T R A N S C R I P T

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Tuesday, 21 September 2021

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WITNESSES *(via videoconference)*

Ms Tricia Ciampa, Executive Officer, and

Ms Teegan Hartwick, Peer Advisory Group Member, Women and Mentoring.

The CHAIR: Welcome back. Thank you. We are now very pleased to be joined by WAM, Women and Mentoring. We are joined by Tricia Ciampa, the Executive Officer, and Teegan Hartwick, who is one of the peer advisory group members.

If I could let you just both know that all evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of our Legislative Council. Therefore any information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you were to repeat that outside this hearing, you may not have the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

We are recording today, so Hansard is at the back listening to us all. You will receive a transcript of today, and I would encourage you to have a look at that and make sure that we do not misrepresent you or we have not misheard you.

If you would like to make some opening remarks, we will then open it up to committee discussion. Thanks again for being with us.

Ms CIAMPA: Thank you, Fiona, and for inviting Women and Mentoring to be a part of these public hearings. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land I live and work on, the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past and present and any First Nations people participating in and watching the hearing. I would also like to acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonisation on our Indigenous communities and their over-representation in the justice system.

Today Teegan, who is part of our peer advisory committee, and I are here to provide information about WAM's mentoring program as a crime prevention initiative and also share some of the lived experiences of the women we work with. The WAM is a small charitable organisation. We are not academics, we are not legal practitioners, and our submission comes, I guess, from the place of working with women who are in the justice system at various stages—from early contact right through to transitioning out of the justice system. The data comes from our independent evaluation reports—we have had one conducted in 2012 and one that was released earlier this year; from our Women's Voices project, which captures the stories and feedback of women engaged in our program; and also from our peer advisory committee, who are women with lived experience of the justice system who give willingly and openly of their insight and their perspective so that we can improve our work and our responses to the needs of women who are justice involved. So we believe that WAM provides an evidence-based crime prevention response that supports vulnerable women to build the protective factors, improve their life outcomes and considerably reduce their risk of reoffending and supports their inclusion in the community.

As you have no doubt heard from many other organisations before us, there are gendered pathways to the justice system. Women's offending overwhelmingly comes from their responses to the complexity and unaddressed psychosocial issues and challenges in their lives, and as such a gendered response is critical to keep women out of the justice system. So from our data that we have developed over the past 10 years of operating we understand that women who are in contact with the justice system experience are negatively impacted by issues like social isolation, lack of secure housing, unaddressed trauma, mental health and substance misuse, outstanding fines with little or no capacity to pay and family violence, and, significantly, many women are not adequately engaged with services to address these issues either before their offending, whilst progressing through the justice system, when they are serving a custodial sentence or when they are transitioning back into the community. They are either unaware of the services or do not know how to access them or there are significant barriers in accessing those services that are readily available in the community.

I would like to ask Teegan at this point to share some of her experiences both as someone who has served a custodial sentence and is building her life away from the justice system and as someone who also continues to support others who are still entrenched in the system.

Ms HARTWICK: Thanks, Trish. Okay, Fiona, all you guys, thank you. I come here today with some lived-in experience, obviously not only from being within the justice system and being incarcerated but also because I raised my daughter in prison—well, her first nearly four years anyway. I was just looking through some stuff and whilst I was in there, they did *Strengthening Connections: Women's Policy for the Victorian Corrections System*. It is me and Mila on the cover, and now I am sitting here talking to you guys, so I kind of jinxed myself.

Look, there are three points I want to get across today, obviously number one being the lack of knowledge that I went through when I committed my crime and all through my sentencing—and that I was not offered particular support prior to being incarcerated, which I think would have made somewhat of a difference. I believe it would have.

