

Acknowledgement

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1 BACKGROUND

This project builds on the existing collaboration between CSNSW and UTS to explore the issues related to parental incarceration. One major component of this collaboration has been the development of the Mothering at a Distance program for incarcerated mothers.

In 2012, the Principal Advisor Women's Issues at CSNSW approached the UTS Faculty of Health to explore the potential for joint research into aspects of parental incarceration, specifically the learning and support needs of incarcerated parents in relation to their parenting role. This interest arose from the extensive evidence on the negative impact of parental incarceration on both parents and their children, and the increased likelihood of children of inmates facing wide-ranging social, economic, psychological and educational problems, and of turning to criminal activity, compared with children whose parents have not in custody.

The research collaboration resulted in a successful submission for a UTS Partnership Grant, awarded in August 2012 and a Research Assistant (RA) was appointed in July 2013. The aims of the project were as follows:

- To generate new knowledge about incarcerated parents and their parenting skills and knowledge, their learning and support needs, while in prison and when they return to the community.
- To provide evidence to inform CSNSW policies on the design and implementation of effective parenting support and education interventions for incarcerated parents
- To contribute to the evaluation of two parenting programs funded under the Keeping Them Safe initiative, specifically Mothering at a Distance (for Aboriginal mothers) and Hey Dad for Indigenous Dads, Uncles and Pops (subsequently renamed Babiin Miyagang).

1.1 Administration

The research team for the project includes:

- Professor Cathrine Fowler (Chief Investigator), Tresillian Professor of Child & Family Health, Faculty of Health, UTS
- Dr Angela Dawson, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health, UTS
- Ms Deirdre Hyslop, Principal Advisor, Women Offenders, CSNSW
- Professor Debra Jackson, Professor of Nursing, UTS
- Ms Allison Jones, Principal Advisor, Family & Community Support, CSNSW (until October 2013)
- Dr Tamara Power, Director of Simulation, Faculty of Health, UTS (from August 2013)
- Dr Michael Roche, Director of Postgraduate Nursing Studies, Faculty of Health, UTS
- Ms Chris Rossiter, Research Assistant (from July 2013)

The project consisted of three main components:

1. A survey of 128 parents in custody (64 mothers and 64 fathers), half of whom had attended a CSNSW parenting program and half of whom had not. The researchers originally proposed to interview a smaller number of these parents after they had been released and reunited with their children, about their experiences. This follow-up was not feasible due to difficulty contacting parents post-release.

2. Interviews with key stakeholders, i.e. individuals involved in the design, implementation or delivery of parenting programs within NSW correctional centres.
3. A review of existing evaluation data of CSNSW parenting programs.

The project received approval from the CSNSW Ethics Committee for the above three components (December 2012 – Part 1; October 2013 - Part 2 and changes to original methodology for Part 1; September 2014 – Part 3). This approval process was ratified by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee.

CSNSW subsequently provided additional funding to the project in order to:

- Assist in the employment of Aboriginal research assistants in collecting data as part of the parent survey, interviewing mothers and fathers in NSW correctional centres.
- Extend the project until June 2015. Data collection for the parent survey took longer than originally anticipated, following a delay in obtaining ethics clearance and a range of operational constraints inevitable in conducting research in correctional centres. Following data collection, the research team spent several months analysing the data from the project and preparing reports and scholarly articles.

2 METHOD

2.1 Parent Survey

The major component of the research project consisted of semi-structured interviews with parents in custody. We interviewed 129 parents with at least one child up to the age of 18. The interviews took place in general areas of a correctional facility. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded – with the permission of both the participant and correctional centre security management.

Many CSNSW staff members facilitated this complex process, promoting the project to inmates, identifying suitable participants and times/places for interview, arranging security clearance, and ensuring that the interviews went smoothly and safely. The researchers are grateful to the MOSPs, SAPOs, Educators, Managers and custodial staff who contributed to this phase of the research. We are also grateful to the parents who agreed to be interviewed for the project.

Each interview involved:

- Introducing the purpose of the research and obtaining informed consent of participants (including consent to be contacted after release for a further phone-based interview for those who were due to be released in the following few months, and consent for the interview to be audio-recorded)
- Conducting a semi-structured interview covering details of the participants' family background, their experience of parenting (both in custody and prior to incarceration), their children's circumstances, their plans post release and their participation (if any) in parenting programs. When agreeable to both participants and correctional centre staff, these interviews were audio-recorded for use by the research team.
- Completing three validated psychosocial instruments: Family Adaptability & Cohesion Evaluation Scale IV (FACES)(Olson 2011), Measure of Parenting Style (MOPS) (Parker et al. 1997) and the Parenting Stress Index for Incarcerated Parents (PSI-IP) (Loper et al. 2009). Participants could complete these three questionnaires themselves or with the assistance of the interviewer, according to literacy levels.

Information from the interviews was supplemented by data from the CSNSW OIMS collection on demographic and criminogenic details of participants.

Parent interviews commenced on 14 January 2014 and concluded 14 January 2015. Seven members of the research team (including three additional RAs) conducted interviews. A total of 129 parents were interviewed across the following correctional centres:

- Bathurst (2 occasions)
- Dillwynia (3 occasions)
- Emu Plains (6 occasions, including Jacaranda Cottages and Bolwara Transition Centre)
- Glen Innes (1 occasion)
- Long Bay (5 occasions)
- Mid North Coast (1 occasion)
- Silverwater (3 occasions)
- South Coast (2 occasions)
- Tamworth(1 occasion)

The circumstances and characteristics of 129 participants in the interviews are summarised in the next Section 2.4.

Not all participants completed all three stages of the interviews. In some cases, it was necessary to conclude the interview before all questions were answered, due to the time constraints of the facility's operation or the participants' other commitments. However, in all but one case, the participants completed the semi-structured section of the interview. In other cases, they were not able (or willing) to complete the psychosocial instruments which were relatively long, repetitive and sometimes not relevant to the participants' personal circumstances.

To date, researchers have contacted and successfully interviewed four parents (two men, two women) after their release. This phase of the project has proved difficult. Relatively few of the original participants fulfilled the criteria for inclusion in this phase: having participated in a parenting program while in custody and being due for release within the time frame of the study. Although most of those who met these criteria readily agreed to take part during their initial interview, it has been difficult to contact them post release. Frequently, the contact details provided by participants were incomplete or phone numbers have been changed or disconnected. On a few occasions the researchers made contact with previous participants, but they were unwilling to complete a phone interview. At least one participant had returned to gaol (his mobile phone was answered by his son who informed the RA of his current situation). The research team ultimately decided not to continue with this component of the project, due to the difficulty of contacting or (if contact was made) of motivating parents to participate in a follow-up interview post-release.

2.2 Interviews with Stakeholders

Over the period November 2013 to April 2015, the research team interviewed a total of 19 individuals with experience in the development or delivery of parenting programs, or in the needs of incarcerated parents more generally. Stakeholders interviewed for this component of the study were:

Stakeholder Groups	Number
CSNSW facilitators	8
CSNSW managers	9
External stakeholders	2

Some were small group interviews; the others one-to-one. Several of the interviews were conducted via telephone; others face-to-face. These interviews were audio-recorded, with the consent of participants, and have been transcribed. Analysis of these interviews is included in Section 7.

2.3 Review of Existing Evaluation Data

To date, the research team has reviewed and analysed satisfaction forms from participants in the following CSNSW parenting programs:

- Mothering at a Distance (MAAD) – 137 forms returned from participants in courses conducted over the period November 2011 to December 2014.
- Hey Dad for Indigenous Dads, Uncles and Pops – 12 satisfaction forms received, plus two letters written to the program facilitator.

The analysis consists of quantifying answers to tick-box questions (e.g. on enjoyment of the program, increased parental confidence and knowledge) and thematic analysis of responses to open-ended questions.

This stage of the project has been reported in a journal for health practitioners (Rossiter et al. 2015).

2.4 Participants – Parent Survey

The main characteristics of the 129 parents interviewed in the study are summarised in Table 1, which presents separate data for mothers and fathers. (Further details of parents who had participated in parenting programs are included in Sections 5 and 6).

Table 1 Demographic profile, participants in parent survey, by gender

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Fathers N=64	All parents N=129
Demographic - parent			
<i>Parent's age (years)</i>			
Range	21 – 58	19 – 52	19 – 58
Mean	33.0	33.2	33.0
Median	31.0	32.0	32.0
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	83.1%	93.8%	88.5%
NZ/Pacific	4.6%	3.1%	3.8%
UK	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%
Asia	10.8%	0%	5.4%
South Africa	0%	1.6%	0.8%
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	52.3%	70.3%	61.5%
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%
Not Indigenous	46.2%	28.1%	36.9%
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	46.9%	54.7%	50.8%
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	46.9%	37.5%	42.2%
<i>Literacy</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-assessed literacy problem	7.9%	11.3%	9.6%

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Fathers N=64	All parents N=129
<i>Disability</i> Proportion with CSNSW-assessed disability	7.9%	11.3%	9.6%
<i>Age left family home</i> Proportion still living at home at arrest	4.6%	6.3%	5.4%
Range (years)	10 – 32	9 – 25	9 – 32
Mean age (years)	17.0	15.0	15.9
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i> Both parents	29.2%	34.4%	32.3%
Mother	43.1%	37.5%	40.0%
Father	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%
Grandparent/s	7.7%	10.9%	9.2%
Other relative	6.2%	0%	3.1%
Foster parent/s	1.5%	3.1%	2.3%
Other	10.8%	12.3%	11.5%
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i> Alone (with or without children)	23.1%	14.1%	18.5%
Partner	33.8%	45.3%	39.2%
Relative/s	27.7%	31.3%	30.0%
Friend/s	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%
Don't know	4.6%	6.3%	5.4%
Other arrangement	9.2%	1.6%	5.4%
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i> Neither	76.9%	70.3%	73.9%
Mother	6.2%	3.1%	4.6%
Father	13.8%	21.9%	17.7%
Both parents	3.1%	4.7%	3.8%
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i> Proportion	20.0%	23.4%	21.5%
Demographic – child/ren			
<i>Respondent's total number of children</i> Range	1 – 9	1 – 9	1 – 9
Mean	3.1	2.7	2.9
Median	3.0	2.0	3.0
<i>Step/foster children</i> Proportion who have step children	1.5%	15.4%	8.5%
Mean number	1	2.8	2.6
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i> Range	0.1 – 35	0.8 – 34	0.1 – 35
Mean	12.6	12.9	12.7
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i> Range	0 – 18	0 – 18	0 – 18
Mean	5.3	5.7	5.5
<i>Children in different age groups</i> Have pre-school aged child	55.4%	53.1%	54.3%
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)	73.8%	57.8%	65.9%
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)	52.3%	46.9%	49.6%
Have child 18+ years	18.5%	25.0%	21.7%
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%s)</i> All children	47.7%	35.9%	41.5%
Some of children	18.5%	28.1%	23.8%
None of children	33.8%	35.9%	34.6%

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Fathers N=64	All parents N=129
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%s)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	32.8%	43.8%	38.0%
Joint carer for some of children	12.5%	14.1%	13.2%
Sole carer for all children	21.9%	0%	10.9%
Sole carer for some of children	7.8%	1.6%	4.7%
No major care-giving role	24.6%	40.6%	33.3%
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	60.0%	46.9%	53.1%
Some of children	23.1%	32.8%	28.5%
None of children	15.4%	18.8%	16.9%
Unsure	1.5%	1.6%	1.5%
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements*</i>			
Lives independently	10.8%	15.6%	13.2%
Other parent	32.3%	84.4%	58.1%
Grandparent/s	38.5%	17.2%	27.9%
Other relative	15.4%	3.1%	9.3%
Partner (not child's biological parent)	3.1%	7.8%	5.4%
Friend	1.5%	0%	0.8%
Foster parent (not related)	24.6%	4.7%	14.7%
Living with relative thru DOCS	12.3%	9.4%	10.9%
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	1.5%	4.7%	3.1%
Don't know where child is	1.5%	3.1%	2.3%
Jacaranda cottage program	12.3%	0%	6.2%
Other arrangement	1.5%	3.1%	2.3%
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	55.4%	62.5%	59.2%
Some of my children	15.4%	21.9%	18.2%
None of my children	26.2%	14.1%	20.0%
Don't know if they know	3.1%	1.6%	2.3%
<i>Children visit</i>			
No children visit	41.5%	32.8%	37.2%
Some children visit occasionally	10.8%	9.4%	10.1%
All children visit occasionally	13.8%	14.1%	14.0%
Some children visit regularly	1.5%	4.7%	3.1%
All children visit regularly	23.1%	21.9%	22.5%
Used to have visits but no longer	0%	17.2%	8.5%
Jacaranda cottage program	9.3%	0%	4.7%
Ever received a visit from children	56.3%	62.5%	59.4%
Speak by telephone at least weekly	65.5%	65.6%	65.5%
Write letters at least weekly	37.3%	36.1%	36.7%
Custodial Data			
<i>Sentence details</i>			
Mean length of sentence (months)	58.0	66.1	62.1
Median length of sentence (months)	35.9	50.0	43.9
Range of sentence length (months)	6 – 264	2 - 240	2 – 264
Proportion not yet sentenced	26.5%	29.6%	28.2%
<i>Time between incarceration and interview</i>			
Mean incarceration to date (months)	15.5	19.7	17.7
Median incarceration to date (months)	8.5	10.5	9.4
Range of duration of incarceration to date	0.1 – 99.7	0.5 - 114	0.1 – 114

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Fathers N=64	All parents N=129
<i>Number of prior sentences</i>			
Mean	5.1	5.9	5.5
Median	3.0	5.0	4.5
Range	0 – 23	0 – 21	0 – 23
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	11.5%	7.0%	9.3%
Medium – low	9.8%	3.5%	6.8%
Medium	29.5%	29.8%	29.7%
Medium – high	32.8%	47.4%	39.8%
High	16.4%	12.3%	14.4%
CSNSW Parenting Program			
Proportion attending	50.8%	46.9%	49.2%
Proportion attending > 1 program	3.6%	14.8%	8.9%

*More than one option per family

These demographic and other details will be discussed in more detail in future publications from the study. In summary, the sample of 129 parents has a total of 374 children ranging in age from newborn to adult. A majority of participants were previously responsible for the care of these children (three-quarters of the women and 60% of the men), who are now living in a variety of arrangements. Several of the parents interviewed did not receive visits from their children (one-third of the men and 41.5% of the women).

Table 2 compares the sample with the population of parents in NSW correctional centres. It shows that the sample is largely typical of other incarcerated parents in NSW in terms of age, literacy and education. However, the current sample has a much higher proportion of Indigenous parents. This is due to the over-sampling of participants who had attended a CSNSW parenting program which have in recent years been targeted to Indigenous inmates. It is also due to the particular assistance the researchers received from Aboriginal Project Officers, the facilitator of Babiin Miyagang, and other Indigenous officers in CSNSW in the recruitment of participants.

Survey participants had a substantially higher mean sentence length than the general population of incarcerated parents, again possibly due to the inclusion of those who had attended parenting programs – whereas inmates with short sentences are less likely to sign up for and attend such programs.

Table 2 Demographic details of the sample and all incarcerated parents in NSW

	BTC Sample N=129	CSNSW Data* N=4448
Mean age (years)	33.0	34.8
Aboriginality (% identified as Indigenous)	61.5%	29.5%
Completed Year 10	50.8%	55.6%
Completed TAFE or trade qualification	42.2%	43.9%
Identified literacy problem	9.6%	10.6%
Identified disability	9.6%	1.3%
Attended CSNSW parenting program	49.2%	4.5%
Mean sentence length (months)	62.1	42.7

*Source: data supplied by CSNSW on inmates identified as having child <18 from the OIMS collection, at December 2013

Of particular interest is the number of Indigenous participants who attended parenting programs while in custody (Table 3).

Table 3 Parents attending CSNSW parenting programs by gender and Aboriginality

Gender	Aboriginality	Attended parenting program	No parenting program
Mothers	Indigenous	19	15
	Non-indigenous	14	17*
	All mothers	33	32
Fathers	Indigenous	28	18
	Non-indigenous	2	16*
	All fathers	30	34

*includes a non-Indigenous parent with Indigenous child/ren

Table 3 indicates that nearly all the fathers who attended a parenting program were Indigenous. One non-Indigenous man had attended Babiin Miyagang and two non-Indigenous men attended other parenting programs earlier in their incarceration. One father attended Shine For Kids in MNCCC and the other could not recall the name of the program that he attended.

Amongst the mothers interviewed, 33 had attended a parenting program. These included 24 who had participated in Mothering at a Distance (13 of whom identified as Indigenous), four attended the Wesley Parenting Program (one Indigenous), two a TAFE program (both Indigenous), and one each PPP, Barnardo's and the 'Barry Palm' parenting course (all Indigenous mothers).

3 FINDINGS – Aboriginal men's parenting program – Babiin Miyagang

This section presents the data obtained from the fathers who had attended the Babiin Miyagang program (N=28). Most of these men had done so recently; in some cases the interviews were conducted after they had participated in the final session of the program and in others on the day they received their certificate of participation. Only two had attended the program prior to 2014. Four indicated that they had attended the program on two occasions.

Fathers had attended the program at Bathurst (10 participants), Long Bay (16) and Silverwater (2) centres.

3.1 Participants in Babiin Miyagang

Table 4 summarises demographic and other characteristics of those who had attended the program (N=28) compared with all fathers in the sample (N=64). The right hand column indicates whether there is any statistically significant difference between those who attended and those who did not. Significance was measured using Students' t-test to compare means and Cramer's V for cross-tabulated data.

