T R A N S C R I P T

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Inquiry into youth justice centres in Victoria

Melbourne — 17 March 2017

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Ms Claire Seppings.

The CHAIR — Ms Seppings, thank you for joining us to give evidence today. All evidence given at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege, therefore you are protected against any actions for what you say here today. But if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by parliamentary privilege. You are welcome to make a statement to the committee of 5 to 10 minutes or so and then we will open it up for questions. But we are happy to hear you now.

Ms SEPPINGS — Absolutely. Thank you very much for the invitation. It is an honour, but it also helps with my mission in life. I will just read you a brief statement that I think captures what I am trying to cover.

We know that the current system is not sustainable, and we want to see young people who have become involved in the criminal justice system achieve their positive human potential in life and society, thereby reducing community risk and the burden on government budgets that recidivism brings. I have come to learn from my professional and lived experience, and emerging evidence overseas, that the missing link in Australian rehabilitation and reintegration is learning from reformed offenders to inform policy and help individuals struggling to go straight. It makes sense.

My Churchill fellowship was inspirational. I set out to study the rehabilitative role of ex-offenders and ex-prisoners as peer mentors in reintegration models and came back with so much more, including a wide range of long-lasting contacts across the countries I visited who are available to help us further — basically to bring us into line with them. It is important to recognise that not only did I think it was a good idea to pursue this project, but the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, to whom I am eternally grateful, being the broad church it is saw the merit for this project being researched and implemented in Australia. We now have the opportunity with my evidence to bring about much-needed individual and system change. It is time to listen to those with the lived experience.

Not only have all these countries embraced the benefits of prisoners and former prisoners as peer mentors, former criminals and drug addicts now sit at the policy table, working with researchers, civil servants and government ministers to help inform justice, social and health policy reform. They have been driven by their lived experiences to develop and even lead their own agencies and services, employ former convicted persons and work with prison and probation systems to deliver person-centred services, and that 'person-centred' is very important.

I visited 65 agencies in seven weeks — government, non-government, universities and prisons. I spoke to a cross-section of civil servants, prison officers, researchers and criminologists, a broad range of young and adult people who have been in and out of the system, and male and female prisoners. It validated and inspired me beyond my expectations that this is the real way to find and realise real reform. My report covers all my seven recommendations and anyone is welcome to go and look at all of that information.

But cutting to the chase, we also need to change the repeating rhetoric from a straight mainstream lens that is not bringing about the sustainable change individuals and our system need, and I think that hit me even more when I returned from the trip. From the level of conversations they are having in the UK, the US, the Republic of Ireland and in Sweden where I went, I came back and kept on hearing the same rhetoric. I am going to just quote the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, who delivered an inspirational speech on prison reform on 8 February 2016:

> … we need a new approach — one that doesn't waste too much energy discussing big existential questions about the prison population or trap us into often false choices between so-called tough or soft approaches.

He referred to this reform as amounting to the 'the biggest shake-up in the way our prisons are run since the Victorian times'. He said"

> … cutting reoffending is just a pipe dream unless we truly understand the turmoil and the trauma that define the lives of so many who have ended up in prison.
>
> This is a golden opportunity to correct some earlier — often catastrophic — state failure.
>
> …
>
> I want us to build a country where the shame of prior convictions doesn't necessarily hold them back from working and providing for their families.
>
> …

Turning remorse and regret into lives with new meaning.

Finding diamonds in the rough and helping them shine.

And that is what my research and reform mission is all about.

As I mentioned, I have met with Parkville and Malmsbury youth justice centre management staff about my research and recommended — in fact there had been some trouble but then there was trouble after that as well — and spoke to them about the incredible work that an agency in the UK called User Voice does. User Voice was established by Mark Johnson, a former offender. He wrote the book *Wasted* and he is now a Member of the Order of the British Empire. User Voice is 85 per cent staffed by ex-offenders and they have established democratic councils in prisons and probation centres in the community. Incredibly they are in eight prisons across England.

I am going to read this to you here. In the 2015 annual report of the Independent Monitoring Board for HMP Birmingham, the council was described as an area of excellence within the prison. The report states that the prison council 'is an exceptional initiative and challenges many long-held negative perspectives'. The report goes on to suggest that the creation of prison councils should be supported and promoted as a policy initiative.