Number two is the lack of support within the prison system. I found that I did not fall into a particular category. The two categories were, you know, obviously drug and alcohol and then CASA for sexual abuse. I walked into the system only experiencing domestic violence and obviously mental health issues, and I found that there was really a big wall stopping people from receiving help whilst in there. I also think that women are not acknowledged in the sense that I truly believe that women are victims before they become perpetrators within the system, and I do not think that corrections has caught up to that yet. I do not think—whilst I was there and since I have left—that we are really treating people in jail with a therapeutic approach or with a strength-based approach.

Number three, I also wanted to point out the importance of support when coming out of prison. As you guys would have read in my submission, I have had some significant important support, but I do not believe everybody gets that, and I think it is important. And I think it is important to acknowledge people with lived-in experience, because as of now I have not finished all my studies and I am not certificate wise but there are a lot of people that I still talk to who are coming out of jail or are in jail, and they will be honest with me. They will say, you know, 'We relapsed' or 'We did this' or 'We did that', and I think that there is a real honesty there and room for improvement by bringing in people that they trust, which are people that have been through the same situations as them. As you guys would have read in my submission, I have had some significant support that I think goes a long way. That is it. Now you can ask a question.

The CHAIR: Great. That was like almost a mic drop moment there, Teegan. That was terrific. Thank you. Teegan, I think you are right and we have seen it with a number of these programs that when people are released from prison that first six months—well, actually probably that first 12 months—is that really crucial time. How did you find that support that you needed when you left prison?

Ms HARTWICK: Well, prior to leaving prison, when I went up to my CMRC, I was told that I should accept VACRO's help, and at the time I thought, 'Oh, yeah'. I was just, like, gliding along. I had actually been told by a few officers, 'You know, you don't need VACRO. That's for people that don't have family. You have family'. So I sort of just winged it, basically, and when I first received their help—and it was only that one organisation—I walked into it very mistrustingly, because I think it goes without saying that people that come out of the system are mistrusting. They are mistrusting of the legal system, and they do not know what gets filtered back. So that was what I offered, and I was offered that for, I think it was, a nine-month term. I did not use it for the full nine months, and I was not really open to wanting to talk to them, but it was just by chance that I made that particular relationship with Sarah from VACRO, and that has just made me kick goals. But it was being able to have them—Sarah in particular—to listen. It is all about listening. But that was only the one organisation I was offered.

I kind of walked out too, Fiona, feeling really sort of deflated. I had come out into society, and I did not want to ask for help. I kind of felt embarrassed to ask for help. I felt embarrassed to say to the Salvos that I may not be able to afford stuff for my kids, 'Can you give me a voucher?'—things like that. I know a lot of other women—women want to support their family. You know, they are sort of the warriors. They do not want to walk out and have to ask for help. So that was one of my biggest battles.

The CHAIR: Yes. I guess having someone in your corner is probably an incredibly important thing.

Ms HARTWICK: That is massive. It is huge.

The CHAIR: Yes, and I have seen that. I have certainly been to a few WAM events, and I watch WAM closely, so I am aware of that. Considering your role now, the importance of people with lived experience in

this—and I know VACRO spoke a little bit about this yesterday—does that create a new trust, having someone with lived experience?

Ms HARTWICK: I think it does. I think it really does, because you know, Fiona, I saw a guy get out the other day. He had done seven years in prison. He did not come out on parole, so he had no help whatsoever. He had, like, a voucher, and it was just when there was coronavirus, so it was: put him in a motel for two weeks. Within the first day of getting out he relapsed and used drugs again. It was funny, because I had known him for a long time. I rang up and said, 'Are you going okay?'. He goes, 'No, I relapsed'. It was just honest, off the tongue, this is what I have done. The other day I spoke to a girl who is on a correction order. She goes, 'Oh, you wouldn't believe what I did'. They are just so free in what they are talking about, because there is no judgement, and because I have been in that situation I do not want to just go and say, 'I'm going to go tell someone' or 'I'm going to call the police', or anything like that. It is just listening and understanding.