Table 4 Characteristics of fathers who attended Babiin Miyagang and all fathers interviewed

ITEM	Fathers attending program N= 28	All fathers N=64	Significance of difference?
Demographic - parent			
<i>Parent's age (years)</i>			
Range	21 – 50	19 – 52	NS
Mean	31.6	33.2	
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	100%	93.8%	P=0.069
NZ/Pacific	-	3.1%	
UK	-	1.6%	
Asia	-	0%	
South Africa	-	1.6%	
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	92.9%	70.3%	P=0.005
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	-	1.6%	
Not Indigenous	7.1%	28.1%	
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	53.6%	54.7%	NS
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	28.6%	37.5%	NS
<i>Literacy</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified literacy problem	7.7%	11.3%	NS
<i>Disability</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified disability	15.4%	11.3%	NS
<i>Age left family home</i>			
Proportion still living at home at arrest	3.6%	6.3%	NS
Range (years)	10 – 20	9 – 25	
Mean age (years)	14.5	15.0	
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i>			
Both parents	32.1%	34.4%	NS
Mother	39.3%	37.5%	
Father	-	1.6%	
Grandparent/s	14.3%	10.9%	
Other relative	-	-	
Foster parent/s	3.6%	3.1%	
Other	10.7%	12.3%	
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i>			
Alone (with or without children)	14.3%	14.1%	NS
Partner	53.6%	45.3%	
Relative/s	25.0%	31.3%	
Friend/s	-	1.6%	
Don't know	3.6%	6.3%	
Other arrangement	3.6%	1.6%	
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i>			
Neither	57.1%	70.3%	P=0.031
Mother	7.1%	3.1%	
Father	25.0%	21.9%	
Both parents	10.7%	4.7%	
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i>			
Proportion	28.6%	23.4%	NS

ITEM	Fathers attending program N= 28	All fathers N=64	Significance of difference?
Demographic - children			
<i>Respondent's total number of children</i>			
Range	1 – 7	1 – 9	
Mean	3.0	2.7	NS
<i>Step/foster children</i>			
Proportion who have step children	17.9%	15.4%	
Mean number	2.6	2.8	NS
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i>			
Range	2 – 34	0.8 – 34	
Mean	13.8	12.9	NS
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i>			
Range	0 – 15	0 – 18	
Mean	6.0	5.7	NS
<i>Children in different age groups</i>			
Have pre-school aged child	42.9%	53.1%	NS
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)	71.4%	57.8%	P=0.024
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)	46.4%	46.9%	NS
Have child 18+ years	28.6%	25.0%	NS
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%s)</i>			
All children	39.3%	35.9%	
Some of children	39.3%	28.1%	
None of children	21.4%	35.9%	P=0.069
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%s)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	46.4%	43.8%	
Joint carer for some of children	28.6%	14.1%	
Sole carer for all children	-	0%	
Sole carer for some of children	-	1.6%	
No major care-giving role	25.0%	40.6%	P=0.032
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	50.0%	46.9%	
Some of children	35.7%	32.8%	
None of children	14.3%	18.8%	
Unsure	-	1.6%	NS
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements*</i>			
Lives independently	17.9%	15.6%	NS
Other parent	75.0%	84.4%	P=0.036
Grandparent/s	28.6%	17.2%	P=0.018
Other relative	3.6%	3.1%	NS
Partner (not child's biological parent)	10.7%	7.8%	NS
Friend	-	-	-
Foster parent (not related)	7.1%	4.7%	NS
Living with relative thru DOCS	7.1%	9.4%	NS
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	3.6%	4.7%	NS
Don't know where child is	3.6%	3.1%	NS
Other arrangement	3.6%	3.1%	NS
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	67.9%	62.5%	
Some of my children	21.4%	21.9%	
None of my children	7.1%	14.1%	
Don't know if they know	3.6%	1.6%	NS

ITEM	Fathers attending program N= 28	All fathers N=64	Significance of difference?
<i>Children visit</i>			
No children visit	26.7%	32.8%	
Some children visit occasionally	10.0%	9.4%	
All children visit occasionally	13.3%	14.1%	
Some children visit regularly	3.3%	4.7%	
All children visit regularly	23.3%	21.9%	
Used to have visits but no longer	23.3%	17.2%	NS
Ever received visit	66.7%	62.5%	NS
Phone contact at least weekly	79.2%	65.6%	NS
Write letters at least weekly	45.8%	36.1%	NS
Custodial data			
<i>Sentence details</i>			
Mean length of sentence (months)	58.0	66.1	NS
Range of sentence length (months)	12 – 126	2 – 240	
Proportion not yet sentenced	39.3%	29.6%	
<i>Time between incarceration and interview</i>			
Mean duration to date (months)	17.3	19.7	NS
Range of duration to date	2.5 – 73.5	0.5 – 114	
<i>Prior sentences</i>			
Mean number	6.4	5.9	NS
Range of number of previous sentences	0 – 21	0 - 21	
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	-	7.0%	
Medium – low	3.6%	3.5%	
Medium	17.9%	29.8%	
Medium – high	60.7%	47.4%	
High	17.9%	12.3%	P=.041

*More than one option per family

NS = not (statistically) significant

Not surprisingly, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of Aboriginality, given that the program is targeted specifically at Indigenous fathers. Fathers who had attended the program were significantly more likely to report that they had been involved in the care of their children prior to incarceration, and they reported more frequent contact with their children (not statistically significant). They were also significantly more likely to have had parents who had been incarcerated during their own childhood (especially mothers) and to have higher LSI-R ratings. A higher proportion of those who had attended Babiin Miyagang had been incarcerated for violent crime¹ (78.6% compared with 66.7% of those who had not attended a parenting program), although the result was not statistically significant.

3.2 Participants' responses to the program

During the open-ended questions during the structured interviews, the fathers who had attended Babiin Miyagang took the opportunity to discuss their experiences and opinions of the program. In summary, their reactions were extremely favourable. There were no negative comments about the program, although five participants made few comments. (These fathers were typically limited in their responses to all questions.)

¹ A very simple categorisation including crimes such as murder, manslaughter, assault, aggravated break and enter and possession of weapons.

For the majority, their responses fall into a number of themes, indicating the aspects of the program which they valued and which they felt had influenced them. The themes and subthemes are listed in Table 5.

Table 5 Impact of Babiin Miyagang – themes and sub-themes from participant interviews

Theme	Sub-theme
Improving myself	Being a better father
	Being a better man
	Challenging myself and improving my prospects
	Overcoming shame
Learning	Learning life skills – practical and relevant
	Learning from others
	Learning in community
Understanding my children	Learning child’s perspective
	Learning about child development
	Connecting with children – inside prison and beyond
Understanding my culture – being an Aboriginal Man	Cultural heritage and knowledge
	Role of facilitator – the irreplaceable elder
	Taking on leadership role – encouraging others
Looking to the future	Breaking the cycle
	Reassessing priorities – what is important
	Hopes for children
	Personal hopes and goals

We present some typical quotes which are indicative of the comments made in relation to each of the themes.

3.2.1 Improving myself

When asked why they had signed up for Babiin Miyagang, many of the fathers responded in terms of ‘improving’ themselves. Not surprisingly given the purpose of the program, participants indicated their desire to be ‘a better father’ and to ‘be there’ for their children. They spoke of wishing to ameliorate the impact of their separation from their children, and of their previous lifestyle and incarceration, on their families. Some contrasted this with their experience of their own father.

- [My father died young and] didn't really give me the advice that I needed to look after my kids. So the stuff that I learnt in the course - I took it on board as stuff that he could have possibly told me. (B120)
- I just wanted to sign up to be a better parent and be there for my kids and just show them the life that I never had when I was growing up. Also to be a good Dad and be qualified to be a Dad and that way my missus can't say I'm a bad parent and she knows that I've done research in this side of the field, about children. A bit of evidence that I'm a good Dad ...The main thing I want to be is a good parent. My biggest goal when I get out is to be there for my children and be a father ... I can say that the bestest thing I'm good at is being a parent, is being a Dad. That's the most important thing - being there for them, loving and caring for them. Everything will fall into place ... When I found out that news, it made we want to do the course even more. It made me want to come over and take part in that course, complete this course. The experience in being a father is looking after

your children. It's opened my eyes and that's one of the reasons I came over and did the course. (B124)

- What motivated me was learning how to become a better father. (B125)
- I learnt what the role of a father should be. (L113)
- Wanted to know if it could make me a better father. No-one is perfect, but wanted to better myself ...The course is really worthwhile. I have learnt about family and how to be a role model to my kids. I have learnt that you are the teacher ... I tell them they are loved. I didn't have that. You can't buy love. (L114)
- I wanted to learn more about how to be a better father. I wasn't there for my son, and he left home when he was 3. I didn't run back into him until he was 16. That's a lot of years I missed out on. I signed up for this program so I could better myself as a father. (L116)
- Big challenge is to get out and stop doing the stuff that I do, be a better father and role model for them. Teach them right from wrong. (L29)
- [I signed up] because I felt I needed to do it. Wanted to be a better father. I want to do things with my kids. Lead them down the right path, not the path I took as a kid. I had a very bad upbringing. There was a lot of violence in my family with my mum and dad. My mum moved us away from Moree when I was very young. Then I went back when I was older and lived with my aunty. I've done bad things. I went down the wrong path because of drugs. I don't want that kind of thing for my children. I know my mum definitely didn't want that for us. But I took that path. Most of my other brothers and sisters they've never been to gaol in their life. I'm the only one. (L31)
- I always thought I was a decent father, but I'm obviously not because I'm in gaol. So thought I'd touch up on a few things. Being there ... (L32)
- It taught me about being a positive role model for my son. Want to be a better Dad than my own father was. I want to be there for him ... Doing the course opened my eyes. I see more opportunities now. I want to be a Dad and not just a father. (L36)
- Being a good dad, learn things that a good father should do, because I missed a lot of things. The correct way to be. How they should be treated at different ages. Communication with my daughter – correct discipline. I've never hit my daughter. [I want to] keep my daughter safe and to grow safe. (L40)
- Well I was talking to my son the other day and I said 'Daddy's doing a fathering course' and he said 'what for, Dad, you're a good dad'. I said 'Oh mate, thanks for that darling, but Daddy could be a better dad'. And he said 'how? You take us to the park and you take us to football and you take us to the pictures'. A lot of the time I'm in gaol - this has just opened my eyes ...Because I wanted to learn how to be a better Dad, how to interact with my children, how to answer the questions that inevitably they're going to ask ... It got me thinking about how I plan to be a better father and if you can get people to think like that well, it's doing the right thing. I've got a plan to do this. (S66)
- Delegate said the course was available for Aboriginal dads in prison. Wanted to see if it could help me figure out a few things to understand with my children. Try and look at a positive way of staying out of prison and spending more time with them. (L18)
- Doing this course has opened our eyes about how it used to be and doing it properly. It makes me feel like a human being. Doing this course makes me feel like I've got a chance. It makes me feel good and that I can be a father again. (L28)

Some fathers spoke in more general terms about how the program helped them with improving themselves, the desire to be '**a better man**' in ways separate from (but often related to) their parenting role. As shown, some participants referred to learning new skills, setting goals and to overcoming bad

behaviour or associates in the past.

- It helped giving me some strategies to put in place when I got out, identifying situations - not so much for the family but for myself. Situations I'd got myself in that would not only affect me but that would hurt the family too. I remembered the strategies [did the course several years ago] - I got out and I stayed out for about 5 years. A lot of the stuff I'd learnt from that course that I had to put into practice. Because I was still young at that time and still associating with the people I used to. I stopped hanging around my old friends. (B102)
- It was great. Found out a lot useful things and it helped me set my goals and become a better person when I get out. Not just for myself, but for my girlfriend and my kid as well. (B125)
- I know within myself how to be – but this gave me more insight into how to better yourself – for the kids' sake. Because they're the future ... I want to better myself and my partner doesn't. She doesn't see the real picture, what's happening to the boys. If we're going to do time, but not give them the time... they'll just be thinking that we don't give a fuck, why should we give a fuck. That's what makes them run amuck. That's what she'd got to get into her head. That's why I'm going to have time by myself. Let her figure it out herself. If you're going to have kids, they're your responsibility. I'm not blaming it all on her – it's me too. But I'm sick of coming to jail, I'm over it. Especially before my parents pass away. They did the right thing, why can't I? I've got to stay away from them bad eggs – don't get caught up with that. (L27)
- I thought the course could pinpoint some things I didn't know. Reminder about things. Anything that could make me a better man, a better father, I'd jump at a chance to learn. (L32)
- Wanted to be a better person, keep positive and drug free. (L37)
- I want to learn things. I want to use my time to the best of my ability. If there are things available, especially for my daughter. Learning to be a better person, like skills, whatever skills I can get. (L40)
- I'm blessed to have the family that I have and to have the children that I have. But I just want to make a change in my life. I'm doing all the courses that I've got to do and each of the courses opens my eyes a little more. I don't know, maybe I've got to an age where I'm thinking about what is going on. I just appreciate the little things now ... It's not only made me a better father, it's made me a better husband. We're not married but we've been together 20 years. It's a long time and most people don't stay together for 20 years ... It helped me, but this isn't something that can be done overnight. This is something that is ongoing, until the day I die. I can always become a better man. Realising that was very powerful for me. I have the tools to make it happen ... I cannot possibly change what's happened but I can make going forward a better place, a better time, a better everything. I've got to become a better man, become more sincere and honest and I've got to embrace what's important to my kids because that's what's important. If I can do that, my children won't have to be in prison, my children will know that they get an honest day's pay for an honest day's work ... It will make me a better man and the snowball effect of that is massive, for me and my family ... To become a better man. To be the man that I want my children to be. That is powerful to me. I've heard things all my life, but I've never heard that. It rings true. (S66)

Some of the fathers viewed the program as a **personal challenge** and a means of facing up to some of the emotional issues they had experienced throughout their lives.

- It's helped me deal with some of my emotions and stuff, some of my feelings that I've had and locked away - talk about them once in a while. It gives you that weight lifted off your chest. Also we're not the only ones with that problem - everyone has them. We're not the only ones dealing with it. Obviously the classroom was full and all of us had problems. It was good to hear. (B122)

- To see if I was up to it and be a better father than what I am (L33)
- This course - I can't thank them enough. I can't say how the other boys thought, but it got me to open my eyes. That's important for me and my family. How can I be a better man? How can I be a better person? It's not just a fathering course, it's a life skills course. Things that we - men - don't really... You didn't show weakness, you didn't show your feelings and that's not right. It's been proven. It's not a healthy way. Balmain boys don't cry.... (S66)

In particular, some fathers stated that the program enabled them to **confront their sense of shame** about being in custody and the impact of their criminality.

- With parole sometimes it's a barrier – you don't have the confidence. I'm used to doing this while I'm in here. But when you step outside, you might slip up with drinking. I'm very hesitant to say that to my parole officer, I'm afraid they're going to judge me and send me back in. Over a period of time if you don't ask for help, things get out of hand. (L28)
- I feel ashamed and rightfully so - I've let them down in the fact that I'm not there for them today. I'm not there for them. I've only 10 months to go, it's only a couple of sleeps to me. It's not a long time [to me], but it's a long time to them. It's a fraction of my life, but it's a big chunk of theirs ... Whatever's important to them is important to me now. That's why I feel ashamed, because that should have been the most important thing in my life. Whereas a couple of beers or a smoke of pot that was important in my life, and now that's not important in my life ... I see other parents, they've got the babies and they're reading books to the little babies and I'm a bit ashamed of myself and that I didn't do that and that I thought that my time was more important. Only reflecting on it now - at the time, I didn't realise that. It's sort of like facing your demons and you've got to be man enough to face your demons, man enough to say, I didn't do the right thing. But I can now do the right thing. I have the tools to be able to articulate what I want, what I need to be a better dad, a better person. You've got to be honest, and take all your flaws and say 'this is my fault'. It beats you up a bit and you think 'how dare I?' But if you don't take that on board, how can you possibly be a better man? You've got to take the punishment, take your medicine. That's what I did. I copped it on the chin ... I've beat myself up about it but I've had to face those demons to be able to go forward and to be the man that I want my children to be. That was very powerful for me. Life was going that fast, I'd never sat down to think about it. It's not until you do a course like this, that hits you smack in the face and then you start to ask yourself some questions. What was I doing? Why was I doing it? And the answers you get, they're not real good, you cannot be proud of them. If you are, then you're not ready to go forward. Something is seriously wrong. (S66)

3.2.2 The Experience of Learning

Many of the participants discussed the process of learning in the program and the sense of achievement at discovering new skills and knowledge. Several mentioned that what they learnt in Babiin Miyagang was **practical and relevant** to their lives and those of their families.

- [I did the course] because of my grandkids and so I could learn. So I could help look after my grandkids when I get out, and help my own kids. (L115)
- I've got about 50 certificates. But Hey Dad is the one about reality. It's more like real life – the others are about business and other things I've learnt now how to be more organised (L36)
- It's not a case of finding out, it's a case of putting it into practice. I want to put it into practice and I hope and I pray that that will happen. I know I will. That's the most important thing - and I've only

noticed it with the phone calls, because I've taken the time out to say 'how was your day and what did you do today?' And they're that excited to tell you. I've never done that before. Until I've done this course I said 'how's things? Can I talk to your mother?' Now she's getting a bit upset because I'm spending all the time talking to the kids. But I told her, 'this is important' ... For many years I thought 'what are you doing, you're going to work 9 to 5, 5 days a week, bugger that. There's something seriously wrong with that.' But now I've come to the conclusion that youse are right and I'm wrong. I just can't wait to put it into practice. I've put it into practice every day with my phone calls when I ring them up. (S66)

Several of the fathers highlighted the importance of **learning together and learning in community**, being with a group of other Indigenous men in a context that felt familiar and which enabled them to share their thoughts and emotions safely.