Through the collaboration of prisoners and prison management HMP Birmingham has seen positive changes. The report concluded that the prison council undoubtedly improves the atmosphere and the levels of safety at the prison. Since their inception User Voice has also been facilitating the views of young and adult offenders reaching the policymakers in Westminster to help shape government policy. You can look at some very inspirational videos on YouTube of them taking the young teenagers into Westminster, and like such an inquiry as this**,** going, 'Why haven't we listened to you directly before?'.

Another incredible example is Hydebank Wood College in Belfast, which has great innovation underway under Governor Austin Treacy. The centre is now called a college and the word 'prisoner' has been changed to 'student'. They conduct many meetings, including ones with the community agencies in Hydebank's cafe that is right in the middle of the college. It is operated by students who are called the cabin crew, who gain hospitality skills — real and definite skills and certificates to take out with them — and they actually deal in real money as well. The staff have their lunch there. The age range of the students in Hydebank Wood College are similar to those in Malmsbury here.

Then we look at U-Casadh — U-turn in English — in the Republic of Ireland, which was established by Stephen Plunkett, a former prison officer. He had become disillusioned with seeing the same people coming in and out of the revolving doors and decided to work with people in the community providing them with an occupation with purpose — and that is important as well — in order to reduce their chances of returning to prison. Their mission is to be a catalyst for change and the attitudes to crime, social exclusion, rehabilitation and justice. They help build entrepreneurialship in their clients and empowerment of self-employment, believing that the empowerment of self-employment removes many obstacles which many of the people who use their service encounter.

What I loved about it there was that they actually ask a very simple question of their clients: what did you want to be when you were growing up? Then while the immediate supports are put in place, such as housing benefits and training, the plan is to head towards their goal and dream occupation. This instils hope, vision and a feeling of empowerment. Again it is the person-centred approach rather than the system-driven outcome.

Even if we look at SOS Brooklyn, which began as a response to the 1991 Brooklyn riots, the staff at SOS, many former gang members with significant prison histories themselves, prevent gun violence from occurring in the catchment area by mediating conflicts that may end in gun violence and acting as peer counsellors. They are called the credible messengers and the violence interrupters to men and women who are at risk of perpetrating or being victimised by violence. So again we keep seeing this thread of the people that have come through the system and have learned how to then be on the better side of that and be an inspiration but also have the credibility with people who are still struggling.

Fletcher and Batty in their research *Offender Peer Interventions* found that offenders may be more likely to turn to peers for help rather than authority figures such as prison officers. 'A lot of people do find it easier to talk to another con rather than an officer. And I think from my own experiences it is the white shirt and the tie and the key and the whistle — it is just that power thing.' In fact one fully paid peer mentor in the Wise Group in

Glasgow said, 'My counsellor cannot be my jailer; it's the power thing'. He chooses to never, ever be given a set of keys or any form of authority when he goes in, but I think that is a key point. When you consider how much funding we continue to keep throwing and throwing and throwing at people who literally cannot say, 'I have walked in your shoes and have the keys, but by the way, trust me to help you become the person that you have never known how to be'.

Probably with that we do tend to focus a lot on the fact that — naturally we know that people that end up in this congested community that is youth justice, detention or a prison — they do come with a myriad of backgrounds and issues and so on. But for me it is a community. It is not a cohort. It is a community of individuals that have their own individual experiences they come with.

Peter Söderlund in Sweden who set up X-CONS had been in and out of prisons in Sweden for over 30 years. He said to me, 'You can stop my drug and alcohol addiction, and I can do that, but I have got to stop being the criminal, and that is my identity. Essentially what you are telling me to do is end my life, the life that I have known, because I know no other'. In telling me that, it was like, so it is here that people come. There was a big sign 'X-CONS', and it is actually in front of a school to normalise it. People who are still struggling, even with addictions or any form of methadone, can go in there and get any of the support they need, because they feel comfortable going there. They see him — quite the entrepreneur he is, in his suits, managing contracts et cetera — and where he has come from, and they go, 'Okay, if you can do that, I can too'.

Just quickly to finish off, because I know we want to talk about a lot. How we treat our prisoners or young people in detention says a lot about ourselves. What does it say about our justice system if we continue to stigmatise those who have graduated from their taxpayer-funded institutions? What message is our current system giving to people in prison and the youth justice system? 'We need you to do such and such to change but have no faith and no trust in your ability to change'. Is that an environment that fosters positive personal change?