There are a couple of girls that are still in jail now. I look at them—one has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and she struggles so much. She has broken her parole and she is back in. I think going in and them knowing, 'Hey, this person gets it; they have been in this situation', makes them straightaway have that little bit more trust, because it is really hard being in the system, whether you are inside or outside, to trust anyone, because you have already been screwed over. You have been screwed over at some point.

The CHAIR: No, exactly. Just in the last minute I have got, Tricia, just speaking about your mentors, how do they create that trust? I know not all of them would be people with a lived experience either.

Ms CIAMPA: Look, predominantly the women that are mentors do not have lived experience of the justice system, but they may have that experience of supporting someone with an addiction, with a mental illness or substance issue—but not always. I guess part of it is the way we train our mentors. It is to walk the journey with the woman. It is not to tell her what to do. It is to come with a non-judgemental approach. So our screening process really helps us look at who would play that role of the mentor really well. The way we work is to value the voice and the insight and expertise of women. They know their history, they know their journey and they know what their goals are. So our role is just to facilitate that. Self-determination is key to their recovery and their rehabilitation. So it is about skilling them up, providing that support, that listening ear. They are the sort of key characteristics that our participants tell us they want in a mentor. Like many, I often ask for someone who is older than them so there is some life maturity and life experience. They want someone who has got a good sense of humour and who is not going to judge them, and that is all they want—someone who will listen to them and help.

The CHAIR: Well, given that you have got recidivism rates of people of around 13 per cent, whatever you are doing, you are doing it right. Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Tricia and Teegan, for your time today and for the submission, and thanks, Teegan, for sharing your lived experience with us. Tricia, can you please outline for me how the Women and Mentoring program works and how it compares to the court integrated services program?

Ms CIAMPA: Sure. So we actually get referrals from a number of different organisations in the health and justice sector. We get referrals from CISP but also from the CLCs—so community legal centres—from VLA, and these are referrals made because women have been identified as needing additional support to, I guess, have better outcomes when they appear at court, or if they are on a corrections order, or if they are trying to just rebuild their life in the community. So we have got over 40 different organisations that do provide referrals to us.

We do a one-on-one assessment with that person, so we get to know them and their needs really well. Simultaneously, we are recruiting volunteer mentors from the community, screening and assessing them for their suitability, and then we match them based on, I guess, their mutual interests. We look for some shared interests. We look for the capacity of the mentor to provide support to that participant and at times when she is available as well—so it suits their needs—and then we just provide support to that mentoring relationship.

We ask the woman who is the program participant to articulate her goals in key areas, which is sort of reflected against criminogenic risks—so building up those protective factors—and the role of the mentor is to help that woman engage with services that might address some of those underlying issues, just navigate, I guess, her community, getting involved in her community. It could be simple things like finding a preschool for her daughter or for a child. It could be helping her with her housing application—you know, really practical support

as well as emotional support. And we currently, up until this year, have not been government funded. We have relied purely on philanthropy to build the program from one court, the NJC, across seven or eight different Magistrates Courts, and this year we were successful in securing a small amount of government funding, and we hope to build on that so that we can be around for much longer and provide more support to more women as well.

Ms VAGHELA: And how easy or difficult is it to really find the mentor matching the needs of the women?

Ms CIAMPA: Sure. The way we work is that we like to build a pool of mentors so that when referrals are made, we have got women to draw from. So we also do not try to keep them waiting too long. We are very lucky in that I think women readily put their hand up to help other people in their communities, so there is not a real shortage of mentors. We just do not have the resources to screen them quickly enough. Like, we have already expressions of interest. We have just finished a training cycle, and we have got seven new mentors that have come through that. We could easily start volunteer recruitment tomorrow, but I think my small team of three part-time staff would murder me if I said to them, 'We've got to start that again'. We just do not have the resourcing to do more.

Ms VAGHELA: And in your view what does a gender-informed response to women in contact with the prison system look like?