- This gives us a chance to all get together in the room. We like that. There's a couple of old heads in the group and some young fellas - but we're all parents. Everyone had something to say and [the course] was bringing us out – because we're not communicating. There's no communication. But courses like this – this is communication skills for us. (B119)
- Because I'm a father. I've bottled most of my feelings in because of my daughter. Having a good discussion with the boys I know has been good. *[Is it good to talk about the deep feelings about your daughter?]* Exactly. The boys I know who are in the class are all parents. *[There's a bond there?]* Yes, that's right. *[Do you feel comfortable to share things?]* Yes. It's a bit hard to open up to someone who you've just met. (B122)
- The parenting program is a good course – something like this needs to be identified for male inmates. Different to all the other courses in prison. No negatives in it. Gathering information. You pick up unique skills from other people – how they deal with their kids. Learn from other participants. You learn from there. Each participant has something different from all the others. You can put it in use for yourself. (S67)
- It was good - the group sessions. Open up. Discuss things with the boys. It was all right. (B123)

3.2.3 Understanding My Children

In keeping with its educational purpose, participants in the Babiin Miyagang program affirmed how it had helped them learn more about their children. They mentioned learning about **child development and taking a child's perspective**. Some indicated that they had come to understand the critical role a father has as a role model for his children – both positive and negative.

- I learnt how to get down to kids' level – discipline kids in the right way. (L37)
- I didn't do any parenting programs or anything like that. I didn't know about all the little steps [stages of child development] and all the stuff I've learnt on this course. I wanted to give it a go. *[Did you learn much?]* Quite a lot actually. (B120)
- I liked the child development stuff - that was good. Every couple of years [you have to] watch out for this and this [different stages of development]. We talked about older children too; when they're 11 and 13 they get very demanding and you have to show them a bit of attention. *[Has the course had an impact?]* Yeah. (B123)
- Realised my daughters are getting older. [I learnt] things to help me along as they get a bit older knowing they're girls and I'm a male. There may be things I don't know. Tools that I could use. (L19)
- [I learnt] how they should be treated at different ages. Communication with my daughter – correct discipline. (L40)

- It was good. Learnt how to look after kids, talk with kids. (B106)
- I learnt how to plan things, plan ahead, set goals. I'll do that with my boys. If they say 'I can do it', then I know that they can do it. I'm like a mirror to them. They see me doing something, they're going to do it too. (B119)

In particular, the program emphasised ways in which fathers could **build connection with their children**. The fathers discussed engaging in more meaningful communication with their children in the present, notwithstanding their separation, and their plans to improve the quality of their relationship once they are released. For some it was clearly an unfamiliar experience to put their strong feelings for their children into words and deeds.

- I signed up as a chance to engage with my kids afterwards. (B106)
- My younger fella is real quiet. He doesn't talk. He's always been like that. I thought something was wrong with him. Then - he'll come to me and talk and he's the happiest kid in the world. He's just a completely different type of kid. I think it's because his brother is an authority over him. It's not me. It's his big brother and he doesn't want to step out of line. [If I talk to him on the phone] he's always talk. I always talk to him about how's school, what's going on, look after your Mum. He loves his sports too. ... I think he's got to tell me something. It's got to be the right time. He opens up when he comes to visit. He tells me everything. He does know I love him. When I got here – we talk, get to the details. He has a cry with me. (B119)
- Just talking to my kids. I don't just mean little [chit-chat] - I mean talking seriously, especially to the ones who are old enough to understand. (B120)
- Yes, [it's had a positive impact] - to show that I care more. To say it and show it rather than just thinking it. (L115)
- Getting my daughters to open up to me. When they have problems, they don't want to talk about it. They think I can't help, but I try to reassure them that I have had a lot of experiences with my nieces and explain to them that they used to come to me and I'd help them a lot. I had a close family when I was growing up, big family. (L19)
- My ex and I aren't friends but we get along for the sake of the children. We have an understanding. I didn't want to just bounce into my children's lives again – I'm not sure what's happening in the future, so I need to get to know them again. But look what's happened now I'm back inside and that I've hurt the children. That's another thing I learnt in the course. [I plan to] get to know them gradually. Get my own place, though at first I'll live with my grandmother ... My son was acting up in school. Something I learnt in here is that instead of being harsh and strict on my kid, I should just talk to them – 'don't do that mate' – they listened. I was surprised! (L28)
- I speak to [first child] for six minutes, and I speak to [second child] for six minutes and I speak to [third child] for six minutes, because it gives me my time with them. But more important, it gives them their time with me. It's a race to the phone to see who gets to talk to Dad first, and usually [first child] wins, because he's the biggest. I try to make time every day just to speak to them. I get back from work at 7 or 7.30, so I give them a ring before bedtime. I say 'what have you done today? How was your day? How was school? Have you got anything you want to tell Daddy? Is there anything important'. They come out with – whatever ... Whatever's important to them is important to me now. That's why I feel ashamed, because that should have been the most important thing in my life. (S66)
- You learn – I touched home more about my relationship with my grandkids and my kids. When your kids are grown up – you talk to them as adults but you don't have that connection until something like this comes up which makes you stop and think: 'I haven't had that much contact

with my kids for x years. Maybe I should contact my kids more.' I'm only one out of the group with kids in their 30s. Others have younger children. My 17 year old is a very inquisitive kid. I learnt more from this course about parenting a younger child, to how I would have seen it [previously]. (S67)

- *[Is the program linked in with your goals?]* It is very much linked in because I was looking at some of the documentaries and things we were watching as part of the program and it just showed us that neglecting children and not being there for them can affect them emotionally and mentally and physically. And it could lead to depression and anxiety and they could develop a problem over the years, being exposed to the negative side of life. The biggest thing I noticed in the program is what type of relationship you're going to build with children and not exposing them to the poverty side of life. Just do your best for them and keep them close. Cherish them as much as you can because they're precious. (B124)

3.2.4 Understanding My Culture

A specific component of the Babiin Miyagang program is its focus on Indigenous fathers. One session early in the program addresses what it means to be an Aboriginal man and consequently, what it means to be an Aboriginal father. Several of the participants discussed the importance of **learning about cultural heritage and tradition** and their understanding of the impact of colonisation and dispossession. For some the program included information that was new to them; for others the discussion brought back strong memories and recognition of the strength of their Aboriginal community.

- It was good. I learned a lot about myself as an Indigenous person, how my ancestors and elders raised their kids. Stories from when [facilitator] was a kid, and his parents. That gave me an insight into how our parents grew up. When I was a kid, I didn't know why my parents did certain things, until I became a parent. It was good hear his stories ... I learned about our culture and my responsibility as a man - not just with my kids, but within the community. The different roles. Being Aboriginal I was always taught to share things when we were kids. If Mum didn't have any flour, she'd say to go next door to ask for some and next week they'd need some onions, and we'd give them onions. Things like that. It's ingrained in me. If I see someone in need or something ... even if I've got nothing, I'll still share. That's what I'm going to pass on to my kids. In country towns, it's more like that. In the city, it's that dense and congested, people walking past each other don't even talk. (B121)
- If there's free programs for us blackfellas, then I'll do whatever (B123)
- I thought it brought up a lot of old memories. It was good. About my childhood, where I come from, and when I was younger. We all experienced what [facilitator] was talking about – growing up on missions, having nothing and Dad going out of his way in providing for us, working and bringing stuff home. It still happens today but we just can't get out and support our families because drugs are influencing us – and outside friends. Sometimes it's the community that we're in, bringing us down. (B119)
- I'm originally from [town A] but we moved to [town B] in '94, when I was about 4 years old just to get us away from the bad side of life and get to a new place. So we had opportunity to go somewhere in life and make it through school. We found a home on the coast and my family started living there, about 15 or 16 years. All my sisters live there and my Mum. It's a pretty nice area and I call it home, even though I'm originally from [A]. But we've been accepted into the community there with all the elders and Aboriginal people there, as a part of the community. We

- have strong ties to the area. I have a lot of family support on our side. I've just got to make that positive decision when I get out and hopefully I don't end up back here. (B124)
- It's a good program. It looks back in the 1900s and traditional times and coming up through to the 1960s and how it is today. I've learnt how back in the early days, living off the land and in the 60s families were split up. I learnt how the father went out to provide for the family, so they could survive. Now, it is very important to be there for your kids and show them love and support. I learnt a fair bit. (L116)
 - I can relate a lot to the things he is teaching me – especially about the background. A lot of us have forgotten where we come from, our background, we don't speak our language. Doing this course has opened our eyes about how it used to be ... (L28)
 - According to DOCS my son has a learning difficulty. They said he's verbally [challenged] and I tried to explain to them that Koori kids – we learn hands on. It's hard to explain to a white person. We learn hands on, not out of a textbook. (L48)
 - It's about time something like that was available for Aboriginal inmates in custody. It opens your eyes up and gives you a background on your family. You can track back where you are from. The map [of the different Indigenous groups in NSW] - some of the younger generation are not familiar with how big their clan is until they see the map. Some of them only know what their clan's name is but don't know how big it is. That map in this course gives you a good insight. [Facilitator] brought that out halfway through the course – we suggested that he brings it out at the beginning, so they know where both their parents are from – some only know where their mothers are from. (S67)

Several of the fathers spoke warmly and positively about the program facilitator and about how critical it was that the program was conducted by **an Indigenous elder**. They valued the insight and information he provided and his ability to act as an important role model.

- I heard that there was an Aboriginal elder and knowing that I could get something from the program. I was curious about what I can learn. As Kooris we do have a lot of respect for our elders, do actually listen and take in a lot. That's something that's ingrained in us ... The reason I like the course is that the person who is running the course is helping us understand. He is an elder Aboriginal person. Whether we choose to listen or not is up to the individual. After this we have to walk out into the maximum security yard – it's very different. Him coming here helping us, I feel it's building my confidence as a father. There's a bit of light at the end of the tunnel. I can relate a lot to the things he is teaching me – specially about the background. (L28)
- Uncle [facilitator] is a different teacher. His way of going about things was a little bit better than [previous facilitator – this father had attended the program twice]. (B121)
- Here's a man that is faced with the same problems that we're faced with but he doesn't go and do the wrong thing. He does the right thing. Most of the brothers I know we just don't ... I appreciated [facilitator's] time. He's come a long way to do the course and the least we could do is turn up. I took the parts that I thought were most important I took in and I won't forget them ... I never had a Dad and the stepfather that I had, I had a gun to my head when I was a kid and that's something I can't even imagine my babies going through ... I'm glad because I hope that he [facilitator] knows that he's turned a man around in five little sessions. I feel I can be a better Dad and I know I can be a better Dad. I will always cherish them five sessions. I will never forget the little things that he said that make you be a better man and therefore make you a better father. It's not about the money and it's not about the holidays - it's about your time and how you spend your time with your loved ones. It's not only made me a better father, it's made me a better husband ...

You wouldn't think you could get so much out of so little - five lots of two hours. But more than anything, his time. [Facilitator] had the gumption to sit here, on our level and explain what being a man and what being a dad was all about. I can't thank him enough. He is a beautiful man - he drives a long way. He does hundreds of thousands of kilometres every year and God bless him. I don't know why youse are studying this, but you're on the right track ... I'm happy to have done the course. He's good man and a soldier. You get around like a soldier [in prison], but you're not. A real soldier has honesty, he has integrity, he has courage - not just armour. He has everything that goes with being a soldier. I hope that he gets his funding for whatever he's got to do. I hope Corrective Services take him on board, because these are the things that we need. (S66)

- My father died when he was a young man and I was only a kid. There wasn't much of a positive role that he played there. No male role model, I suppose ... It helps [having someone in the course to be a role model]. (B120)

Some of the participants indicated that they were inspired by the program to **take on a leadership role** in their own families and communities, either while they were in custody, or after their release.

- I've actually filled out the forms for being Koori Delegate in the gaol – to mentor a lot of younger fellas in the system and show them what not to do and who to hang around with and show them the right way and try and keep them away from trouble and drugs and stuff. A lot of the young fellas in gaol do look up to me and the younger fellas have got kids of their own and I show them the right path to take. I don't want their children to miss out on what my children missed out on. I show them there's a better side of life than this place. Show them that they can achieve their goals in life. The main thing I want to be is a good parent ... I've ended up talking a few of the boys into signing up for this course. And they found it intriguing. They liked it. So they all got together and watched some DVDs and talked about different sides of life with the children. I stood up with the boys and took some leadership and showed them that they can achieve what they want to achieve, be a better person and be a better parent. Pass it on to the next generation and show them that there's other things in life than coming in here. (B124)
- I recommend [the program] to - not just brothers, but to any father. It doesn't matter what colour your skin is. It's the same for all of us ... If it can get a man to start to think about how he can be a better man, how he can be a better father, well you can't go wrong with something like that. At the end of the day, if it only gets one person out of every group, that affects whole families, and that affects communities and generations. It has a snowball effect. From little things, big things grow. I know that from my experience with it, it's a good course. Everyone should do it, not just Aboriginal men - all men. (S66)
- [I did the course] to gather information about what it was about so I could then express it to other Aboriginal men. Give them insight to what program is about and what you would gain from it. It's good. It's about time something like that was available for Aboriginal inmates in custody (S67)

3.2.5 Looking to the Future

Several participants in the program discussed how it had helped them with their plans for the future. In particular, some spoke of their desire to **break the cycle** of incarceration and the distress it caused themselves and their families. Their responses demonstrate their understanding of how swiftly children learn from their parents.

- It helped giving me some strategies to put in place when I got out, identifying situations - not so much for the family but for myself. Situations I'd got myself in that would not only affect me but that would hurt the family too. I remembered the strategies - I got out and I stayed out for about 5

years. A lot of the stuff I'd learnt from that course [parenting program attended several years earlier] that I had to put into practice. Because I was still young at that time and still associating with the people I used to. I stopped hanging around my old friends. (B102)

- My two boys are locked up now ... I blame myself. I've been thinking I've got to fix myself up before going back to a relationship ... The kids are going to be in the cycle too. Got passed around from different family members. I haven't lived at home since they were little. I want to better myself so that I can talk positive to my boys and give them an outlook ... I'd like to advise them in case they do something real bad, before it gets to that stage ... It's never too late – need to get them away from their circle ... I like to talk to them. I'm fed up with it and it's just caught up with me. I don't want to see them in the system. (L27)
- The one thing you don't want to rub off on your kids is violence and crime. You try to show your kids a manner way of growing up. Kids only repeat what they see and hear. If you go on like a bad person, the kids will act like that. If you go on like a good person, the kids will pick that up and act like a good person. It's only what you transfer onto your kids is what they pick up. (S67)
- God forbid if one of my children came to gaol, I would be shattered and it would be my fault. So, I can't wait to be a Dad again. Not this bloody stupid person that would get on the drink and he'd smoke pot. My children never went without, it wasn't a case that I was taking the money. But they did go without - because they didn't have my time and my undivided attention. I can't wait to give them my undivided attention. I can't wait. (S66)

Some comments related to how the program helped fathers **reassess their priorities**. For example:

- I will remember the important parts of being a responsible parent. Instead of just making decisions and leaving them [family] and just coming to gaol. I will think it's more about them than me - that's what I want to be taking out of it. (B120)
- At the end of the day, the Gold Coast holiday - the kids don't talk about them - Dreamworld, SeaWorld, Movie World - it's over. They've got a memory of it, but what I'm hearing from them is the time in the park, at the beach, the time when Daddy picks them up from school. When Daddy picks them up when they've got a cut knee. And that is what they hold in their hearts ... [Facilitator] said to me, his grandkids come over and it doesn't matter what he's doing, it doesn't matter who's in the house, if he's got an important business meeting, he says to whoever it is, 'you go and put the kettle on, I'm just going to talk to the kids for five minutes and see what their day was like and I'm going to get down to their level.' That's beautiful ... It got me thinking, we think that other things are so important in our life, but the most important thing has just come home through the door. They're that excited to see you and they've had a good day at school and they've done whatever they've done and now with my phone calls with my children, even though it's only six minutes, I do it three or four times a day ... And this course made me realise that that's what's important. They don't talk about the motorbikes, they don't talk about - sport's a big thing in my family. The boys play football and [my daughter] does her hip-hop dance and her ballet and her tap and she tells me about it. And it's important to me that I listen to her, because that's what's important to them. That's what this course has shown me. The things that are important to me aren't important - what's important to them is what's important to me now ... That's happened to me a thousand times, when the kids have run in and I was too 'busy' doing my stuff, doing nothing. I should have been listening to what they had to say. So, I encourage anybody to do this course ... Talking to you today, I can't wait to ring my kids, to keep on the path that I am, which is more interested in them than me. What this course has done has made me realise that they are gold, they are the important... anything that I've got is secondary, because that is what is going to make them better people ... Put it this way, I had nothing growing up and I thought that the most

important thing was that they had everything and I made sure that they had everything. But I missed the most important thing and the most important thing is having Dad there 24 - 7. I thought the most important things were monetary, but they're not. The most important things are the most basic things. (S66)

Several of the fathers focused on their **hopes for their children**.