Why would the justice system not welcome its success stories — success often in spite of prison and detention — and the expertise of those who have succeeded? By continuing to identify people who are in prison and who have left prison with behaviours they want to leave behind, using stigmatising and stereotyping language and continuing to hamper their ability to contribute to society even as returned citizens through instant and lifetime consequences of a criminal record, we perpetuate the continued failed system, we continue to fail returning citizens and we fail the community.

I want to see a change in how we see reform to stop recycling the same old rhetoric broadcast and published by those who see themselves as experts but have no lived experience of the system they want to change. I want to see a change in this country. I want to see my state, Victoria, starting to believe in rehabilitation, restoration, reformation, desistance and recovery. I want our country to be a place where our leaders, prisons and youth justice centres believe in the rehabilitation they are funded to achieve, celebrate the success stories and use this expertise to inform reform. I want a justice system where everyone in the system collaborates on improving the lives of the community. In the words of User Voice, until we break down that 'us versus them' with just the mainstream straight lens saying, 'We know what your issues are, and we know what you need', until we break down that division, nothing is going to change.

The CHAIR — On behalf of everyone, thank you for making such a positive contribution, particularly after the last two witnesses where it has been focusing on what is going wrong. Thank you very much for that.

Ms PATTEN — Thank you, Ms Seppings. I have been aware of your work, as you know. Your work largely focused on adult prisoners, adult offenders and adult ex-offenders, and I certainly think some of those models we could bring into youth justice. When I was going over this this morning I noted that you visited Malmsbury and you visited Parkville, and certainly Parkville College has a youth leadership program. Did you see any other peer frameworks within our youth justice system that modelled what you have seen overseas? Could you expand on what sort of peer framework you would recommend that we recommend be considered in Malmsbury and Parkville?

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure. There is a whole range of different types of certainly peer interventions that you can have within centres. The National Offender Management Service in the United Kingdom has a whole range of lists about that and the different options. When we are talking about the prison councils, we are actually then looking at, 'Okay, where are your leaders?'. But you are going to have leaders elsewhere. We often run the risk

of focusing on the low literacy and numeracy and think that equates to a lack of intelligence. There will be a lot of intelligent people with entrepreneurial skills and leadership skills that might not have the level of education that others do that then get into those positions as well or are seen as that.

So you are looking at your democratically elected councils within that, so people that they want to then be representing them to resolve issues. That is one level. That is the kind of really advanced level, I guess, that is happening through User Voice. But other examples include the Listener scheme where the Samaritans train people in the centres to become listeners, and that is about reducing suicide risk. Any prisoner who has been trained in that is on tap for that. There are even incredible services they have got. One particular one is Housing Rights Northern Ireland. They saw that this gets into the whole housing — —

Ms PATTEN — Sorry, just to pull you back, Ms Seppings, I suppose because we are talking about offenders — we are talking about young people — and also the scale. We are not talking about large centres. You might only have 50 young people, and the biggest reoffenders are the 10 to 14-year-olds.

Ms SEPPINGS — Certainly Hydebank college that I went to was a good example of that, but I will also give another example — and I guess I am talking probably about a 17-year-old here. Community Led Initiatives in Manchester set up their mentoring service, two former prisoners. They are established in the probation service, and they get their referrals from the probation service. They have young people, naturally, that are reporting on probation. When I had the meeting there, there was one young guy there and I actually just asked him, 'What started your offending? What were the issues?'. He said he started stealing cars when he was 13 because he was bored. He had nothing else to do. I guess we can interpret what that may mean — home was not a safe place to go to. What changed for him, and he was still reporting on probation, was having the peer, who was probably not much older than him actually, explain to him what her experience was of having her car stolen and the impact on her. She was a single mum. She had a criminal record herself. He said that was the turning key for him to finally understand the impact of what his offending had on someone that he could identify with.

When I was there the same worker checked her emails, and she had an email from a probation officer thanking her for how she had been able to engage with a really hard to engage young person who would not come in to probation and was very anti-authoritarian. She was finally able to help connect him, because he could identify with her, to then finally get him to come in to probation. While my reach certainly did not cover 10 to 14-year-olds, everything is able to be replicated no matter how big or how small. It is around the principle of it. Former UK justice secretary Chris Grayling came out and said, 'I think every person coming out of a prison or youth justice should have a mentor, and the best placed person to do that is an ex-offender'. What better than to have the ex-con steer the young kid away from becoming involved in a gang or the reformed gang member doing that.