Ms CIAMPA: I think in the first instance it is providing support before they get in contact with the justice system or before they go into court, creating awareness of what services are available in the outset. A lot of the women that are referred to us have not engaged with the service system before, whether that is that distrust that Teegan was talking about before, lack of awareness or just barriers to engagement. And a lot of the issues that they are experiencing are barriers to engagement. Like, some women may not want to engage with Orange Door because they are worried that it might impact on a Family Court issue or child-protection issue. So it is really looking at what are those unaddressed or underlying issues behind those pathways to offending and addressing them in, I guess, that early intervention phase and building up women's capacity, their knowledge and supporting them from the outset.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you. I will come back, Chair, if time allows.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tania.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Tricia and Teegan, thank you so much for being with us. I have got a question for each of you, but first, I would just like to say, Teegan, thank you so much for coming and sharing your story.

Ms HARTWICK: That is all right. Thank you. Thank you for listening.

Ms MAXWELL: This committee must hear from those who have been incarcerated. We heard from a young man yesterday, and I think it has the opportunity to provide us with so much knowledge and information that we otherwise would not be able to obtain. Now, I know that Ms Patten, the Chair, and I and maybe the other members as well have been through some of the prison systems, but it is very guarded—literally—but their information is very guarded as well. So this provides us a rare opportunity to actually get in and have a better understanding. Teegan, I am really interested to know, at what time in your sentence did you receive counselling?

Ms HARTWICK: Well, this is quite interesting, Tania, and this is the point I really have an issue with, because I reckon it was probably a good year—

Ms MAXWELL: I had not finished yet, Teegan. So there are two parts to the question, sorry. One is: when did you first receive the counselling? Because I do not want to miss out on my question if it goes overtime. And at what time in your sentence did they start to prepare you for your release?

Ms HARTWICK: For the counselling, I reckon it was probably after a year, and it was really causing me a lot of stress because I would go to my CMRCs and they would say, 'So what are you doing? What are you doing to help yourself?', and I would be sitting back going, 'Well, what do you mean "What am I doing"?'. I had no answers. I knew what I had done was wrong, but I did not really understand all of the background to it, and it was not until CASA decided to open up their doors not just to the sexually abused but to everybody—that caused a real issue within the system, because everyone then was like, 'Okay'. If you were not drug and

alcohol, you went to CASA. There were so many people going to CASA and they did not have the time or resources for it because they were only coming into the prison maybe one or two days a week. They had their timeslots and there were women missing out. So I reckon it was probably at least after a year of my sentence—and I did just over three years—where I was able to go and sit with CASA and be in a really therapeutic approach and unpack the stuff that I probably necessarily did not want to that I did and that has led me to where I am today. And it was not until CASA—and I know I put this into my submission, and it was just wow—said to me, 'You know, Teegan, you're a victim as well'. Because I did not walk in—I was not allowed. I felt really scared to be in the system and think that I was the victim. I was the perpetrator; that was it, that was all people worried about. And I know that CASA had a lot of trouble within the system because they do it with a therapeutic approach. You know, not everyone in the system believes in how CASA counsels, so that is what happened.

And then when they started to reintegrate me, you know what, it probably was not until maybe the last six months, because no-one ever believed I would get my earliest, and they make that very clear with the parole changing—that you just do not get your earliest. It is unheard of. I was an SVO, so they said, 'You're not going to get your earliest, Teegan', and I did. I was lucky enough to receive my earliest. So it was probably six months that they started looking at there being a possible chance, and it was not until probably three months until I got the paperwork and they said 'You're going home' that they were like, 'Wow, we have to start to really get the ball rolling'. And, as I said, I got offered VACRO and that was about it.

Ms MAXWELL: Did they ensure that you had stable housing to go home to?

Ms HARTWICK: Well, with parole you need to have stable housing to be approved, so I was lucky enough to have been approved to go to my mum's house for parole and [Zoom dropout].

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you. Just quickly, my next question for Tricia. Thank you so much for the mentoring and the wonderful work that you do with women. I am wondering what percentage of women that you have worked with have experienced coercive control.