- The main thing I want is that I want my children to have the life that I never had when I was growing up. I want them to go to University and travel the world and achieve some things in life ... I've got a strong connection with my children and they know who I am and they love me. They love their Dad because he's very supportive - the loving and caring side of life and being there for them. I just want them to grow up with a strong relationship between me and their mother. I just want that family bond to be strong, like my family bond was when I was growing up. (B124)
- I can't wait to be out and talk to them and make them think more positive. (L27)
- I've done bad things. I went down the wrong path because of drugs. I don't want that kind of thing for my children. I know my mum definitely didn't want that for us. But I took that path. Most of my other brothers and sisters they've never been to gaol in their life. I'm the only one. (L31)
- It's made me think about a lot of things that I should do when I get out. I haven't seen my daughter yet – she's 6 months old and it's too far for them to travel. Really looking forward to seeing her. (L18)
- I plan to get custody when I get out – get back with my missus. Getting custody depends on her response to a relationship when I'm released. But even if it doesn't work, she won't keep me away from them. (L34)
- I just want to become the Dad that they can look up to. When I'm long gone, I've got to build some sort of bridge that makes them a better parent, a better person ... I don't want my babies to have to witness anything other than love and [knowing] they're the most important thing ... I just want my children to be honest, I want them to be reliable, I want them to have integrity. I want them to have all the things I didn't have. But today, and from now on, I want to have those things, I want my children to know love. I always give the kids a kiss and tell them Daddy loves them and God bless. But up until this course I didn't know why I've done that. It was just a knee-jerk reaction. But now I realise why I do this, it's because I want them to know love and to know that if things are bad, things are going to get better. I just want them to be the best they can possibly be. (S66)

Further to their hopes for their children, some fathers talked about their **own personal hopes and goals for the future**. Some of their goals were inspired by participation in the program and the sense of confidence they attributed to the experience.

- Over the years I've had a lot of time to think. I'm going to take a step outside the square now and look at it from all angles and figure where I want to go in life. Pick up from there. I should achieve something in life. I just want to make them [children] proud. I want them one day to go to school and one day see me on TV or see something written about me and say 'That's my Dad there'. I want to make them proud ... The biggest thing I noticed in the program is what type of relationship you're going to build with children and not exposing them to the poverty side of life. Just do your best for them and keep them close. Cherish them as much as you can because they're precious ... In a way I'm happy that I've come back to gaol to clean myself up a bit and straighten my head out and open my eyes up. It's going to be big doing that on my own. (B124)

- Doing this course ... makes me feel like a human being. Doing this course makes me feel like I've got a chance. It makes me feel good and that I can be a father again. (L28)
- Being in gaol, it's either deal with it or do your head in over it. If you're stressing out over it, there's other things. Blokes hang themselves in here and self-harm. The first couple of months, I found it hard to get motivated because of that. Then I sort of ... I try to stay strong. I know I'm going to see my kids eventually. (B121)
- This doesn't work – sending us in prison doesn't work. Building up our confidence does work. (L2)
- I wanted to get out of the program how to live when I get out of gaol – with my partner. When I get out I want to go to rehab or something like that. (L31)
- Everyone has set backs, you've got to take your medicine and this is my medicine for doing the wrong thing. I'm happy to do it, but I can't wait to put into practice the things that I'm learning and it's an on-going thing. I learn every day. Whereas before, I used to think that I already knew it all. How silly of me! ... Society won't let me start afresh, but it doesn't matter about society, it matters about you. Over two years or five years, they will realise that here's this man that used to be a dead-set lunatic and he's changed his ways and he's become a better man. I can see he's become a better man because he does this, this and this, instead of this this and this. I'm looking forward. My life's just begun. My journey has just begun and I thought it had ended. (S66)
- I'm proud to be a Dad. I have lots of plans for when I'm out – there's lots to catch up on. (L36)

3.3 *Additional Information – Babiin Miyagang*

In addition to face-to-face interviews with fathers in the main parent survey, the researchers had access to written feedback on the program. This included comments on feedback forms from participants following their participation in the program and correspondence from CSNSW staff involved with the program. A selection of these documents are included in Appendix A.

3.4 *Discussion – Babiin Miyagang*

Section 3.1 indicated that the sample of 28 participants in Babiin Miyagang were largely similar to the wider group of 64 fathers interviewed as part of the Breaking the Cycle program in their demographic and criminogenic characteristics. They were, by definition, more likely to be Indigenous – all but one identified as Indigenous, compared with 70% of the main sample. However, there were some differences: the program participants reported that they were more engaged with their children prior to incarceration, being more likely to be living with their children and to be involved in their care. This was not the case with all program participants, however, some of whom were estranged from their children and had little contact. Significantly fewer fathers who had attended the program reported that one or more of their children were currently living with their mothers (75% compared with 84.4%), although more of the program participants had plans to live with a partner on their release (not statistically significant).

The qualitative data presented in Section 3.2 indicates strong support for the program amongst the participants who clearly valued the experience of participating. They reported that it helped them understand more about their children and how to communicate with them. Several stated that it inspired them to be better fathers and better men. They valued the cultural aspects of the program, particularly the specific skills, qualities and influence of the facilitator and the fact that they were learning in the company of other Indigenous fathers. Most of the fathers were extremely positive about their experiences in the program and some spoke about its powerful impact on them.

Many of the participants articulated hopes and goals for after their release and their resolve to live better lives and to be better connected with their children. Clearly this resolve may not be translated into reality, especially given the many pressures on parents leaving custody. It has been beyond the scope of this study to explore the longer-term impact of the program. However, many of the skills and insights that participants have learnt are potentially lasting: a greater understanding of child development and the ability to view the world from a child’s perspective; communication skills; priority-setting; and a stronger and more positive sense of their Indigenous culture.

The results of this stage of the project have been written up in an article currently under review in a journal on social issues.

4 FINDINGS – Mothering at a Distance Program

This section presents the data obtained from the mothers who had attended the Mothering at a Distance (MAAD) program (N=24). In addition to these women, 11 other mothers reported that they had attended another parenting program while in custody.

4.1 Participants in MAAD and Other Parenting Programs

Table 6 summarises demographic and other characteristics of those who had attended the program (N=24) compared with all mothers in the sample (N=65). The right hand column indicates whether there is any statistically significant difference between those who attended and those who did not. Significance was measured using Students’ t-test to compare means and Cramer’s V for cross-tabulated data.

Table 6 Characteristics of mothers who attended MAAD and all mothers interviewed

ITEM	Mothers attending MAAD N= 24	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
Demographic - parent			
<i>Parent’s age (years)</i>			
Range	21 – 58	21 – 58	
Mean	30.8	33.0	
Median	28.5	31.0	P=0.084
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	79.2%	83.1%	
NZ/Pacific	8.3%	4.6%	
UK	0%	1.5%	
Asia	12.5%	10.8%	NS
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	54.2%	52.3%	
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	0%	1.5%	
Not Indigenous	45.8%	46.2%	NS
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	34.8%	46.9%	NS
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	43.5%	46.9%	NS
<i>Literacy</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified literacy problem	17.4%	7.9%	P=0.035
<i>Disability</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified disability	8.7%	7.9%	NS

ITEM	Mothers attending MAAD N= 24	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
<i>Age left family home (years)</i>			
Proportion still living at home at arrest	8.3%	4.6%	
Range	11 - 32	10 – 32	
Mean age	16.6	17.0	NS
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i>			
Both parents	25.0%	29.2%	
Mother	33.3%	43.1%	
Father	4.2%	1.5%	
Grandparent/s	12.5%	7.7%	
Other relative	8.3%	6.2%	
Foster parent/s	0%	1.5%	
Other	16.7%	10.8%	NS
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i>			
Alone (with or without children)	29.2%	23.1%	
Partner	29.2%	33.8%	
Relative/s	33.3%	27.7%	
Friend/s	0%	1.5%	
Don't know	0%	4.6%	
Other arrangement	8.3%	9.2%	NS
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i>			
Neither	66.7%	76.9%	
Mother	16.7%	6.2%	
Father	16.7%	13.8%	
Both parents	0%	3.1%	P=0.056
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i>			
Proportion	25.0%	20.0%	NS
Demographic – child/ren			
<i>Respondent's total number of children</i>			
Range	1 – 9	1 – 9	
Mean	3.4	3.1	
Median	3.0	3.0	NS
<i>Number of children 0 – 18</i>			
Range	1 - 6	1 – 6	
Total number	75	176	
Mean	3.1	2.7	
Median	3.0	3.0	P=0.07
<i>Step/foster children</i>			
Proportion who have step children	4.2%	1.5%	
Mean number	1	1	NS
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i>			
Range	2 – 35	0.2 – 35	
Mean	11.9	12.6	NS
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i>			
Range	0.2 - 12	0 – 18	
Mean	4.0	5.3	P=0.07
<i>Children in different age groups</i>			
Have pre-school aged child		55.4%	NS
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)		73.8%	P=0.055
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)		52.3%	NS
Have child 18+ years		18.5%	NS

ITEM	Mothers attending MAAD N= 24	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%s)</i>			
All children	45.8%	47.7%	
Some of children	20.8%	18.5%	
None of children	33.3%	33.8%	NS
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%s)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	33.3%	32.8%	
Joint carer for some of children	12.5%	12.5%	
Sole carer for all children	16.7%	21.9%	
Sole carer for some of children	12.5%	7.8%	
No major care-giving role	25.0%	24.6%	NS
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	62.5%	60.0%	
Some of children	25.0%	23.1%	
None of children	8.3%	15.4%	
Unsure	4.2%	1.5%	NS
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements¹</i>			
Lives independently	8.3%	10.8%	NS
Other parent	29.2%	32.3%	NS
Grandparent/s	29.2%	38.5%	NS
Other relative	25.0%	15.4%	NS
Partner (not child's biological parent)	4.2%	3.1%	NS
Friend	4.2%	1.5%	NS
Foster parent (not related)	37.5%	24.6%	P=0.065
Living with relative thru DOCS	12.5%	12.3%	NS
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	4.2%	1.5%	NS
Don't know where child is	0%	1.5%	NS
Jacaranda cottage program	16.7%	12.3%	NS
Other arrangement	0%	1.5%	NS
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	66.7%	55.4%	
Some of my children	16.7%	15.4%	
None of my children	8.3%	26.2%	
Don't know if they know	8.3%	3.1%	P=0.030
<i>Children visit</i>			
No children visit	25.0%	41.5%	
Some children visit occasionally	8.3%	10.8%	
All children visit occasionally	29.2%	13.8%	
Some children visit regularly	4.2%	1.5%	
All children visit regularly	20.8%	23.1%	
Jacaranda Cottage program	12.5%	9.3%	P=0.023
Ever received visit	75.0%	56.3%	P=0.019
Phone contact at least weekly	50.0% ²	65.5%	P=0.050
Write letters at least weekly	40.0% ²	37.3%	NS
Custodial data			
<i>Sentence details (months)</i>			
Mean length of sentence	68.8	58.0	
Median sentence length	39.9	35.9	
Range of sentence length	14.9 – 264	6 – 264	
Proportion not yet sentenced	37.5%	26.5%	NS

ITEM	Mothers attending MAAD N= 24	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
<i>Time between incarceration and interview (months)</i>	16.2	15.5	
Mean duration to date	8.5	8.5	
Median duration	1.0 – 99.7	0.1 – 99.7	
Range of duration to date			NS
<i>Prior sentences</i>			
Mean number	4.4	5.1	
Median	4.0	3.0	
Range of number of previous sentences	0 - 12	0 – 23	NS
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	21.7%	11.5%	
Medium – low	0%	9.8%	
Medium	26.1%	29.5%	
Medium – high	26.1%	32.8%	
High	26.1%	16.4%	P=0.063
CSNSW Parenting Program			
Attended parenting program in custody	100%	50.8%	
Attended > one course	4.2%	3.6%	

1 More than one option per family

2 N=20 as some participants didn't complete this section of questionnaire

NS = Not (statistically) significant

Comparison between the women who had attended MAAD and those who had not indicates that there were not many substantial differences between the two samples. The relatively small numbers of mothers in each group may affect the statistical significance of differences. However, there are some trends worth noting. The women who had attended MAAD had substantially lower literacy levels than the other women interviewed and, accordingly, only one third had completed Year 10 at school (compared with over half – 53.7% – of those who had not undertaken the program). These women had significantly more experience of parental incarceration during their childhood.

The women who had attended the MAAD program were typically younger than other women interviewed, and had more children in younger age groups. This is consistent with the targeting of MAAD to women with children in the 0-5 age group. Despite this, significantly more MAAD participants indicated that their children knew they were in gaol ($p=0.030$) and they were also more likely to report that they received visits from their children. Conversely, they had significantly less frequent phone contact with their children.

The next table includes data on all participants who had attended a parenting program (including MAAD but also courses provided by TAFE, Wesley, PPP, Barnardo's and other providers) and again compares them with all mothers in the BTC study.

Table 7 Characteristics of mothers who attended a parenting program and all mothers interviewed in BTC study

ITEM	Mothers attending any parenting program N=33	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
Demographic – parent			
<i>Parent's age (years)</i>			
Range	21 – 58	21 – 58	NS
Mean	31.3	33.0	
Median	29.0	31.0	
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	81.8%	83.1%	NS
NZ/Pacific	6.1%	4.6%	
UK	0%	1.5%	
Asia	12.1%	10.8%	
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	57.6%	52.3%	NS
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	0%	1.5%	
Not Indigenous	42.4%	46.2%	
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	40.6%	46.9%	NS
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	53.1%	46.9%	NS
<i>Literacy</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified literacy problem	15.6%	7.9%	P=0.022
<i>Disability</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-identified disability	12.5%	7.9%	NS
<i>Age left family home (years)</i>			
Proportion still living at home at arrest	9.1%	4.6%	NS
Range	11 -32	10 – 32	
Mean age	16.9	17.0	
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i>			
Both parents	24.2%	29.2%	NS
Mother	36.4%	43.1%	
Father	3.0%	1.5%	
Grandparent/s	12.1%	7.7%	
Other relative	6.1%	6.2%	
Foster parent/s	0%	1.5%	
Other	18.2%	10.8%	
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i>			
Alone (with or without children)	27.3%	23.1%	NS
Partner	27.3%	33.8%	
Relative/s	33.3%	27.7%	
Friend/s	3.0%	1.5%	
Don't know	3.0%	4.6%	
Other arrangement	6.1%	9.2%	
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i>			
Neither	69.7%	76.9%	NS
Mother	12.1%	6.2%	
Father	15.2%	13.8%	
Both parents	3.0%	3.1%	

ITEM	Mothers attending any parenting program N=33	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i> Proportion	27.3%	20.0%	NS
Demographic – child/ren			
<i>Total number of children</i>			
Range	1 – 9	1 – 9	
Mean	3.2	3.1	NS
Median	3.0	3.0	
<i>Number of children 0 – 18</i>			
Range	1 – 6	1 – 6	
Total number	96	176	
Mean	2.9	2.7	NS
Median	3.0	3.0	
<i>Step/foster children</i>			
Proportion who have step children	3.0%	1.5%	
Mean number	1	1	NS
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i>			
Range	0.1 – 35	2.1 – 35	
Mean	11.9	12.6	NS
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i>			
Range	0.1 – 12	0 – 18	
Mean	4.0	5.3	P=0.032
<i>Children in different age groups</i>			
Have pre-school aged child	66.7%	55.4%	P=0.063
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)	78.8%	73.8%	NS
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)	48.5%	52.3%	NS
Have child 18+ years	9.1%	18.5%	P=0.048
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%)</i>			
All children	45.5%	47.7%	
Some of children	18.2%	18.5%	
None of children	36.4%	33.8%	NS
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	27.3%	32.8%	
Joint carer for some of children	12.1%	12.5%	
Sole carer for all children	27.3%	21.9%	
Sole carer for some of children	9.1%	7.8%	
No major care-giving role	24.2%	24.6%	NS
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	66.7%	60.0%	
Some of children	24.2%	23.1%	
None of children	6.1%	15.4%	
Unsure	3.0%	1.5%	NS

ITEM	Mothers attending any parenting program N=33	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements*</i>			
Lives independently	6.1%	10.8%	
Other parent	24.2%	32.3%	
Grandparent/s	30.3%	38.5%	
Other relative	21.2%	15.4%	
Partner (not child's biological parent)	3.0%	3.1%	
Friend	3.0%	1.5%	
Foster parent (not related)	33.3%	24.6%	
Living with relative thru DOCS	15.2%	12.3%	
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	3.0%	1.5%	
Don't know where child is	0%	1.5%	
Jacaranda cottage program	15.2%	12.3%	
Other arrangement	0%	1.5%	All NS
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	66.7%	55.4%	
Some of my children	15.2%	15.4%	
None of my children	12.1%	26.2%	
Don't know if they know	6.1%	3.1%	P=0.036
<i>Children visit</i>			
No children visit	21.2%	41.5%	
Some children visit occasionally	9.1%	10.8%	
All children visit occasionally	21.2%	13.8%	
Some children visit regularly	3.0%	1.5%	
All children visit regularly	30.3%	23.1%	
Jacaranda Cottage program	12.1%	9.3%	P=0.015
Ever received visit	78.1%	56.3%	P<0.001
Phone contact at least weekly	60.7%	65.5%	NS
Write letters at least weekly	32.1%	37.3%	NS
Custodial data			
<i>Sentence details (months)</i>			
Mean length of sentence	60.6	58.0	NS
Median sentence length	39.9	35.9	
Range of sentence length	6.2 – 264	6 – 264	
Proportion not yet sentenced	30.3%	26.5%	
<i>Time between incarceration and interview (months)</i>			
Mean duration to date	15.7	15.5	NS
Median duration	9.5	8.5	
Range of duration to date	0.1 – 99.7	0.1 – 99.7	
<i>Prior sentences</i>			
Mean number	4.0	5.1	NS
Median	3.0	3.0	
Range of number of previous sentences	0 – 12	0 – 23	
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	19.4%	11.5%	
Medium – low	6.5%	9.8%	
Medium	25.8%	29.5%	
Medium – high	25.8%	32.8%	
High	22.6%	16.4%	NS

ITEM	Mothers attending any parenting program N=33	All mothers N=65	Significance of difference?
CSNSW Parenting Program			
Attended parenting program in custody	100%	50.8%	
Attended > one course	3.6%	3.6%	

**More than one option per family*

NS = Not (statistically) significant

Comparison between the mothers who had attended a parenting program in custody and those who had not indicates that the two groups are relatively similar. However, there are a few differences. The women who had attended parenting programs had significantly lower literacy levels than the other women interviewed, although the difference in the school attendance was not statistically significant. A higher proportion reported a disability, although this was not significant.