One thing that a Community Led Initiatives mentor said was, 'Sure, young ones, and even us former adult prisoners, listen. They might not take it on board, because they are thinking, 'What would you know? You're older than me', but also they are not yet ready to reflect on what they are doing or ready to leave that identity and that support group that they have. But he said, ''We plant a seed', and often it is not until a couple of years later that they will come back and say, 'Actually, you were right', and 'Yes — guess what?— now I'm doing this and I'm doing that'. Also, it is important that the young guy who was around that table referred to youth justice, that every time he went into the youth justice system in Manchester he said, 'It was fine, it was great. It was a chance to catch up with all our mates' — and that is all it ever was.

Mrs PEULICH — Friends and family.

Ms SEPPINGS — Exactly. The change for him was that it was not until he was then connected to this peer mentoring program, based in the very dark and gloomy probation service in West Manchester, that things started to change for him.

Mr MULINO — Thanks very much for your evidence. It sounds like you have undertaken some fascinating research, which we will undoubtedly delve into. You have looked at some interesting programs in the UK, Ireland, Sweden, the US. I am wondering, are there any programs in place in Victoria or other Australian jurisdictions which are trying to implement some of those learnings?

Ms SEPPINGS — Yes, there are actually agencies that I am aiming and trying to implement it since I have come back. Before I went away they said, 'If you can bring us back the evidence, because we're struggling to

get these people with criminal convictions back into the centres'. That was one of the key things. It is more by accident. I do not know if you know Glenn Broome, who has his own incredible history. He worked for Whitelion for 10 years. He is now working with VACRO as a family liaison officer. Naturally he has the offending background and that incredible history of the youth system and the adult system, but he says, 'Yeah, I'm a one-off, and I shouldn't be through accident. It needs to be systemic in a sense'. So no, across Australia — and hence why I was awarded a Churchill fellowship. Through all my consultations, there is mentoring programs — —

Mr MULINO — There is not much yet.

Ms SEPPINGS — No. There is mentoring programs, but not peer and not through-the-gate peer.

Mr MULINO — One last question — and this might be something in your report — it would be interesting to get a sense of which programs overseas have gone through the most rigorous evaluation, obviously to get a sense of which ones would be the most likely to be turned to for pilots.

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure. In many evaluations, which I have got — I have got a huge list, I guess; a lot of research by universities as well — it is varied. The Wise Group in Glasgow, they have had two evaluations and they have been going for over 10 years. They are a model which actually has full-time paid peer mentors 50-50. Yes, that is that actual level of it. Others will have people that are volunteers one to two days a week.

With all the examples I have brought back, it has got to be put in an Australian context, in a Victorian context, in a regional or a metro context, and it is going to be what suits the agencies. Now there are some agencies that certainly are not peer-led, like a St Giles Trust, but they have a wide peer-mentoring service and even a peer hotline. Then you look at a User Voice, which is peer-led, peer-driven. We have got a while to go before we actually — and hopefully we will see — have former offenders setting up their own organisations and doing similar things to User Voice. At the moment we have got NGOs that are not peer-led, but if they start their mentoring programs, then they could pick and choose any of the different kind of examples — yes, there is a whole range.

I think too it is important that the US has the Second Chance Act, and within that they provide specific funding for mentoring programs, which can include peer in that. You can see that on the Department of Justice website in the US. But that is quite extensive and good funding over three years. They have identified you really need to have your funding over three years. It takes a year to set up, a year to get some runs on the board, then in the third year you can really start seeing some outcomes. The UK has the benefit of the Big Lottery. Merseyside Offender Mentoring services in Liverpool were able to attract the big lottery funding and do terrific work there.

I guess my recommendations cover that we need to increase the peer-to-peer mentoring, advisory, listening, active counsel-type peer work within the centres as they are, with people who are actually in there. We need to get the through the gate happening and we also need to have it done in your probation services as well, so it is really across the board. It is also not just about the one on one and the peer at that level. It is about people then, if that is the career they want. A lot of them will say, 'Look, I've been through the system. I know what's wrong. I want to now work in the system'.

Currently there is a couple in Australia who cannot for the life of them get a job because of the criminal record. You will find even now where with the new prison to be opened in Ravenhall, if you look at the applications, they ask: 'Have you ever been in prison? Have you ever visited anybody in prison?'. Overseas research is saying these are the experts. Again we are going to put a whole lot of money into people who are not. Sure, academically or otherwise they are. It is a vital factor that we need to introduce. Until we do, as well — I think when I go back to my first statement — what are we saying to the people going through the system? We are putting all this money to rehabilitate you, and yet the fact that we will not employ you, even in that system later, what is that saying — that we do not actually believe in the rehabilitation that we are being funded to achieve?