Ms CIAMPA: I cannot answer that unfortunately—I could probably take that on notice—because it is not something that we have actually tracked in our data. I could probably find some anecdotal evidence of that, but it is not something that we probably have had the capacity to track as yet.

Ms MAXWELL: Okay. That is fine. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Matthew.

Dr BACH: Thanks, Chair. And thank you both for coming along. I might ask you another question, Teegan. It is great to have you here and to have access to you. Just earlier today actually we heard evidence that in Victoria's criminal justice system women get a get-out-of-jail-free card. How would you respond to that, as somebody who has had personal experience in the criminal justice system?

Ms HARTWICK: You know, Matthew, I do not believe that. I really, really do not. I think that the women probably cop a harsher sentence, especially when it comes to violent crimes. Mine was a violent crime, and as I have written in my submission, you know, in comparison, I have read so many articles coming out on men that have committed similar crimes and worse. I know everyone has their own story and reasoning, and drugs is a big thing to a lot of people, but because I was not on drugs and, you know, basically did not fit the common circle of women that were coming in, I think I was made an example of. And I know a lot of women are. In the justice system I think the magistrates are all behind time a little bit: 'Women are not meant to commit violent crimes'. And there are so many women in there that have, but I think that if we took the time to think why they have committed crimes—

But society do not want to hear it, because you know, they do not want to acknowledge how many issues we have when it comes to domestic violence, and women are still going through these horrible situations. So, Matthew, I do not believe that at all.

Dr BACH: Thank you. And so when you say that we, and magistrates in particular, should take a closer look at some of the reasons, some of the causes of the crime that is committed by Victorian women, in particular you are referring to family violence—

Ms HARTWICK: Yes.

Dr BACH: and the prevalence of family violence in the community?

Ms HARTWICK: I think so. Yes, I definitely am. It took me a long time, Matthew, and I know from other women, watching them, within the system that a lot of women do not even know that they are in that cycle; they do not know. There are women that are still in jail now having men come and visit them, and they do not know that they are in a cycle that they need to get out of.

Dr BACH: Yes. Thank you, Teegan. In addition, I was really interested in the comments you made about how you found things inside.

Ms HARTWICK: Yes.

Dr BACH: You talked in your initial comments about a lack of support and how the approach was not therapeutic. I would love your thoughts on what can be done better.

Ms HARTWICK: I think what I have found really strange since I came out—because since I have come home, Matthew, I have been studying my arse off, and I have been studying to be able to be, you know, one of you guys, except I have got lived experience. I have come home to a CRN and not many people really want to give people with a CRN the time of day, I have noticed, in society. I have studied wanting to work with people that are in the same situation as me, and I do not understand that the officers that are in the prison systems that deal with us every day do not need to have that. How can they not be taught how to deal with women who have come from violence or how to use strength-based approaches or not want to build people up to see people walk out of the system strong, rather than saying, 'Well, you know, remember why you are here: you are a number, you are this, you are that'? Do you know what I mean? Because if you walk in there with your head held high, there is a 100 per cent chance there is going to be an officer that reminds you exactly who you are, where you are and why you are there. I do not think that that is exactly the way to go. I think we all know why we are there—we have all been sentenced for a reason—and I think that it is time to make people, women and men, confident that they can survive society and they can walk away from horrible relationships and not be in prison.

Dr BACH: All right. Thanks so much for being with us and for your insights. It is much appreciated.

The CHAIR: Thanks. Sheena.

Ms WATT: Thank you. And what a joy, really, to hear a very truthful account about what is going on and what it is that we need to do from you, Teegan. And thank you so much, Tricia, for all that you do to support women like Teegan right across our state. I have a question about recidivism and women. I just wonder if you have any comments, particularly perhaps Tricia, about what we can do to address recidivism in female offenders particularly. What needs to happen?