The women who had attended a parenting program had more children in younger age-groups, and significantly fewer children over the age of 18. Despite this, significantly more indicated that their children knew they were in gaol ($p=0.036$). They were also more likely to report that they received visits from their children (or else participated in the Jacaranda Cottage program). There was no statistically significant difference in other forms of contact with their children. Further, there did not appear to be any significant difference in terms of criminological characteristics.

Table 8 compares the mothers in the BTC sample who had attended a parenting program with the population of all mothers in custody in NSW at the end of 2013.

Table 8 Demographic details of mothers who attended parenting programs and all incarcerated mothers

	BTC mothers attending parenting program N=33	All mothers in custody CSNSW Data* N=387
Mean age (years)	31.3	34.8
Aboriginality (% identified as Indigenous)	57.6%	38.5%
Completed Year 10	40.6%	55.3%
Completed TAFE or trade qualification	53.1%	43.7%
Identified literacy problem	15.6%	6.5%
Prior sentences (mean number)	4.0	5.9
Mean sentence length (months)	39.9	42.5
Attended CSNSW parenting program	100%	23.3%

**Source: data supplied by CSNSW on inmates identified as having child <18 from the OIMS collection, at December 2013*

This table indicates that the women interviewed for the BTC study who had attended parenting programs were slightly younger than the average for all incarcerated mothers, consistent with the tendency of mothers with younger children (who would be themselves younger) to be recommended to attend these programs. The sample had a higher proportion of Indigenous mothers, largely due to the targeting of MAAD towards Indigenous women. They were less likely to have completed Year 10 at school, but more likely to have gone on to TAFE or other post-school qualification. The women in the sample also had a lower mean number of previous incarcerations and typically shorter sentences.

4.2 Participants' responses to the program

During the open-ended questions during the structured interviews, the mothers who had attended parenting programs commented on aspects of the programs. Their comments can be grouped into a number of themes. These themes are similar to those developed in the analysis of evaluation forms from 134 mothers who attended MAAD during the period November 2011 to December 2014 (Rossiter et al. 2015). Table 9 summarises these themes.

Table 9 Themes in qualitative responses from women participating in parenting programs

Themes	Subthemes
1. Supporting mothers in their role	1.1 Identifying as a mother 1.2 Sharing their maternal experience 1.3 Developing confidence
2. Learning practical strategies with children	2.1 Understanding the child's world 2.2 Understanding child growth and development 2.3 Learning new ways of managing child behaviour
3. Mothering from prison	3.1 Maintaining a connection with children 3.2 Creating a gift for children 3.3 Acknowledging the difficulty of being separated from children
4. Other Issues	4.1 MAAD as a means to an end 4.2 Doing what I am told

4.2.1 Supporting Mothers in their Role

Some respondents indicated that the program helped them in their maternal role. This was significant for those who did not have custody of their children and whose *maternal identity* was uncertain.

- She wasn't in my care back then but I was hoping to regain some access. I felt like I was out of touch with being a Mum. Everyone says that they never lose their mothering instinct. (D39 – did MAAD about 10 years earlier)

Several women stated that they found that *spending time with other mothers* was valuable, enabling them to share experiences and emotions, and to provide mutual advice. It also provided a bond with other inmates due to their common circumstances:

- My friend was called up to do MAAD and we are in the same situation. So she said she wanted me to do it too because we are very close (E128 – MAAD)
- We all got to learn things from each other – tips from older mothers. I was the youngest one in this group (J21 – MAAD)
- I learned a lot, from the other mothers. We talk about what upsets us and what problems we have with the children. (J89 – Wesley Adolescent Program)

At least one mother reported *feeling more confident* as a parent due to her involvement in a parenting program:

- I found I'm not confident in my parenting and behaviour management, but I'm learning a lot through the program. I have done behaviour management strategies and problem solving. I think the program is boosting my confidence as a parent and my abilities to parent. I like the program. I

think it is useful. It teaches me how to control anger in situations and not scream or yell. (B61 – currently doing PPP in the community as part of care plan)

4.2.2 Learning Practical Strategies with Children

Several participants indicated that the parenting programs they attended helped them learn more about interacting with their children. Some responses demonstrate that they had developed a capacity to better *understand the world from their child/ren's perspective*.

- [I signed up] just to learn more about healthy discipline. The importance of stability to the child. [Did you learn about those things?] Yes (D15 – MAAD)
- I got strategies on behavioural problems and he showed how certain things affect your kids. Really good – I got a lot from it. Liked seeing how little things we do affect your kids. I would definitely recommend it – even people without kids said it was really good. (B64 – ‘Barry Palm’ child psychology course at Bolwara)
- I know I wasn’t the perfect mother on the outside for the kids. I wanted to better myself for the kids so when I do get out I give them a better life. Just to learn how to discipline them – I had trouble controlling them. I wanted to learn how to put myself in their shoes and understand why they are so angry. Sit down and talk to them and ask what is wrong with them. (D4 – MAAD)
- [Leader was] helpful and taught us how to sort out problems with kids and how to help them, like when they are upset and stay in their rooms. How to solve their problems. (J89 – Wesley Adolescent Program)

Others women mentioned learning more about *child growth and development* as a result of the parenting program; some indicated that they had not previously had this knowledge.

- I loved it. I learnt how to care for babies more, the right way, and the feelings that we get from it and a lot of other things. (E128 – MAAD)
- It teaches you about things that you wouldn’t normally know about children, like six stages of their sleep, how to bond with them. It teaches you things that you wouldn’t know. (J21 – MAAD)
- I learned a lot – parenting stuff, coping with babies. (E129 – MAAD)
- I learned about lots of things – how to bath him, sterilise bottles, relaxation bathing etc. (J88 – Wesley Adolescent Program, PIPA, Brighter Futures, MCP)
- I’m very inexperienced and very dependent on Mum and Dad. It’s good to know. I wanted to find out more for myself. (J26 – MAAD)

Some respondents specifically discussed learning more about *managing child behaviour*, especially around problematic issues such as eating and anger.

- I learned lots about how to discipline them, how to interact with them, how to get them to help you do stuff. My kids are pretty good but. Different time out strategies. How to get them to share. (S111 – Barnardos program)
- Found some of it useful. We discussed a lot of things and some of the tips were useful, e.g. for my son who is a very fussy eater. [I learnt] tips on new ways to try different foods. All the others weren’t fussy, but he is. It makes me even harder on him. (J86 – Wesley Adolescent Program, MCP)
- It teaches you things that you wouldn’t know. How to approach kids when you’re angry if they’ve done something wrong – it’s not good to approach in a bad mood and scream because they don’t know. Development stuff, discipline stuff. (J21 – MAAD)

- [I learnt] little things that you wouldn't think would work with little kids, but they actually do. Good tips and examples. If you didn't know anything, they would explain it to you. It was good. (E126 – MAAD)
- I signed up for this because we pretty much had to. But I would have done it anyway. I'm having trouble with the oldest one, who is mucking up at school. If I had someone there to give me advice, because she is rebelling too because I am in here. She has settled down a bit now. She gets on well with my aunty. The program was great, I really liked it. [We learned] how to sit down and listen to your children more and let them actually get in control a little bit [of the conversation – let them set the agenda]. I was pretty close with my mum when I was growing up and that's what I want with my girls. (J90 – Wesley parenting program)

4.2.3 *Mothering from Prison*

Some women recounted that parenting programs helped them *maintain a connection with their children* despite the distance between them.

- I enrolled in the past and did about 4 sessions. I didn't finish because I was released. It was something to do – to learn about how to do things with my kids. Got a lot out of it; it helps a lot. (E53 – MAAD)
- I have a better understanding that you can still parent your children, even if you are not there. Like making things for children and the fact that you can send them little things. The children wait for letters to come (D44 – MAAD)
- It helps making a connection with children and [how to cope] when they have to leave after a visit. (D46 – MAAD)
- It's taught me ways to keep in contact with them through letters and making them things. [You hadn't done that before?] No. Then Michelle helps me send it out (through DOCS). It's real good. I learnt little ways to stay in contact with them. Even if they don't contact back. (E130 – MAAD)
- I did MAAD in 2011. I signed up to help me with my children – my youngest was two. I can't remember much about it because it was a bad time in my life. I recall that it was about how to keep the relationship while you're away. [Maybe it would be more relevant if you were to do it now?] Yeah. (E127 – MAAD)

One of the most popular elements of the MAAD program was the craft activities. The women frequently mentioned their pleasure in *creating a gift to send to their children*. Facilitators used the time spent on this activity to continue discussion, especially about issues that some participants found difficult to talk about.

- I loved the craft we made (E128 – MAAD)
- The welfare officer told me about the course. It was coming up to Christmas and I'd done it before so I knew what it was like. So I did some artwork for my son and sent it to him (J8 – MAAD)
- I liked it – making stuff and sending it to my kids (E129 – MAAD)
- A friend was doing it and she said you get to make stuff for your kids. She'd been told about it, so we got to do it together. I made stuff and sent it to my kids – it's good. I've made more stuff since then. It's taught me ways to keep in contact with them through letters and making them things (E130 – MAAD)
- [I did MAAD] to do things to get passed onto my children. To get photos done to get passed onto my children. Because no one else would do them in gaol (J7 – MAAD)

One of the participants found that program helped her acknowledge the difficulty of being separated from children.

- I thought it was pretty helpful back then. I had a lot of barriers up then, feeling guilt for not being there for my daughter. Certain subjects would come up and I would shut down and block it out. But it kept surfacing. (D39 – Did MAAD in 2004)

4.2.4 Other Reasons for Participating in Parenting Programs

Several mothers indicated that they enrolled for MAAD and other parenting programs for reasons to do with their separation from their children. Some women saw *parenting programs as a means to an end*, for instance as a way of increasing their chances of being granted custody of their children on release, or to be transferred to the Mother and Children's Program at Jacaranda Cottages.

- I had wanted to do it for a while and whenever I've been in I've wanted to do it but I got out too quick. Heard good things from people, from friends. This time the main reason I did it was to get my baby to move [into Jacaranda] – it will help for you to get over here. It just helps you [to get to have your baby with you]. They see you want to progress and you do really want your baby. It's so nice here, especially compared with over there [main Emu Plains Correctional Centre]. You don't feel like you're locked up and you get to have your children come for the weekend – boys up to 10 and girls up to 13. They do a lot of programs for the kids (J21 – MAAD)
- My kids went into care when I came to gaol. I did it [MAAD] to look as though I was applying myself to understand my children's needs. There were no issues between me and the children; they only went into foster care because I came to gaol. I thought it might help in relation to my crime – violent crime – though not in relation to children. The carers they are with are quite controlling and want to adopt. They don't want them to see me. I am doing the course to show that I am doing my part. (D5 – MAAD)
- Yes, [I've done MAAD and Mothers & Children's Program] because it was about children. I thought it was about what to do if DOCS takes your children. (J20 – MAAD)
- [I did it] to help me get over here [to Jacaranda Cottages]. It helped me to progress over here. (J24 – MAAD)

Other women indicated that they enrolled for the program *because it was required of them*, for instance as part of their participation in the Mothers and Children's program at Jacaranda Cottages.

- I haven't done MAAD – not yet. Because I have visits from my son. I only do courses when Welfare Officers ask me to, but have already done two. I would do it again if they wanted me to (D2 –TAFE Parenting Course at EPCC)

4.2.5 Other Comments

Some of the mothers made positive general comments about parenting programs they had attended.

- [I enrolled] so I can be a better mother. [Was it helpful?] - yes (D17 – MAAD)
- I learnt new things for my son and my children. (J87 – MAAD, Wesley Adolescent Program, Circle of Security)
- I thought it was a good thing for me to do. It's good to have certificates – and the knowledge I guess. (J6 – TAFE parenting course)

One mother, however, felt that she did not learn anything that was new to her.

- I already knew most of it as I used to be a youth worker for [outside organisation] in Blacktown. So, the content - everything that was said in there, I pretty much knew anyway. Even when we did a mothering class at Brighter Futures, they put us in a different room to the kids and said "We're asking the kids to draw an animal. We want you to think what animal it was." I was the only one - I got the three of them right. We're pretty close. [Was there anything new or that you might do differently when you're back with your boys?] No. (E131 – MAAD)

4.3 Reasons for Not Attending Parenting Programs

We asked all parents in the BTC study whether they had attended a parenting program and, if they had not, why that was the case. The responses from women who had not attended a program fell into three main areas:

4.3.1 Program not available

Several mothers stated that they had not had the option of attending a parenting program because none had been available at the time and place of their incarceration. Some of these mothers only recently been incarcerated, although others had had longer periods in custody. Several of these women indicated that they would like to attend a program if it was available.

- I haven't done a program – only been in gaol for one week. I would more than likely sign up if it was offered. I need something to break up my day and give me something to do, because everything I've done for the last 9 years has just stopped. I find that very difficult to cope with.
- I have not [attended parenting programs], but would like to. But I'm not sure what a course will be like.
- I've been on several short sentences since my kids were very little [not able to enrol for program]
- I've been here five months but I had to go to court and I was doing the Young Offenders Satellite Program. I would like to do a parenting program.
- None has been available, but I definitely would if I had the opportunity. I've only been here a week.

Some respondents stated that they had put their name on a waiting list, but no course had been offered at the time of their BTC interview.

- I put my name down for MAAD, but they never called me up.
- I put my name down – I'm on a waiting list.

Others didn't get a chance to complete the program:

- I did a couple of sessions of MAAD, then was released so didn't finish the course.

4.3.2 Program not relevant

Some respondents stated that they didn't feel the need for a program, either because they felt their relationship with their children was satisfactory or because their children were older.

- I don't need it. I don't believe it's necessary now my kids are older, now the little part is over.
- I don't really need a parenting class. My son's all good.

- There are no programs for parents of older children
- I don't think I need to – they're already grown up.
- I came to gaol for drug issues. I have a really good bond with my four kids. Like I ring them up every couple of days and talk to them. The older three are a bit harder to get hold of.
- Because I was concentrating on bettering yourself and the future in regards to my children, so I decided not to attend parenting programs.
- I never had trouble with the kids when they were little, at all. My Mum had six brothers and she had another child much younger than me. I always had a baby on my hip.
- All my children are adults.

4.3.3 Correctional issues

Some women were unable to attend parenting programs due to policies and procedures within the correctional system. Some interviewees were on remand and others were affected by the number of times they had moved between correctional centres.

- I'm not entitled to do anything because I am on remand. I'm on the Mothers and Children's Program, but I can't do anything else. It is stupid – because the courts say 'what have you done to help yourself?' and I say 'nothing, because I am not entitled to do anything because I am on remand. What would you like me to do?'
- I put name down, and I'm keen to do it, but they said that there are certain reasons why I can't do it.
- It was never offered – I was always moved around.
- Not because I didn't want to... [Has moved round several gaols and found it hard to settle to a course]
- When first came to Jacaranda, no children were allowed in the house I was in because I was working on the dog assistance program. By the time I moved to another house, he [my son] was too old to live with me. MAAD wasn't offered because he was older – it was beyond me.

4.4 Discussion of Mothering at a Distance

The majority of the 33 women who had attended a parenting program indicated that they had received some benefit from participation. Only one specifically stated that she had not found it to be useful or informative. However, some of the other participants were not able to recall much about the program they had attended and made few comments. One of these women specifically recognised that she had attended at a time when she was not very receptive to the content of the program – although she stated that she would obtain more value if she could attend it around the time she spoke to the BTC researchers.

The comments from participants indicate that the mothers reported learning from the programs, in ways that are consistent with the aims of MAAD. Comments indicate that the program is addressing its objective to 'develop strategies to enhance pro-social parenting skills through increased maternal sensitivity and appropriate responsiveness to infant's signals or cues with the aim of guarding against the intergenerational cycle of crime' (Perry et al. 2011, p. 462). Participants' comments suggest that they had increased their knowledge of children's development and their understanding of their children's perspective. They also indicated that they had developed ways to feel connected to their children and to communicate with them, especially in stressful situations. Several participants described the programs as helpful or enjoyable.

The responses are not as uniformly positive as those from the fathers who had attended the Babiin Miyagang program. This may be at least partly related to the fact that we interviewed the men shortly after they completed the program and that many of them were invited to participate in the BTC study by the program facilitator. Some of the participants may have been keen to highlight how valuable they had found the program. Conversely, we interviewed the mothers some time after they completed the program – in some cases, many years later. Their recall was not as fresh or specific in terms of what they had learnt and they were generally less enthusiastic than the fathers. It might be more relevant to compare the men’s comments with those made by the women in their evaluation sheets, completed at the conclusion of the MAAD program (Rossiter et al. 2015). These comments showed greater enthusiasm for the program and a more inclusive view of what they had gained from the program.