Ms PEULICH — I am not sure that you have won me over on that argument, but on the others you have.

Ms SPRINGLE — I would like to hear you possibly unpack a little more about how you would address the differences between the youth justice system and children essentially that have offended, and there are quite big differences between adults that offend and children that offend. Because the bulk of your work is around adult

offenders, how would you tweak your work to be applicable, to be appropriate for the developmental stage of young offenders?

Ms SEPPINGS — Certainly, as I mentioned, my final social work placement in 1983 was in Winlaton. I have vivid memories back there of being a 21-year-old with the 16-year-old, 15-year-old girls. With young people, and I think if we can try to keep calling them young people, and children as well, the one I guess saving factor — and it has been spoken about in previous drug and alcohol conferences — the one protective factor is a positive adult. In the absence of a parent, that could be a teacher, it could be a neighbour. In the absence of that, it could be your older peer. In the US in the court system, they have youth peer courts as well. It is that principle of having a person you can trust, a person who has faith in you who can instil the hope in you. That is a principle that should be the basic, really, rather than us focusing on, 'They are starting to offend; we've got to address why that is happening', when they might not have even had that insight themselves.

As I found with everybody that I met, at different points in their lives when they chose to no longer reoffend it was through a personal catalyst, through a relationship. Relationships are the key, as we know in our own lives. Naturally we need all of the other supports that we all access in the community and have access to — that is basic — yet we need to guard against patting ourselves on the back, 'Great! We're giving health services, education, access to housing to people coming out of prison'. That is basic, but it is what actually helps facilitate a person to think differently about their life or a young person to think, 'Hey, actually I don't want to go down this track'. Is it going to be the strength of your negative peer group, or is it going to be somebody who is older, wiser, understands you and supports you that is going to do that.

Ms SPRINGLE — As an extension of that — and coming from Winlaton you would know this — traditionally in the youth justice system that was the role of staff. Staff would be there to have the relationships with the children. It was a protective factor of the youth justice system, and sometimes the child protection system. Certainly at Winlaton and then Turana there were kids that were not offenders; they were what they called wards of state, so the relationship-based nature of staff to child was pivotal in either turning around their offending as well as a protective factor for the staff. So, are you advocating a model of going back to that practice, or do you think it can only be a mentoring sort of program, or is it a hybrid?

Ms SEPPINGS — Yes. Certainly there was so much more that I learnt, but it is also just through my experience as well that I have come to see that we need to from day dot — and I am not talking about why. Once a person has committed a crime, a person is not there for mental health and they are not in custody for drug and alcohol. They are in custody because they have committed a crime. So, on day dot, when they are in custody and need to be in custody, the type of case management where you are actually from day one identifying who is the positive personal network out in the community, no matter who they are, involve them from the start and keep them and support them along the whole journey.

Our model has been that, yes, often that key person that they have to identify with or even liaise with in a centre is going to be a person with the keys. It is going to be the person they will go 'Yes, sir/Yes ma'am' to. Sure, it could be well meaning and very professional, but as we know as well through royal commissions, sometimes those connections and relationships can be also very negative, so more involving and looking at detention and custody and prison as an extension of community and an extension of a person's life event, not a cut-off. What we do have now are silos. Again, from my personal experience of having someone I was close to in prison, you are cut off from the beginning, yet you are meant to be the support person that is going to save the world at the end of it all, and you are lucky if you can last the distance. But everything is made as difficult as possible for the most important person for that person to change.

Mrs PEULICH — Thank you for your presentation; it was quite inspirational. I did not agree on one dot point, but it is obviously a huge void and all that you say makes sense. Is there any idea of cost that you might be able to shed light on? How much would it cost to implement a program of that nature in our current facilities?

Ms SEPPINGS — I suppose it is going to vary. If an agency has already got current staff in a program area, I guess you are looking at, 'Are we going to pay mentors or have them as volunteers?'. There is a whole different range of cost depending on what people are wanting to do with it. I can certainly provide examples for you. There are examples I have in my research. Off the top of my head at the moment, if you were looking at just from the get-go to get things started, you are looking at $140 000 over two years, for argument's sake,

where you would have for your project a part-time project manager, a part-time lead peer and five volunteer peer mentors. Some colleagues and I nutted out some figures of what it could look like.