Ms CIAMPA: As you would have seen from our submission, the recidivism rate for women involved in our program is about 13 per cent, which is quite low. I think part of that is with, as Teegan talked about, that therapeutic response. We support women in the community, we help them remain in their community and we also help them work at addressing those underlying issues. So it is engaging with services. One of the things that obviously cannot be solved by us or by anyone really is homelessness or insecure housing. That is a key issue for a lot of the women that we are working with. The ones who have had contact with the justice system significantly have insecure housing or unsafe housing or are couch surfing—it is all part of the same thing. I think that is probably the key—helping them secure housing so they can feel safe, so they can start to be part of their community, so they can find employment. I mean, there are a range of issues that women are trying to address, and I guess for us it is looking at having their basic needs met and then them being able to address those underlying issues, engaging with services positively.

Ultimately, the justice system is about community safety, and I think part of that is improving the lives of everyone in the community as best we can so that they can live a fulfilling life—and that is people who have offended as well as other people in the broader public. I am not sure if that answers your question, Sheena. I think I have gone off topic, but yes.

Ms WATT: No, no, no—that makes sense. Do you do any particular work with women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and are there any particular things that we should be made aware of when working with culturally and linguistically diverse women? As well, just another question about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and if you work with those two particular cohorts.

Ms CIAMPA: Sure. So we get referrals from all over. Over the last few years we have sort of looked at that data, and predominantly they are Australian-born women who are referred to the program. We have probably worked with maybe five women that identify as First Nations people in our program as well. Part of that could be because they are not referred to us perhaps by VALS or by other services who may not know who we are. We are working towards building relationships with organisations like Djirra as well so that we can do some cross-referrals, but I think part of it is that maybe we are not deemed as an organisation that can take on those referrals, having more culturally appropriate sort of training as well or providing those mentors or being able to recruit mentors from CALD backgrounds as well. I think that is probably important. But there are some recommendations in our evaluation about how we can sort of build those relationships with other organisations so that we can attract those referrals and also the volunteer recruitment simultaneously. So we have got some work to do in our own organisation to do that, but I think across the board the majority of women that we work with are Australian born.

Ms WATT: All right. Well, I think that is something to at least recognise—that in fact that is a skill set that as an organisation you need to build up. Really, I certainly appreciate, having come from the Aboriginal community controlled service delivery sector before this, that having organisations like yourselves recognising that makes a great matter of difference when it comes to program design and obviously program delivery. That is really very helpful. I do not have any other questions. I am just awfully impressed by your—

The CHAIR: No, that is great Sheena. I think it is really interesting. When we were speaking to VACSAL about some of their programs I could not help thinking that there could be a partnership between WAM and an ACCO where you could share the programs that you have been so successful in building—without any funding. And seeing people like Teegan who have now come and found you to further your work—you know, for Teegan to give back.

Teegan, just thinking about that friend of yours you were talking about who came out of prison in the middle of COVID and got a two-week voucher for some dodgy hotel. Inevitably the first call is probably to a mate that is probably not the best mate they could have called. Do you reckon there are three to five things that everybody should have on the day that they leave prison? I think of you. You were fortunate in some ways—there was family there for you, but lots of people do not have that.

Ms HARTWICK: I agree, Fiona. And even though I had my family and friends—it was interesting, because I did not have a lot of friends—the crazy part is that the woman that picked me up from when I first walked out was actually a woman I met in prison. She came up with my mum, she picked me up, she handed me a phone, she drove me home. And she was in jail with me—you know, crazy, because I do not know if society accepts stuff like that. But I found they need support with somebody. This person that got out, he only had his mum, and the rest of his family were drug users. So we all kind of knew, looking at that, this was going to be a tough ride for him. He did not know—coming out in corona, seven years away—how to do the click and collect; he did not know how to walk into somewhere. He had one outfit to wear. I think one of the biggest things I tell people when they get out is: do not go on Facebook—definitely do not go on Facebook. They do their first account that they had from seven years ago, and then all of a sudden those same people are on. What I found, Fiona, out there: for every person that is getting out that wants to start anew, they have to change their circle of friends, and the ones that have been able to do it have said, 'This is a really lonely life', because it has taken them a while to adjust to that because no-one wants to be around them when they are trying to do the hard work and not reoffend or re-use drugs or anything like that.