5 FINDINGS – Incarcerated Fathers’ Contact with their Children

5.1 Quantitative Data on Contact with Children

Table 10 summarises the responses from the fathers interviewed in the BTC study to the question about whether they received visits from their children while they were in custody. It shows that only one quarter of the sample received regular visits from their children. Nearly one third never received visits from their children, for a variety of reasons (see below).

Table 10 Visits from children, all BTC fathers (N=64)

	Frequency	Percent
No visits any children	21	32.8%
Irregular visits some children	6	9.4%
Irregular visits all children	9	14.1%
Regular visits some children	3	4.7%
Regular visits all children	14	21.9%
Used to have visits but not any longer	11	17.2%
Total	64	100%

Table 11 shows the fathers’ frequency of contact with their children via phone and letter. Not all participants responded to these questions that were included in the Parenting Stress Index questionnaire, completed at the end of the interview. In this schedule, the fathers were asked to answer in relation to their youngest child, so these figures may under-estimate contact with all their children.

Table 11 Frequency of contact with children (N=59)

	Write letters		Talk on telephone	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Every day	1	1.7%	17	28.8%
Several times a week	2	3.4%	10	16.9%
Once a week	18	28.1%	11	18.6%
Less than once a week	10	16.9%	5	8.5%
No contact in last month	28	47.5%	16	27.1%
Total	59	100%	59	100%

Approximately one-third of the fathers reported writing to their children at least once a week. It should be noted that if their child was very young, writing letters (or even speaking on the phone) might not be

relevant. Phone contact was more common, with just under two thirds (64.3%) reporting that they spoke to their children at least once a week.

Table 12 explores the characteristics of fathers who receive no visits from their children, and those who receive regular visits from at least one of their children (N=17). It shows that Indigenous fathers are less likely to receive regular visits than non-Indigenous fathers. Fathers who receive regular visits tend to have had more education (though are less likely to have post-school qualifications) and to have grown up with both parents. They are also more likely to have lived with their children prior to custody and to plan to live with them after release. A higher proportion of these fathers report that they plan to live with a partner on release. They write and speak to their children more often.

Fathers who have not had any visits from their children have been incarcerated for a shorter time than those who receive visits, suggesting that some are recently arrested and/or unsentenced and have not yet made arrangements for visits.

Table 12 Characteristics of fathers who receive regular visits (from some or all children) and fathers who receive no visits (including those who used to receive visits previously)

ITEM	All fathers N= 64	Fathers who have regular visits N=17	Fathers who receive no visits ¹ N=32
Demographic - parent			
<i>Parent's age (years)</i>			
Range	19 – 52	21 – 52	19 – 46
Mean	33.2	36.5	31.3
Median	32.0	35	29.5
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	93.8%	88.2%	96.9%
NZ/Pacific	3.1%	11.8%	0%
UK	1.6%	0%	3.1%
Asia	0%	0%	0%
South Africa	1.6%	0%	0%
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	70.3%	58.8%	75.0%
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	1.6%	5.9%	0%
Not Indigenous	28.1%	35.3%	25.0%
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	54.7%	82.4%	34.4%
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	37.5%	29.4%	43.8%
<i>Literacy</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-assessed literacy problem	11.3%	11.8%	13.3%
<i>Disability</i>			
Proportion with CSNSW-assessed disability	11.3%	17.6%	13.3%
<i>Age left family home</i>			
Proportion still living at home at arrest	6.3%	5.9%	6.3%
Range (years)	9 – 25	13 – 20	10 – 22
Mean age (years)	15.0	15.2	14.8

ITEM	All fathers N= 64	Fathers who have regular visits N=17	Fathers who receive no visits ¹ N=32
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i>			
Both parents	34.4%	47.1%	21.9%
Mother	37.5%	29.4%	50.0%
Father	1.6%	0%	3.1%
Grandparent/s	10.9%	5.9%	15.6%
Other relative	0%	0%	0%
Foster parent/s	3.1%	5.9%	3.1%
Other	12.3%	11.8%	6.3%
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i>			
Alone (with or without children)	14.1%	5.9%	12.5%
Partner	45.3%	70.6%	43.8%
Relative/s	31.3%	17.6%	37.5%
Friend/s	1.6%	5.9%	0%
Don't know	6.3%	0%	3.1%
Other arrangement	1.6%	0%	3.1%
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i>			
Neither	70.3%	82.4%	68.8%
Mother	3.1%	0%	6.3%
Father	21.9%	11.8%	21.9%
Both parents	4.7%	5.9%	3.1%
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i>			
Proportion	23.4%	17.6%	31.3%
Demographic – child/ren			
<i>Respondent's total number of children</i>			
Range	1 – 9	1 – 9	1 – 7
Mean	2.7	3.6	2.6
Median	2.0	3.0	2.0
<i>Step/foster children</i>			
Proportion who have step children	15.4%	11.8%	12.5%
Mean number	2.8	2.5	3.0
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i>			
Range	0.8 – 34	2 – 34	3 – 26
Mean	12.9	14.8	12.1
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i>			
Range	0 – 18	0.4 – 14	0 – 18
Mean	5.7	5.8	6.0
<i>Children in different age groups</i>			
Have pre-school aged child	53.1%	58.8%	50.0%
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)	57.8%	47.1%	59.4%
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)	46.9%	52.9%	37.5%
Have child 18+ years	25.0%	35.3%	21.9%
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%s)</i>			
All children	35.9%	52.9%	34.4%
Some of children	28.1%	23.5%	28.1%
None of children	35.9%	23.5%	37.5%

ITEM	All fathers N= 64	Fathers who have regular visits N=17	Fathers who receive no visits ¹ N=32
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%s)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	43.8%	58.8%	46.9%
Joint carer for some of children	14.1%	5.9%	12.5%
Sole carer for all children	0%	0%	0%
Sole carer for some of children	1.6%	0%	3.1%
No major care-giving role	40.6%	35.3%	37.5%
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	46.9%	64.7%	40.6%
Some of children	32.8%	29.4%	25.0%
None of children	18.8%	5.9%	31.3%
Unsure	1.6%	0%	3.1%
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements²</i>			
Lives independently	15.6%	17.6%	12.5%
Other parent	84.4%	82.4%	87.5%
Grandparent/s	17.2%	23.5%	12.5%
Other relative	3.1%	0%	0%
Partner (not child's biological parent)	7.8%	11.8%	6.3%
Friend	0%	0%	0%
Foster parent (not related)	4.7%	5.9%	6.3%
Living with relative thru DOCS	9.4%	5.9%	6.3%
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	4.7%	0%	9.4%
Don't know where child is	3.1%	0%	6.3%
Other arrangement	3.1%	5.9%	3.1%
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	62.5%	82.4%	56.3%
Some of my children	21.9%	11.8%	25.0%
None of my children	14.1%	5.9%	15.6%
Don't know if they know	1.6%	0%	3.1%
Ever received a visit from children	62.5%	100%	34.4%
Speak by telephone at least weekly	65.6%	82.4%	58.6%
Write letters at least weekly	36.1%	47.1%	27.6%
Custodial Data			
<i>Sentence details</i>			
Mean length of sentence (months)	66.1	67.9	68.0
Median length of sentence (months)	50.0	48.4	55.4
Range of sentence length (months)	2 - 240	12 - 240	2 - 240
Proportion not yet sentenced	29.6%	29.4%	50.0%
<i>Time between incarceration and interview</i>			
Mean incarceration to date (months)	19.7	22.5	19.0
Median incarceration to date (months)	10.5	16.5	8.8
Range of duration of incarceration to date	0.5 - 114	2.5 - 56.5	1.5 - 114
<i>Number of prior sentences</i>			
Mean	5.9	7.0	5.6
Median	5.0	7.0	4.0
Range	0 - 21	2 - 12	0 - 21

ITEM	All fathers N= 64	Fathers who have regular visits N=17	Fathers who receive no visits ¹ N=32
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	7.0%	12.5%	0%
Medium – low	3.5%	0%	7.4%
Medium	29.8%	25.0%	29.6%
Medium – high	47.4%	43.8%	51.9%
High	12.3%	18.8%	11.1%
CSNSW Parenting Program			
Proportion attending	46.9%	47.1%	24.1%
Proportion attending > 1 program	14.8%		

1. Includes fathers who used to receive visits in the past but no longer do so.

2. More than one option per family

A paper on the support needs of incarcerated fathers has recently been accepted for publication by an academic journal (Fowler et al forthcoming).

6 FINDINGS – Incarcerated Mothers’ Contact with their Children

6.1 Quantitative Data on Contact and Visiting

Table 13 summarises the responses from the mothers interviewed in the BTC study to the question about whether they received visits from their children while they were in custody. It shows that only one quarter of the sample received regular visits from their children. Over 40% never received visits from their children, for a variety of reasons (see below).

Table 33 Visits from children, all BTC mothers (N=65)

	Frequency	Per cent
No visits any children	27	41.5%
Irregular visits some children	7	10.8%
Irregular visits all children	9	13.8%
Regular visits some children	1	1.5%
Regular visits all children	15	23.1%
In Jacaranda Cottage program	6	9.3%
Total	65	100%

Table 14 shows the mothers’ frequency of contact with their children via phone and letter. Not all participants responded to these questions which were included in the Parenting Stress Index questionnaire, completed at the end of the interview. In this schedule, the mothers were asked to answer in relation to their youngest child, so these figures may under-estimate contact with all their children.

Table 4 Frequency of contact with children

	Write letters		Talk on telephone	
	Frequency	Per cent	Frequency	Per cent
Every day	5	8.6%	13	22.8%
Several times a week	3	5.2%	15	26.3%
Once a week	14	24.1%	10	17.5%
Less than once a week	15	25.9%	1	1.8%
No contact in last month	21	36.2%	18	31.6%
Total responding	58	100%	57	100%

Table 14 above indicates that the mothers did not often write to their children – although it should be noted that if their child was very young, writing letters (or even speaking on the phone) might not be meaningful. A total of 37.9% reported writing letters once a week or more often. Phone contact was more common, with two thirds reporting that they spoke to their children at least once a week.

Table 15 explores the characteristics of mothers who receive no visits from their children, and those who receive regular visits from at least one of their children (or who are in Jacaranda Cottages with their child) (N=22). It shows that Indigenous mothers are less likely to receive regular visits than non-Indigenous mothers, as are mothers whose children are with foster parents. Mothers who receive regular visits tend to have had more education and to have grown up with both parents. They are also more likely to have lived with their children prior to custody and to plan to live with them after release. Mothers who have not had any visits from their children have been incarcerated for a much shorter time than those who receive visits, suggesting that some are recently arrested and/or unsentenced and have not yet made arrangements for visits. They are also given a higher security rating.

Table 15 Characteristics of mothers who receive regular visits (from some or all children and/or live in Jacaranda cottage and mothers who receive no visits

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Mothers with regular visits N=22	Mothers who receive no visits N=27
Demographic - parent			
<i>Parent's age (years)</i>			
Range	21 – 58	22 – 58	21 – 45
Mean	33.0	33.5	31.7
Median	31.0	32	31.0
<i>Country of birth (proportion born in...)</i>			
Australia	83.1%	77.3%	88.9%
NZ/Pacific	4.6%	4.5%	3.7%
UK	1.5%	4.5%	0%
Asia	10.8%	13.6%	7.4%
South Africa	0%	0%	
<i>Aboriginality</i>			
Indigenous	52.3%	40.9%	59.3%
Not Indigenous, but has Indigenous children	1.5%	0%	0%
Not Indigenous	46.2%	59.1%	40.7%
<i>Education & Training</i>			
Proportion finished Year 10 school	46.9%	57.1%	48.1%
Proportion with TAFE or trade qualification	46.9%	57.1%	51.9%

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Mothers with regular visits N=22	Mothers who receive no visits N=27
<i>Literacy</i> Proportion with CSNSW-assessed literacy problem	7.9%	5.0%	7.4%
<i>Disability</i> Proportion with CSNSW-assessed disability	7.9%	9.1%	3.7%
<i>Age left family home</i> Proportion still living at home at arrest Range (years) Mean age (years)	4.6% 10 – 32 17.0	4.5% 11 – 32 19.2	3.7% 10 – 30 15.7
<i>Main caregiver during childhood</i> Both parents Mother Father Grandparent/s Other relative Foster parent/s Other	29.2% 43.1% 1.5% 7.7% 6.2% 1.5% 10.8%	36.4% 45.5% 0% 0% 0% 0% 18.2%	25.9% 44.4% 0% 7.4% 11.1% 3.7% 7.4%
<i>Plans to live with post-release</i> Alone (with or without children) Partner Relative/s Friend/s Don't know Other arrangement	23.1% 33.8% 27.7% 1.5% 4.6% 9.2%	18.2% 36.4% 31.8% 0% 4.5% 9.1%	25.9% 37.0% 14.8% 3.7% 7.4% 11.1%
<i>Own parents incarcerated during childhood</i> Neither Mother Father Both parents	76.9% 6.2% 13.8% 3.1%	72.7% 13.6% 9.1% 4.5%	74.1% 0% 25.9% 0%
<i>Spent time in out of home care in childhood</i> Proportion	20.0%	18.2%	22.2%
Children			
<i>Respondent's total number of children</i> Range Mean Median	1 – 9 3.1 3.0	1 – 6 2.8 2.5	1 – 9 3.3 3.0
<i>Total number of children aged 0 – 18</i> Range Mean	1 – 6 2.7	1 – 5 2.7	1 – 5 2.9
<i>Step/foster children</i> Proportion who have step children Mean number	1.5% 1	4.5% 1	0% 0
<i>Age of oldest child (years)</i> Range Mean	2.2 – 35 12.6	0.1 - 35 12.2	4 – 27 12.7
<i>Age of youngest child (years)</i> Range Mean	0 – 18 5.3	0.1 – 15 5.4	0.1 – 18 5.0

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Mothers with regular visits N=22	Mothers who receive no visits N=27
<i>Children in different age groups</i>			
Have pre-school aged child	55.4%	59.1%	51.9%
Have primary school aged child (5-11 years)	73.8%	59.1%	88.9%
Have secondary school aged child (12-17)	52.3%	50.0%	48.1%
Have child 18+ years	18.5%	18.2%	18.5%
<i>Lived with children before gaol (%)</i>			
All children	47.7%	68.2%	37.0%
Some of children	18.5%	13.6%	18.5%
None of children	33.8%	18.2%	44.4%
<i>Responsibility for children before gaol (%)</i>			
Joint carer for all children	32.8%	50.0%	19.2%
Joint carer for some of children	12.5%	4.5%	11.5%
Sole carer for all children	21.9%	31.8%	19.2%
Sole carer for some of children	7.8%	4.5%	7.4%
No major care-giving role	24.6%	9.1%	42.3%
<i>Plans to live with children post-release</i>			
All children	60.0%	86.4%	44.4%
Some of children	23.1%	13.6%	25.9%
None of children	15.4%	0%	29.6%
Unsure	1.5%	0%	0%
<i>Child/ren's current living arrangements*</i>			
Lives independently	10.8%	4.5%	14.8%
Other parent	32.3%	31.8%	29.6%
Grandparent/s	38.5%	27.3%	48.1%
Other relative	15.4%	18.2%	14.8%
Partner (not child's biological parent)	3.1%	9.1%	0%
Friend	1.5%	4.5%	0%
Foster parent (not related)	24.6%	18.2%	33.3%
Living with relative thru DOCS	12.3%	13.6%	11.1%
Child in gaol or juvenile justice	1.5%	0%	3.7%
Don't know where child is	1.5%	0%	3.7%
Jacaranda cottage program	12.3%	18.2%	3.7%
Other arrangement	1.5%	0%	3.7%
<i>Children know I am in prison</i>			
All my children	55.4%	54.5%	44.4%
Some of my children	15.4%	13.6%	22.2%
None of my children	26.2%	27.3%	33.3%
Don't know if they know	3.1%	4.5%	0%
Ever received a visit from children	56.3%	100%	0%
Speak by telephone at least weekly	65.5%	75.0%	54.2%
Write letters at least weekly	37.3%	25.0%	50.0%
Incarceration details			
<i>Sentence details</i>			
Mean length of sentence (months)	58.0	76.1	36.9
Median length of sentence (months)	35.9	60.0	20.0
Range of sentence length (months)	6 – 264	6.2 – 216	8 – 120
Proportion not yet sentenced	26.5%	31.8%	59.3%

ITEM	Mothers N= 65	Mothers with regular visits N=22	Mothers who receive no visits N=27
<i>Time between incarceration and interview</i>			
Mean incarceration to date (months)	15.5	25.5	6.8
Median incarceration to date (months)	8.5	15.1	5.0
Range of duration of incarceration to date	0.1 – 99.7	0.1 – 99.7	0.2 – 25.2
<i>Number of prior sentences</i>			
Mean	5.1	2.1	6.1
Median	3.0	1.0	4.0
Range	0 – 23	0 – 10	0 – 23
<i>Security risk rating</i>			
Low	11.5%	25.0%	3.7%
Medium – low	9.8%	20.0%	3.7%
Medium	29.5%	30.0%	25.9%
Medium – high	32.8%	20.0%	40.7%
High	16.4%	5.0%	22.2%
Parenting programs			
Proportion attending	50.8%	72.7%	11.5%
Proportion attending > 1 program	3.6%		

**More than one option per family*

7 FINDINGS – Stakeholders

Two major themes were identified within the stakeholder interview data: parent-child contact and learning parenting. The subthemes are shown in the following table:

Table 16: Themes and subthemes from interviews with stakeholders

Theme	Sub theme
Parent-Child Contact	Maintaining contact
	Needed interventions
	Trauma
Learning parenting	Learning activities
	Building on strengths and relationships
	Culturally appropriate education
	Changing behaviour
	A different way of parenting

7.1 Parent-Child Contact

The major theme of parent-child contact has three significant subthemes: maintaining contact, needing intervention and trauma.

