

**Inquiry into support for children of imprisoned parents in New South Wales**  
**Supplementary questions**

**1. How do you become aware if any children and young people in your programs have imprisoned parents?**

As an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), our staff/management have deep connections to the communities we work within and often know the family of the children and young people we work with. We are often already aware of the parents, grandparents and family/community ties.

For new referrals of children/young people we don't know we first receive a referral which identifies and outlines the challenges the young person is experiencing which may include that one or both of their parents being incarcerated. After we receive the referral and accept the child/young person into our service, we then conduct a 'holistic needs assessment' which is a comprehensive evaluation of the young person's circumstances, including their strengths, challenges and family circumstances. Through this, Deadly Connections is able to build on their strengths, better understand the unique and individual context of the young person and respond to this appropriately.

In the situation of group programs, once we have begun to build trust and rapport with the young people involved, they will slowly open up and disclose more information about their personal life, including if they have parents imprisoned.

We don't try to rush this process but allow these relationships and bonds to form naturally over time. It is important to keep in mind that this is a gradual process and isn't going to happen overnight but our links to community ensure that we are already have connections and underlying ties. The young people first need to feel that there is a genuine and meaningful relationship in place. It is then in this place of safety that more information can be shared.

**2. What activities or strategies do you undertake, to help children understand or cope with having an imprisoned parent?**

We adopt a strengths-based, holistic model that empowers participants and builds independence. All our staff have lived experience and also operate through a 'credible messenger' model. Being able to relate to children from a lived experience perspective is essential in understanding the position of the children/young people we are working with. Deadly Connections builds trust and rapport with the young people we work alongside. Being on the same level, rather than a position of authority allows Deadly Connections staff to meaningfully connect with young people and better understand their circumstances.

Over time, this means we can have hard conversations with them about not continuing the cycle of incarceration that their parents may be currently in. We

develop and implement initiatives that seek to demonstrate that there is more to life than being imprisoned and build on their strengths to empower them.

The foundation of our work is built on connecting the young people we work with to their culture and cultural identity which we know serves as a protective factor. The more these individuals can become closer to their culture, the further away they move from other 'anti-social' behaviour or distractions. This is empowering and improves the self-determination of young people so that they can make their own informed decisions.

Overall, we take an individualised and tailored approach to each young person and adapt to their circumstances so we can support them to move in a direction that promotes positive outcomes.

### **3. Are child facilities in NSW prisons culturally appropriate?**

#### **a) What would 'best practice' in prison-based services for Aboriginal children and families look like?**

No, the child facilities in NSW prisons are not culturally appropriate, they actually serve to further traumatise and harm Aboriginal children and parents while removing connection to culture.

Deadly Connections believes 'best practice' would involve firstly analysing the way NSW prisons perpetuate the system of colonialism which disproportionately impacts First Nations people. This would include incarcerating pregnant women or Mothers when there are community-based options available such as Intensive Corrective Orders (ICO). These options could keep parents connected to their children, especially mothers who are single parents.

The provision of healthy and accessible food for children and families visiting their loved ones is imperative.

Developing a safe space for children and families to connect during their periods of incarceration is essential as is the provision of cultural and parental activities during visits.

The provision of transport for families with very little resources is also vital to facilitating contact with children, families, and incarcerated parents.

CSNSW needs to allow more external service providers to facilitate cultural activities for people in custody, their children, and families. It is essential that this is delivered by Aboriginal people themselves.