So when I think about the things that you need, I would say support off somebody, support off an organisation—he did not have that; he did not know who to call—a phone, money, housing and then the hope that you are going to get a job, because when you come out into society most of these guys and girls want to work. Everyone has got a dream inside. Everyone says, 'We're going to do this when we get out'. They want to, but when you get out it is a really, really hard road. And to have jobs say to you—the first question is, 'Do you have a criminal record?' and you have to say yes, it is all over, red rover. Like, there is no job, so how are they going to support themselves, how are they going to support their kids, their families? And nine times out of 10 it is like, 'Well, what are we going to do?'. And that is really scary. I know it is not easy. I mean, people in society are struggling to work and have things—I get that. But if I could go back into prison now and talk to the women, I would say, 'It's hard', because you do not really get told it is going to be hard outside. You get told to be excited about your end date and you going home. But you walk out, and there is no-one offering you a job. It is hard work—it is hard work in every aspect—and I think that that becomes daunting. It is daunting for strong people, let alone weak people, and like I said to Matthew before, there are a lot of people walking out weak because they are not empowered to feel strong.

The CHAIR: Yes. And we heard from VACRO that it is towards those aspirations—that is how you stop people from recidivism. I note in your evaluation, Tricia, that social connections were one of the reasons that people reached out for a mentor, so that seems incredibly crucial. Kaushaliya, Tania, Matt: do you have further questions? Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. How different are the reasons for entering the justice system for women prisoners from men prisoners? How different are the impacts of incarceration on women prisoners from men prisoners and also the impacts of incarceration post release on women prisoners from men prisoners?

Ms HARTWICK: Was that to you, Tricia, or to me?

Ms VAGHELA: Whoever wants to answer.

The CHAIR: I think it is to you, Teegan.

Ms VAGHELA: I think probably, Teegan, you will be able to answer.

The CHAIR: I think we have lost Teegan—or she is thinking very hard without blinking.

Ms CIAMPA: Hopefully she comes back. I am not equipped to answer that at all unfortunately. So yes, Teegan might have some insight.

The CHAIR: Matt.

Dr BACH: Thanks. Tricia, Teegan in response to a question that I asked her before was talking about the need for the whole system—my recollection is in particular members of the magistracy and the judiciary—to come to a better understanding of some of the underlying causes of crime in particular that is carried out by women in Victoria. We have got a couple of our terms of reference that relate very directly to that point that Teegan was making, and in particular to the sort of understanding that is held by judges and magistrates. How might we, if I take it that probably you agree with Teegan on that point, do better to bring the system up to speed? I think that was the language that Teegan used.

Ms CIAMPA: Look, I can really only speak to the experiences of the women who have presented in front of a magistrate, and those that have had the opportunity to tell their story or to explain a little bit about perhaps their pathway to the justice system and what work they are putting into place to, I guess, change their life have had better outcomes at court. Some even have had surprisingly good outcomes when the magistrate has understood the work that they have done to sort of, I guess, change some of their circumstances—address some of those issues. Probably all I can really speak to is what we have experienced in that regard. So I think it is important. We know that there are some magistrates that will accept a letter of support from WAM when a woman presents in front of court, and it is regarded well because she is making connections in her community and she is doing that piece of work to change her circumstances and change her life trajectory. So I think that probably speaks to that sort of experience.

Dr BACH: All right. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Teegan, would you like to tackle the quite enormous questions that Kaushaliya posed to you?

Ms HARTWICK: Yes. Now, I kind of got cut off in the middle of that, and I was—

Ms VAGHELA: That is okay—I will repeat.

The CHAIR: Kaushaliya, just in the interests of time, maybe just one or two.