7.1.1 Maintaining contact

There is a wide variation between the physical contact prisoners have with their children from regular contact to limited or no contact at all.

- There are the parents that are seeing their kids and then there is this whole other group that are parents but don't have access or don't have that and their kids have been taken away (Stakeholder 1)
- She was in contact with them but she had made that commitment to them during the program [MAAD] that the connection was really important and he [the officer] said every morning before she goes to work she rings her kids, and you know I just love hearing that sort of stuff (Stakeholder 2)

The stakeholders were committed to the importance of the prisoners maintaining contact and interacting with their children. In these quotes one of the participants identified the importance of maintaining contact for the fathers.

- I ... became very conscious of how important the children were to the fathers and what a lot of distress they experienced as well as a lot of elation when they would have good visits and so on. (Stakeholder 3)

Various techniques to maintain contact were used:

- We try and place an inmate close to family because that's very much part of their rehabilitation side. It's not always possible because of the program they have to do or their associations so it's really difficult to say yes that inmate's going to be there for the whole sentence and have access to his family. (Stakeholder 4)
- One of the things I'm going to try and do next year is the Story Time Project that's out at Silverwater ... look at doing a recording of dad reading a book, on a CD at least, and see if we can maintain [the] relationship and contact that way. (Stakeholder 9)
- ... the women being involved in the Shine for Kids days and trying to make the most out of the time with the children (Stakeholder 5)
- We set up small things ... like, writing to your children and people who couldn't write were saying those stories and in those days you could put it into a tape recorder and send the tape out to the family and receive the tape back and things like that. And just allowing them to take their work up to visits so they could share it with their families when they came to visit, which seems so ridiculously small but it was - what can I say? - it was such a huge battle that they had to fight to actually take their stuff up to visits. They could share it and we had cases where the person was learning to read and we would give them books so they could learn to read during the week and then they would go up to visits and they would sit there and they would read to their kids during visits. They were actually, that was all they could read you know this little reader but they could take it up to visits and use visit time to read to the kids. (Stakeholder 6)
- There was another woman I'm just remembering as well I think she was from an Indonesian background and she started for the first time, started reading to her daughter in the contact. Because she thought you know 'my English is broken, I can't teach my daughter anything by reading to her in broken English'. But her feedback was that just reading with her - it didn't matter whether her English was broken or not, just reading with her herself will be good for the relationship and a good experience for the child. (Stakeholder 5)

For women living at Jacaranda Cottages, contact with their children is frequent and well managed. They often have support from their families who assist in enabling contact between mother and child.

- Their mother might have custody. One woman here [her son] lives with her daughters while she's in here and then he comes in every second week and then he comes in the whole two weeks of the school holidays. One of the other girls here, her ex-husband has the boys through the week then on the weekend they come here or else they will go to her mother's but her ex-husband has custody of the children. (Stakeholder 8)

Differing rules between the Correctional Centres can result in restricting the ability of the prisoners to contact their children.

- You get different rules in different gaols you know one gaol can give one of them an envelope but others can't and then if they haven't got any money for a stamp then you know the letter can stay in the inmate's file and not go anywhere. So it's one of the challenges of the gaol [setting]. (Stakeholder 5)

Some prisoners found it very difficult to contact their children

- I always ask our fellows, if there are any difficulties with the contact, have you had a talk to the welfare officer here, any of the Aboriginal staff within the correctional centre, to see what you can get done to help push along to get that contact with your children? (Stakeholder 9)

Even if contact between parent and child is achievable, it can remain challenging and distressing because of the correctional setting. These managers provide insight into the constraints of the visiting environment and the impact it has on the visit.

- But for the children under a certain age it's just about touch. They've just got to climb all over the person and they're not allowed to and they've got box visits, you've got to sit on that coloured numbers seat. And then they talk about the teenagers there sitting there like bumps on a log. They don't want to go on the play equipment but it's this really artificial situation where they're sitting. They're "what do we talk about?" (Stakeholder 7)
- But you know we forget about that twelve year old and onwards group and they're a really difficult group to work with and if they have got it in their mind you know mum or dad's in trouble in gaol, it's that stigma - we don't want anything to do with them. So I think it's building up how to talk to those kids before they end up down that path. (Stakeholder 6)

Movement within the correctional system impacts the ability of staff and others to assist with enabling contact between parents and their children. Carers having to travel long distances and having limited finances further compound this lack of contact. There can be a clash between the correctional management requirements and the plans to enable contact.

- Even the child/parenting days ... We are actually talking to the [senior management] about that this morning ... because we hold most of it here at the school holidays to maximise the attendance of kids. But we could have you know twenty inmates and all their kids ready to go and then the night before they move or ship them out to Bathurst or Emu Plains or wherever they go and then everything changes. And so the kids miss out because mum's not there, she's gone somewhere else. And that's always been a bit of a problem and they don't seem to be able to overcome that (Stakeholder 1)
- These families are living in poverty and they don't have the money to get onto a train. You know even our experience of going up to Bathurst - it was hard to get there in a timely way. If you had to do that on a regular basis with a small child - forget it. A lot of the carers are elderly, they are

grandparents and I think that's a real issue (Stakeholder 10)

While in other circumstances some prisoners make a decision not to have contact with their children while in gaol due to concerns about the impact on their children and the resulting stigma.

- For the ones I've spoken to who have said to me "they don't know I'm in gaol and I don't want them to because I don't want them to have that stigma, I don't want them to think any worse of me". They think they're overseas or working on mines or something - usually that's what it is, offshore mines or working overseas with defence and that's the stories that they tell (Stakeholder 7)

Maintaining contact with their children is further complicated by external factors that include the Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and the child's carers.

- I think with [FACS] the case workers change so quickly so they know which office their children are attached to but they don't know who their [FACS] worker's name is and you know there's just no relationship there. They are reliant on some supportive SAPO in gaol to make those phone calls for them. (Stakeholder 5)
- Our worker is trying to convince the foster carers to let them go for the day, and we have some successes - not always... There's lots of problems with that and it doesn't always work and a lot of foster carers, depending on their motivation, they can really stop the kids going. You know all they have to say is 'the kid was upset or came home crying' or you know they can even make it up and everything stops and the actual visit was really good so it's how the foster carers [present it]. (Stakeholder 1)

7.1.2 Needed Interventions

Interventions have been identified that are beyond the scope of CSNSW. While foster carers provide an essential service caring for children of prisoners, it is important to ensure that the relationship between the child and parent is supported and not compromised by the withholding of contact.

- I think there is a lot of work that needs to be done with foster carers and that whole area especially now when there's so much more and all the not-for-profits, so many agencies now in that space with all that transitioning and even all the changes in the fast track for adoption. That's really scary for the women in prison because it's really going to affect them. And there's nothing they can do, so you can give them all the parenting in the world and it's probably not actually what they need. They need a really good case worker to support them to get the visits they need and that's probably much more valuable because if those visits stop then they have just got to go back to the courts and say the kid was upset or whatever and you know if the kids only a baby and two or three months go past then there isn't any of that bonding and attachment because people have interfered and not made it happen. So I am a bit concerned about that one (Stakeholder 1)

Some prisoners and their children find maintaining contact extremely difficult as the prisoners may not know who their children's carers are or where they are living. Communication between FACS and the mothers and CSNSW staff appears to be limited. Nevertheless, staff do intervene to facilitate contact.

- Yeah, most of the packages I've sent in with DOCS [FACS] are for Aboriginal mums. A lot of the non-Aboriginal - because there was a few non-Aboriginals in some of my groups - the family had their children. I sent them to the home addresses. But most of the Aboriginal girls I sent them via DOCS [FACS] Some didn't even know where their children were which is sad to say or what office they were attached to. So our child protection unit would do the research for me and let me know so I

could send their children the packages too (Stakeholder 12)

While stakeholders did not specifically raise the lack of contact by fathers, it could be anticipated that a similar situation exists for incarcerated fathers.

Participating in parenting programs is identified as assisting the women work on their connection with their children. Crucially it is identified as contributing to *not coming back into custody*.

- I am just lucky enough to be able to facilitate a program that helps them connect to their children and I truly believe that that connection assists both parties, but particularly the women in taking their direction and working on that connection and what it means and hopefully not coming back into custody (Stakeholder 2)

The parents require support to interact and remain engaged with their children.

- The other things that people talk a lot about is they've been able to figure out ways to be more engaged with their kids when they do have access to them (Stakeholder 11)

7.1.3 Trauma

Trauma is a significant issue for many prisoners as a result of childhood experiences, forced separation from their children and being victims of violence. Giving birth to a baby while in prison is difficult. Some mothers can be accommodated within Jacaranda Cottages, while many others have to relinquish their child at birth returning to prison without their baby.

- I think gaol is a very hard place. I think the Mother and Children Program is great but it is very difficult to give birth to a baby and walk away because the gaol hasn't organised ... for you to have the baby with you (Stakeholder 12)

Minimal or no contact can be traumatic for both parent and child. In this quote a MAAD facilitator highlights the traumatic feeling experienced by the women when they are asked to explore the experience of having their child removed from their custody:

- They sort of open the emotional boxes, "I've kept this box really tightly closed and keep yourself busy and don't think about it" you know once you're in gaol and you've closed your box it's not easy to keep it closed. And that's what they work on because what's in there is too hard to deal with and what we are asking the women to do is open it up "open the box, open up your emotions about having your children removed". Well it's not that – but that's how they perceive it. It's kind of "I've lost my children and they're not with me and that really hurts and now you want me to talk about it" and you know some of the women coped really well through that. For others it was just too hard because I think for a lot of them the reason their children were removed they were so drug affected at that period that they can't really remember the facts of why the children were removed. And so now to be in gaol relatively clean and sober it's quite a lot emotionally, quite a lot of hurt to deal with (Stakeholder 5)

In the following quotes the participants describe the way the prisoners manage their imprisonment and the potential associated trauma. The participants highlight the need to focus on positive aspects of parenting rather than needing to deal with the frequent everyday realities of parenting; causes of the trauma; and the inmates' complex histories that impact on their ability to parent.

- Yeah it is hard because a lot of the women, one of the things I have heard many many times over is

that sense of they talk about “you have to keep your head inside, when you’re doing time. You have to keep your head inside. You can’t have your head outside - it just doesn’t work. You won’t get through, it’s too emotional”. So what that sometimes means is that when they are keeping their head inside they will sometimes be a little bit avoidant around contacting their kids and when they do contact them they want fluffy and happy stories, and they don’t want “such and such has dropped out of school and so and so is having a really hard time with bullies” and they find those things really really difficult (Stakeholder 13)

- So one of the things that the women were trying to raise is ‘how can I not be hated by my children?’ because that’s the sense, that they are going to hate them and they already hate them and they are going to hate them forever and how can they not be hated by their children (Stakeholder 13)
- I ran a program not long ago at [Correctional Centre]. We were talking about domestic violence and what causes domestic violence. More times than not, drugs and alcohol (Stakeholder 9)
- An acknowledgement that a lot of these women do have histories of complex trauma and some of that has happened in the context of their own parenting experiences. So they have been parented in a way that has resulted in abuse so sometimes that can actually trigger some things for the women, so having that available for them to sort of be supported through that is important I think (Stakeholder 13)

7.2 *Learning parenting*

Several parenting programs are provided for male and female prisoners as discussed in previous sections. A key focus of parenting programs is to develop parenting capacity and skills. For some of the incarcerated parents this requires a significant change to their belief systems and behaviour. The theme of learning parenting has five subthemes: learning activities, building on strengths and relationships, culturally appropriate education, changing behaviour and a different way of parenting.

7.2.1 *Learning activities*

The education level and the learning ability of the prisoners can be compromised due to a range of issues that include cultural beliefs and ways of parenting, cognitive impairment due to drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness, and a distrust of learning environments due to poor childhood experiences of school (see Tables 1 and 2). A further complication that impacts on their ability to learn is a lack of exposure as children to responsive and sensitive parenting. Participants identified that learning activities need to be more creative rather than theoretical.

- They might say [their education level], oh it isn't great. They'll probably click more with visual discussion, hands on, drawings, you know? There are times when we spoke about hopes and dreams and I thought, well they're not going to write anything. So I grabbed the A3 and put the pens and colouring pencils out. I said, alright, draw the hopes and dreams. That's how we got them involved and motivated, yeah (Stakeholder 9)
- So sort of establishing from the beginning what do they need around the practical learning situation, but also things like playing. A lot of the women don’t have much of an understanding of play, because for many of these women their own experiences of being parented were very problematic, very limited so they may not have histories of play to draw on. You know taking the child to the park and what do I do if I take the child to the park? What am I supposed to do with that child if we are stuck at home and it’s raining and I don’t know what to do and I don’t have any

money, because there is often a sense of needing to buy things for kids, so what do I do when I don't have any money. Just play, just general what does play look like for kids, what do they need, what does labelled play look like, just generally how to engage when you don't have a history of that yourself (Stakeholder 11)

- The other thing they really liked is learning how to read to their children. Now it's the communication part again but active listening and praise. I think that the program looks at that, what was said to you that was positive and what would you say to your children now and explaining to them how praise works so much better because children come not knowing what's right and wrong. That we are here to teach them. I think that was it – particularly the videos, loved the videos – [on] active listening, praise, descriptive praise and there's one about getting to know you, about when a child is first born and how they communicate (Stakeholder 12)
- ... you've got to think on your feet and you've got to be creative. I just think that DVD, and I'm sure there are other DVDs out there, allows for that visual (Stakeholder 9)
- And then you know seeing the women being involved in the Shine for Kids days and trying to make the most out of the time with the children (Stakeholder 5)
- We have fruit mornings, so I'll go out and get a heap of fruit through petty cash through the department. When we have SHINE for Kids, when they come in [worker] from SHINE for Kids comes in, they have the activity in here and we'll have the fruit and we talk about what sort of fruits you should be eating instead of having lollies - this is better for you and tastes just as nice. And the mums, we do facilitate a bit of a group especially the new mums about nutrition because they have to keep their nutrition up as well as the children, so we touch on all of that, it's great (Stakeholder 8)
- The other thing that we did that I think was the biggest hit was that we tried to avoid as much as possible making it feel like school, because a lot of these women found school very difficult and so some of the activities we would do would be around a kitchen table or be craft activities that were just about making a jigsaw puzzle for their child or a picture frame that they could decorate. They were only paper or cardboard but it didn't matter and the women really enjoyed doing that. But the bonus of that was that there were often conversations going on and the facilitator was there and you know probing and doing things as well to expand what the women were saying and providing sort of opportunistic learning (Stakeholder 10)
- The craft activity components are particularly nice in this environment because the women do those things without their children around and then you often see them being a little more creative about the way they engage and play with their children, at times they've got free time (Stakeholder 11)

7.2.2 Building on strengths and relationships

Many of the inmates had never participated in a parenting program and they avoided contact with health professionals and other that could support their ability to parent. A key feature of the parenting programs was to focus on parenting strengths and developing relationships rather than on their parenting deficits.

- We wanted the mothers to feel that they did have some knowledge of their children and that helped not having to have parenting expertise [not] having a health professional in it. For example ... when we were talking about development we would do an exercise on the whiteboard where we would list the ages and the facilitator would say "okay who has a two month old baby and who's got a three year old?" And we ask them – that makes them the expert on that phase and

what their three year old was doing and the others would help and we would adjust it (Stakeholder 10)

- That comes out in the evaluations they all loved the craft and I suspect they might not quite understand what's going on at the same time...Yeah, but I think that's a far more powerful way and you know if I was putting this [program] into the community I would expand that a lot more and just do the whole thing around the kitchen table. But still keep the elements of getting them to bring out their knowledge because I think that was really useful and a lot of the women I don't think recognize that they have knowledge of their children or about parenting. I'm sure lots of the knowledge they had was quite dysfunctional knowledge but amongst that there was some little gems that you could really tease out with the women and say you know that's really terrific and this is how you can build on it. And that was really precious for some of them I think (Stakeholder 10)

7.2.3 Culturally appropriate education

Providing culturally appropriate education was of concern for the stakeholders. A continuing difficulty is the lack of educational resources that focus on Aboriginal beliefs and parenting behaviours. The inmates were often unable to relate many of the depicted families to their family life without assistance and reassurance from the program facilitators.

- It shows a setting of a father, a dad, with three of his children, struggling around each of these in the different segments. As Kooris, they say, why aren't there any Aboriginal fellows? Why isn't this an Aboriginal setting? So they pick it up straight away and I say, look past the colour of the skin and just look at what's been presented. So some of them do it easy. Others find it hard and you have to try and encourage, you know (Stakeholder 9)
- The other thing I find about this program that is extremely powerful ... when I trained Aboriginal staff members, I said, no it's only for men. We didn't get too many Aboriginal men to start off with and I said, look, open it up and we'll train up the Aboriginal women as well. I'm glad we did. ... Because I find an Aboriginal women's voice, especially around that violence area, extremely powerful. Extremely powerful because when a woman talks and says, you know, we all go through the stages of lust, love and wanting - and when a woman talks like that and she says, you know, at the end of the day, no woman is put on this here planet to be any man's punching bag, it's more powerful from a woman. (Stakeholder 15)
- They loved them [videos]. [Do they have Aboriginal actors in them?] No. I say to the girls, sorry, they're very middle class some of these women, but the message is what's important here. (Stakeholder 12)

Art activities were identified as a significant way for incarcerated parents to maintain connection with their children and pass on cultural and family information. Assistance with communicating was highlighted as a crucial cultural outcome of art activities.

