ability of the DCS to deliver on these objectives frequently leads to disappointment and growing doubt by prisoners and parolees of the true intentions of DCS.

At a more substantive level, it remains cause for concern that participants reported such an overwhelming sense of lack of personal safety. Maintaining safe and secure custody is a Constitutional obligation placed on the state, but based on this research, as well as other information, it is concluded that there are many shortcomings in this regard. An unsafe prison environment has a negative impact on both prisoners and staff. Providing information upon admission, orientation of new prisoners, proper supervision, managing risks proactively and effective responses to victimisation are key responses in making prisons safer.

33 Liebling, A. (2004). *Prisons and their Moral Performance – A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 229.

34 Liebling, A. (2004). *Prisons and their Moral Performance – A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

35 Liebling, A. (2004). *Prisons and their Moral Performance – A Study of Values, Quality and Prison Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 458.

Too few prisoners are involved in comprehensive and structured programmes that will prepare them thoroughly for release. The extent to which the existing pre-release programme prepares prisoners for release was questioned by the participants. A more structured, focussed and integrated approach is required. Research from elsewhere has already established the principles for effective programmes and these must be reflected on:

- risk classification should determine the nature of programmes;
- targeting criminogenic needs, such anti-social attitudes and drug dependency;
- programme integrity is maintained by adhering to the plan and using appropriately skilled staff;
- responsivity by matching teaching styles with learning styles;
- treatment modality - interventions are skills-based, aimed at problem-solving, social interaction and includes a cognitive component to address attitudes, values and beliefs supporting offending behaviour;
- community-based programmes.³⁶

The group discussions yielded convincing accounts of the challenges people face when leaving prison and more importantly, the lack of services available to them. There is also an overwhelming sense that parole supervision has been reduced to a policing function and that very limited support services are indeed rendered to parolees. Structured post-release support services are essential for reducing re-offending. Recommendations in this regard have been made elsewhere and are summarised below:

- Successful re-entry will be improved if a comprehensive case management approach is followed that sees active involvement of the offender/parolee, officials, family members and community structures. Such an approach must be based on continuity in planning and monitoring from well before release until completion of parole/correctional supervision. In qualifying cases, such a release plan needs to be a natural product of the sentence plan.
- The case management plan must identify and address specific risk factors in the individual's life that may place him at risk of re-offending.
- The DCS should develop a detailed data base of community-based resources that may be of assistance to all ex-prisoners. Prisoners who are about to be released should be properly briefed on the nature and locality of such services in their area of residence.
- Families of prisoners need to be prepared for release and made part of the re-entry process.
- A more strategic and active approach needs to be implemented in respect of securing employment for released prisoners.
- Mental health assessments should be done during imprisonment and specifically prior to release.
- Substance abuse treatment must start prior to release and link individuals to community-based resources on an individual basis.
- Prior to release, it should be ensured that a prisoner has an identity document. It should similarly be ensured that the prisoner and his family have access to social security benefits if they qualify.
- Parolees and probationers need to be properly educated about their community corrections conditions as well as problem-solving in this regard.
- Parolees and probationers should be compelled to participate in regular community-based support and development activities with a view to developing pro-social networks and accessing assistance.³⁷
- There is a small number of non-governmental and community based organisations in South Africa rendering services to prisoners and ex-prisoners.³⁸ Financially they are dependent on donor agencies and in a limited number of cases they receive subsidies from the Department of Social Development. These organisations render an invaluable service to the DCS yet receive, as far as could be established, no financial support from this department. This situation must be addressed as a matter of urgency to augment the capacity of the DCS in a strategic manner, especially when rendering support services to former prisoners.

36 See Dünkel, F. and Van Zyl Smit, D. (2001). Conclusion. In Dünkel, F. and Van Zyl Smit, D., *Imprisonment Today and Tomorrow* (p. 822). The Hague: Kluwer Law.

37 Muntingh, L. (2008). *Prisoner re-entry in Cape Town - An Exploratory Study*, CSPRI Research Report No. 14. Bellville: Community Law Centre, p. 55.

38 Muntingh, L. (2008). *A Societal Responsibility: The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Prisoner Support, Rehabilitation and Reintegration*. Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies.

Lastly, this report reflected on the views of ex-prisoners about imprisonment and re-entry after imprisonment in an attempt to bring these voices into the discourse on prison reform in South Africa. Prisoners and parolees are important stakeholders in this process, but they have, unfortunately, for too long not been heard. It is not argued that their opinions carry more weight than others, but rather that their voices need to be heard and reflected on if the process of transformation is to be successful.