Ms VAGHELA: I will shorten it. Teegan, the reasons to enter the justice system, how different are they for women prisoners compared to men prisoners?

Ms HARTWICK: You know what, I reckon that they are somewhat a little bit different, because as much as I do not like to put men down—I really do not—men are different to women, with women it was quite interesting, because there was something spoken about. When men are in jail and women are in jail, the jail sentence is not what women—what is the right word for this? That is not what the women are copping hard on them. What women are copping hard is being separated from their family and their children. Now, men deal with that emotion differently. So as soon as women are taken away from their families and their children, that is

their sentence. Do you know what I mean? It is not putting them in prison, because women can do prison. Do you know what I mean? They can cook. They can clean. They can talk to other women. It is not jail itself; it is being away from their families, and then it is about the way they are being treated as such. But women are survivors, and they can survive jail. I do not know if I am answering your question, to be honest. That is how I feel.

The CHAIR: I think that is a great insight, Teegan. And the second—that has kind of answered two of your questions, I think, Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Yes. So that was before entering or the reason for them entering the justice system, but while they are in the prison, the impacts, are they harsher on women than men? You partially answered when you answered Dr Bach's question, but how different are they, because you already mentioned about your daughter and other women with children as well—so how different in the end, post release?

Ms HARTWICK: So when you are in jail, what it is like? Well, it is a lot different, because if you walk into a men's jail, like, it is pretty yucky, I think, but with women's jails—it can still be yucky, but obviously I raised a daughter in there. We were in units, you know—gardens, animals, trampolines. That was about it, really, and then eventually my little girl was given the chance to go into day care. So the prison took her out. It took me a while to be approved to take her. And it is quite interesting, you know, because when you are in jail with a child it is mandatory, if you are going to go in with a child, that you have to pick carers. Now, I do not know if I put it in my submission, but I remember when I first got told that, I thought, 'How the hell am I going to pick a carer for my child? How am I going to let a murderer look after my child?'. Do you know what I mean? Like, it could be anyone. These women have committed crimes.

I was just as judgmental as the rest of society when I hit jail, but it was not until I was able to have a murderer and have someone with this or—all these different crimes, and they have all looked after my daughter and they are mothers themselves. And I go, 'Wow! That's pretty crazy, isn't it?'. If you went out to society and said that a little girl got raised in jail around a bunch of murderers and robbers and all kinds of people that have committed offences and she was safe and she got raised in there, I do not think society would accept that. I do not even think they would understand it—which brings me to my next thing: that there is a lot of not understanding. That is what the problem is. You know, whether it be the magistrates who do not understand or the prison officers who do not understand, like, knowledge is power. We need to do a lot more understanding and want to understand why people offend and then be prepared to help them.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I think that is just a terrific high point to finish this really wonderful session. It is the end of the day, and I cannot imagine a better way to finish today's public hearings. Thank you both so much. Tricia, WAM must be doing something right, because Teegan is interested—and the fact that you have got people like Teegan supporting you. Certainly, congratulations on everything you do. As I said at the outset, you will receive a copy of the transcript of today's hearing. Have a look at it, because there is no doubt that it will form part of our report. The transcripts will also make their way onto our website. Thank you both—

Ms HARTWICK: Just before we go—sorry to interrupt, Fiona—but did you ever go to Tarrengower Prison and walk around and have a look at it?

The CHAIR: I only got up to Dame Phyllis. I never went to Tarrengower, but we would really like to—

Ms HARTWICK: I just feel like our paths have crossed at some stage. You look very familiar. Maybe I saw you walking through the prison.

The CHAIR: No. If they have not passed before, I certainly hope they do again. I look forward to it.

Ms HARTWICK: Definitely.

The CHAIR: It has been really terrific.

Ms CIAMPA: Thanks for the opportunity—really appreciate it.

The CHAIR: Thank you both. Thank you, everyone.

Witnesses withdrew.