Mrs PEULICH — That is probably modest.

Ms SEPPINGS — That is basic; that is very basic.

Mrs PEULICH — Probably modest, but it is important. If ultimately — and I do not wish to pre-empt anything — the committee want to make recommendations of that nature, they need an idea of the cost implications. If there is someone else who might be able to provide additional details that you might be able to pass on to the chair, that would be good.

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure.

Ms CROZIER — Thank you very much for your presentation and your submission, Ms Seppings. In your submission you have a number of recommendations — seven, I think, in your presentation to us. Recommendation 3 of your submission goes to the fact that reformed offenders should be recognised for their expertise and to potentially provide leadership, mentoring and all sorts of other elements that you have just spoken to the committee about. In your recommendation you say that justice departments and NGOs should be engaged in that process.

We heard from the commissioner earlier, who said that exit interviews are done with offenders who come out of the system. I am just wondering from your expertise, when you are recommending that these offenders should be consulted and potentially be used in these programs that you have described to us today: when is the best time to identify those people and how is it done? I want to understand the practicality of your recommendation and what actually happens here on the ground now that that exit interview that the commissioner for children and young people spoke to us about?

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure. If I am hearing right, there are two separate things there. It is about justice departments, wherever they have got a board a committee — or even here — having somebody here.

Ms CROZIER — Is it the Youth Parole Board?

Ms SEPPINGS — Quite interestingly, the chair of the Parole Board in Ireland regularly takes a former prisoner, an ex-prisoner, in with him every single time he goes into a centre, because, he said, 'They're not going to listen to me'. It is that kind of use of the expertise I mean. The Irish Penal Reform Trust, on their board, brought on an ex-offender who happens to be highly qualified as well and a teacher. They realised, 'How can we be making all these policies when we have got no idea about the system and how people are living that? I think I see exit interviews as different from a person who may well want to continue giving advice or be able to give advice, but you need some runs on the board as well.

Ms CROZIER — I suppose what I am asking is: how are offenders with the potential to conduct those mentoring and leadership programs identified, and when are they identified?

Ms SEPPINGS — All the agencies advertise and people — —

Ms CROZIER — So it is post when they are out, is it? They are not identified as having potential to be in those mentoring programs as they are coming through the system; it is once they leave the system.

Ms SEPPINGS — There are examples of that, as I was talking about before. Housing Rights Northern Ireland have trained up peers in prison to do assessment and referral for them for everyone coming into the system. I met with a group of them there. One prisoner said that he had actually gone out to work with Housing Rights Northern Ireland. He messed up on his parole and was back in prison. Housing Rights Northern Ireland said, 'When he comes back out, he can come back out and work with us again', so there is an example of somebody doing it within the prison and then coming out and working for an agency to be that peer, as such, and then going back in. Others literally apply to — —

Ms CROZIER — Hasn't he failed, though, if he has gone back in?

Ms SEPPINGS — I would not term it as — —

Ms CROZIER — I mean he has reoffended.

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure.

Ms CROZIER — So it is not a fail as such, but he has reoffended, so therefore the program that is set up to support him to contribute to the community has failed him.

Ms SEPPINGS — No, I would say that he failed himself.

Ms CROZIER — Okay. You know what I am asking.

Ms SEPPINGS — Sure. With any program, and I highlight this too, it is not a silver bullet, but it is a link that you need to have because of the obvious sense it makes. People are going to reoffend for a variety of reasons. Only that person can say, 'Well, it's because that support I got was absolutely no good at all'. I think what I also saw overseas was this attitude of keeping going the distance with people and believing in their capacity to change. Is it going to be determined when I think they should change? Only they know when they are going to change, but you keep with people.

It is like, as we know, with drug addiction: people can have seven relapses of their heroin addiction over their lifetime before they finally become clean. If we start looking at offending that way too, we go back to Peter Söderlund in Sweden, who said, 'This is about me changing my identity, so I need to learn how to unlearn that, and that is going to take time'. But I think what we tend to still do in Australia is say, 'You've failed, so we'll forget about you'. Services over there are sticking with people, and the more that you stick with them, the more likely it is that next time it will minimise, just as with any other addiction.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for taking the time to appear today. We appreciate you doing so, and again thank you for the positive message. You will receive a copy of the transcript within a few weeks for review.

Ms SEPPINGS — Excellent. Thanks very much.

Witness withdrew.