- We have quite a number of Aboriginal women that do participate in that program [MAAD] and I think particularly one of the focuses that they get is they do a lot of art work and it gives them an opportunity to be able to tell their story and their history and their family history and their heritage through their artwork which they then can also pass those stories onto their children. So I think that helps develop those communication skills a lot better for them as well. Given that they are supposed to be the storytellers of passing that information onto their children it just gives them a

different way of passing that information on. And they do actively participate at a very high level in the MAAD program (Stakeholder 7)

The parenting programs and psychological support offered to inmates during incarceration was thought to reduce recidivism and intergenerational patterns of punitive and neglectful parenting behaviour. Positive changes were frequently highlighted by the stakeholders

7.2.4 Changing behaviour

Participating in a parenting program provides learning opportunities that potentially change the inmates' beliefs and behaviour about how a parent should act. The stakeholders provided numerous examples of the attitudes and actions and the changes they had observed.

- He thought he was a great dad because he had a car and his kids never went without. I go, but they do. I said, their emotional and psychological stability and growth is just as important as the material things (Stakeholder 9)
- One women in particular at [correctional centre] and we went through the program with her. She started off with virtually no contact, the baseball cap never came off her head and towards the end it was almost like a visible transformation of her feeling much more optimistic and knowledgeable and having more understanding of what she needed to do for the future. You could physically see that in her. Even with the amount of eye contact and was prepared to offer over the course you know the four days that we run the program (Stakeholder 5)
- With this program, I get them to think about their actions, especially around domestic violence. There's a song I play and it's called *Looking Back*. When they hear that song - I said, if there's one word that you could sum up as to what that song is all about, what would it be? More times than not, they'll say, "regret" (Stakeholder 9)
- Very much so, they think they are not worthy a lot of the time as well and that's why some go back to what they were doing before they came in here. But if we can build their strengths through programs and through everything that we are doing, and through their child thriving you know if we can build up that then we have done our job in the end (Stakeholder 8)
- One woman said at some stage "you know I have learned from the course that there's more to mothering than just loving your baby" which is quite a profound statement (Stakeholder 10)
- ... she had learned that [if] she had ... thrown a tantrum at the visiting time she would have been in trouble but also that it would have upset the children and so she thought this was a much better way to do it (Stakeholder 10)
- I do know that the women do get quite significantly involved in the program - they do get a lot out of the program. And they do feel that they have benefited greatly from the structure of the program and the content of the program. And it does, it changes their perspective on how they actually interact with their children (Stakeholder 3)
- The discipline stuff, the talks around consistency I think are really useful because often they can see that it hasn't been consistent for their kids and that one of the things that they could, one of the things that could be immediately different for those who are going back to being fulltime carers, that sense of bringing consistency back into the kids' lives is something that they can often identify [for] immediate change (Stakeholder 11)

- We did get stories back from the prison officers [after the MAAD program]. There was one story about a woman who after the program came back to them and the DOCS [FACS] workers had come back to the welfare officers and prison officers and said “she is so much easier to communicate with - she doesn’t yell at us anymore” because we helped them [the mothers] sort of learn some communication skills and they were applying them (Stakeholder 10)

7.2.5 A different way of parenting

The parenting programs and support content that are provided to inmates is often very different from their experience of being parented and parenting their own children. The stakeholders identified that inmates started to use more relational parenting skills.

- After the program’s completed it ... changed how they view their interactions with their children compared to their previous behaviours. It used to be primarily I think because a lot of the time there is DOCS [FACS] involvement with a lot of the children, most of the children and I think they tend to view their interactions with their children at a much different level and appreciate I think their contact and things like that. And just how they do things is very much different after they have done the program I think, and a lot of their contact through their mail service and things along those lines change as well (Stakeholder 3)
- I think that the thing that they really liked was how to communicate with your child, stuff around communication. The alternatives to discipline (Stakeholder 8)
- So when you think that the women are raised by these really mean and nasty people in homes and that how are they supposed to learn parenting skill...or positive parenting skills when they've not got parents? Because generally we get our parenting skills from our parents. So if your mum doesn't have it, how is she going to teach you? That is who you model on, they are our role models. If you got a nasty nun who is your substitute parent how can you learn? (Stakeholder 12)
- The women have an opportunity to talk about things but they are not able to, like if you were at home and participating in a program you’re able to go home and practise the things or implement the things that you’re talking about. So for the women it’s taking things away in this abnormal environment and trying to play around with the stuff that they are learning (Stakeholder 11)
- So consistency is something that’s been often commented on by the women. And they will often say that that wasn’t there for them, so being able to reflect on their own experience of being parented and it was never consistent and that they went to many different households and the rules were different everywhere and it was really hard. So I think they can often relate to that and to how nice that would have been to have just consistency and how that would have felt safe for them. So conversations like that where they can sort of see immediately that they can make a difference with that so things like that, things that are simple to grab hold of at first (Stakeholder 11)

In the following quote the stakeholder reinforces the intergenerational burden the women carry of getting it wrong. This is countered by the suggestion that a more positive discourse could be: *parenting can be fun*.

- I think a lot of the women feel very burdened because they feel the burden of having got it wrong and they feel the burden of many generations perhaps sometimes, that many generations have got it wrong, well not wrong but that’s their perception so they feel the burden of history and parenting just doesn’t seem fun anymore I think. I think it feels scary and loaded with judgement as well, like if they

sign up for the program that they are crap and a terrible mum and they need help. Just maybe sort of pitching it more as you know parenting can be fun, how do we reclaim some of that enjoyment in parenting? (Stakeholder 13)

Knowing what type of parent you want to be can be very difficult for the inmates, as highlighted in earlier quotes, as their parenting knowledge, skills and experiences were often limited and there often lacked sensitivity to the needs of the child. In this quote the stakeholder discusses the importance of being able to sort through information provided. To do this a parent needs to appreciate there are lots of parenting options they can use.

- Anecdotally, through working with a lot of the women there's a sense of you know "one person gives me this advice and I take that on-board and then the next person comes along and gives me this advice and oh god now I have to do that as well, and that person said this and then that person said that and it's just all this information". But if you haven't decided what kind of a parent you want to be then all of this seems important to take on but once you've got that filter of "no I would like to parent in this way" then you can do "well thank you for that information but I prefer to do it this way" (Stakeholder 11)

7.3 Discussion – Stakeholders

The stakeholders provided confirmation of many of the findings from the incarcerated parents' data. The findings were consistent with interview data from the incarcerated mothers and fathers about their contact with their children and experience of participating in parenting programs. Two main themes were identified: parent-child contact and learning parenting.

Some stakeholders highlighted the importance of the parent-child relationship and the emotional impact of separation. They identified that some parents avoided contact with their children while others took the opportunity to improve contact and the relationship with their children as they had the support of the correctional services staff. For some inmates contact with their children was complicated due to unsatisfactory or non-existent interaction with FACS, especially for children in custody of others, often outside the family. In some circumstances, contact was constrained due to the limited health and finances of family carers, in particular grandparents.

Using strengths- and relationship-based approaches to work with the inmates was a common thread throughout the data. The stakeholders highlighted the lack of opportunity and support for parenting for the inmates, both pre and post incarceration.

The stakeholders raised a mismatch between the needs of the correctional facilities and those of the incarcerated parents, their children and the carers. The movement of inmates without consultation with facilitators of parenting programs and activities can result in significantly reducing contact between parents and their children. This contact is extremely important and missed appointments resulted in considerable disappointment and distress for the parent, children and other family members. Acknowledgement is required that the movement of inmates and/or suspension of access to the correctional facilities can be, at times, necessary and unavoidable due to security and other reasons.

Inconsistency in rules and requirements between the various correctional facilities were noted. These inconsistencies at times were minor but significant for the inmates. For example, in some facilities inmates

were given an envelope to send artwork to their children while in others this was not provided. Stakeholders also raised the issue of having adequate access to money for postage.

Stakeholders identified that the visiting environment was not always conducive for the different age groups of children. Younger children require physical contact, while teenagers are reluctant to interact and potentially require a different type of visiting space. For teenagers this is often compounded by the stigma of having an incarcerated parent. Creation of more intimate spaces and seating that facilitate communication is required. This issue is not unique to correctional facilities, as the importance of the physical environment within health facilities is also being investigated.

The provision of parenting programs and activities were identified as being significant in maintaining contact with the children, engaging parents in parenting programs and learning, enhancing parenting ability, and in some instances contributing to reduced recidivism. Most of the programs have been in place for many years and they remain highly valued by most of the stakeholders. Nevertheless, there was some criticism and suggestions for improving and updating programs. These suggestions included: the need to review the programs to ensure they were culturally appropriate especially for Aboriginal inmates; and the development of culturally specific resources such as digital clips, and reading materials. A review of the programs is recommended to ensure their continued relevance and fidelity.

Numerous examples were provided of changes in parenting beliefs and behaviour as an outcome of programs. A program of approximately 8-to-10 sessions will not realistically result in a sustained change in behaviour and changes to intergenerational parenting behaviour. However, in combination with other programs and activities offered within the correctional setting it does contribute to the establishment of positive pro-social behaviour.

8 FINDINGS – Quantitative Results

As noted in Section 2.1, during the semi-structured interview, each parent was asked to complete three validated psychosocial instruments, with most opting to complete these instruments with the assistance of the interviewer. The instruments were:

- The Measure of Parenting Style (MOPS) (Parker et al. 1997) measures the participants' experience of being parented across three domains: Indifference, Abuse, and Overcontrol, indicating the degree to which the participant experienced that style of parenting from their own mother and/or father.
- The Parenting Stress Index for Incarcerated Parents (PSI-IP) (Houck & Loper 2002; Loper et al. 2009) is based on earlier research by Abidin (1995). It is designed specifically for incarcerated parents and measures three aspects of stress experienced: Competence stress is that related to perceived competence in the parenting role; Attachment stress is that linked to the motivation and investment a parent has in fulfilling the role; and Visitation stress is linked to experiences of visits with the child.
- The Family Adaptability & Cohesion Evaluation Scale IV (FACES IV) (Olson 2011) is based on the Circumplex Model, that hypothesises healthy families are more balanced and unhealthy families more unbalanced. Family cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another and family flexibility as the quality and expression of leadership and organization, role relationship, and relationship rules and negotiations. It expresses the balance

between factors via three ratio scores: the Cohesion Ratio, the ratio between the family's disengagement and enmeshment; the Flexibility Ratio, the ratio between rigidity and chaos; and Total Circumplex ratio, the average of the other two figures. Ratios above 1 are associated with healthy families, while unhealthy families tend to have ratios below 1.

In addition to the ratio scores, the FACES IV also provides respondents' estimation of family communication and their satisfaction with their family.

Results for each instrument are grouped by respondents' gender and comparisons made between those who had or had not attended a parenting program.

8.1 Measure of Parenting Style

In regard to participants' own experience of being parented (MOPS), there was no statistical difference between mothers or fathers who had or had not attended a parenting program, although mothers who attended a program did report facing higher levels of maternal indifference and abuse, compared to fathers (Tables 17 and 18). Looking at both attendees and non-attendees as one group, fathers reported a significantly higher level of abuse from their own fathers than did female participants (3.8 vs 2.0). Overall, the scores on this scale are slightly lower than those reported in the literature (Gladstone et al. 2004).

Table 17 Fathers' Measure of Parenting Style* score, by Attendance at Parenting Program (n=64)

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All fathers
Source: Respondent's mother[#]			
Indifference	2.4 (3.4)	1.8 (3.3)	2.1 (3.3)
Abuse	1.7 (2.8)	1.2 (1.9)	1.5 (2.5)
Overcontrol	4.5 (2.9)	3.5 (1.8)	4.1 (2.5)
Source: Respondent's father[#]			
Indifference	3.5 (4.7)	3.4 (5.9)	3.5 (5.2)
Abuse	3.8 (4.7)	3.8 (4.8)	3.8 (4.7)
Overcontrol	4.3 (2.9)	3.6 (2.4)	4.0 (2.7)

* Measure of parenting style experienced by the participant from the source (i.e. their own mother or father);

The source of the indifference, abuse or overcontrol

Note: possible score ranges: 0-18 (indifference), 0-15 (abuse), 0-12 (overcontrol)

Table 18 Mothers' Measure of Parenting Style* score, by Attendance at Parenting Program (n=65)

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All mothers
Source: Respondent's mother[#]			
Indifference	2.5 (4.6)	3.4 (5.5)	2.9 (5.0)
Abuse	1.6 (3.5)	2.9 (4.0)	2.2 (3.8)
Overcontrol	4.0 (3.0)	4.5 (2.7)	4.2 (2.9)
Source: Respondent's father[#]			
Indifference	2.1 (4.7)	2.0 (4.2)	2.1 (4.4)
Abuse	2.0 (4.1)	2.0 (4.0)	2.0 (4.0)
Overcontrol	3.4 (2.2)	3.4 (2.7)	3.4 (2.4)

* Measure of parenting style experienced by the participant from the source (i.e. their mother or father);

The source of the indifference, abuse or overcontrol

Note: possible score ranges: 0-18 (indifference), 0-15 (abuse), 0-12 (overcontrol)

8.2 Parenting Stress

Parents reported high levels of stress associated with child visits and attachment (Table 19 & Table 20), consistent with previous studies of imprisoned parents that have used the PSI-IP (Loper et al. 2009). Fathers who had attended a program scored highest in that regard. In contrast, stress related to parenting competence was slightly lower than earlier reports. There was no statistical difference between program participants and non-participants, although fathers did report significantly higher attachment stress than mothers (2.2 vs 1.9).

Table 19 Fathers' Parenting Stress Inventory* scores

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All fathers
Competence Stress	2.0 (0.5)	2.0 (0.3)	2.0 (0.5)
Attachment Stress	2.2 (0.5)	2.1 (0.4)	2.2 (0.4)
Visitation Stress	3.5 (0.8)	3.9 (0.6)	3.7 (0.7)

* Higher scores represent greater stress; possible range 1-5

Table 20 Mothers' Parenting Stress Inventory* scores

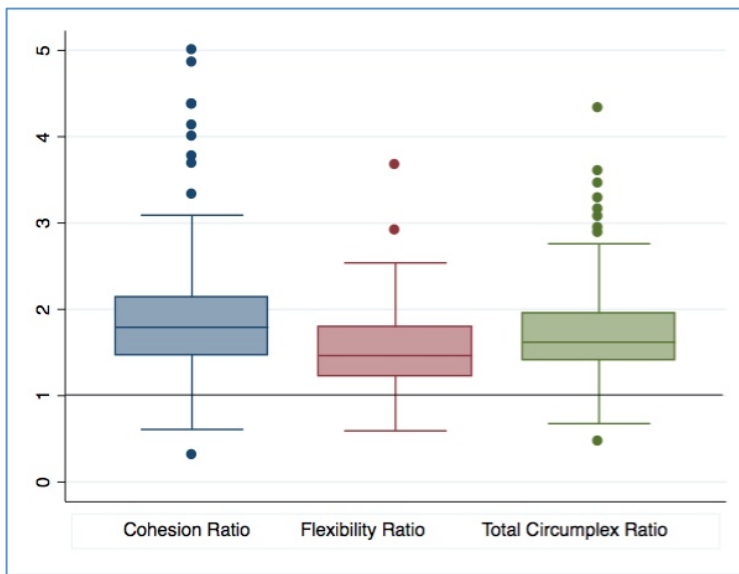
Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All mothers
Competence Stress	1.9 (0.4)	1.8 (0.5)	1.9 (0.4)
Attachment Stress	1.8 (0.4)	1.9 (0.4)	1.9 (0.4)
Visitation Stress	3.4 (1.1)	3.5 (0.8)	3.4 (0.9)

* Higher scores represent greater stress; possible range 1-5

8.3 Family Cohesion & Flexibility

The majority of participants recorded cohesion ratios well above the cut-off point of one (mean=1.9 SD=0.82) with a wide range (Figure 1). Flexibility displayed less dispersion and a lower mean, but again above one (mean=1.5 SD=0.5). The total ratio (combining cohesion and flexibility scores) reflected these scores (mean=1.7 SD=0.6).

Figure 1 Boxplot of FACES IV ratio scores, with healthy cut-off (1) indicated



Overall, mothers reported slightly higher cohesion and flexibility ratio scores (Table 21 and Table 22), particularly those who had not attended a parenting program. Interestingly, the average scores for both mothers and fathers who had attended a parenting program were identical.

Table 21 Fathers' FACES IV scores

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All fathers
Cohesion Ratio	1.9 (0.8)	1.9 (0.8)	1.9 (0.8)
Flexibility Ratio	1.4 (0.4)	1.5 (0.3)	1.5 (0.4)
Total Circumplex Ratio	1.7 (0.6)	1.7 (0.5)	1.7 (0.5)

Table 22 Mothers' FACES IV scores

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All mothers
Cohesion Ratio	2.1 (1.0)	1.9 (0.8)	2.0 (0.9)
Flexibility Ratio	1.7 (0.6)	1.5 (0.4)	1.6 (0.5)
Total Circumplex Ratio	1.9 (0.7)	1.7 (0.5)	1.8 (0.7)

In regard to family communication, fathers who attended a program scored more highly, while the inverse was true for mothers (Table 23 and Table 24). Family satisfaction was similar for all groups with mothers scoring slightly higher than fathers.

Table 23 Fathers' Family Communication & Satisfaction scores

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All fathers
Family Communication	38.0 (7.9)	40.2 (7.9)	38.9 (7.9)
Family Satisfaction	35.8 (8.2)	36.7 (7.1)	36.2 (7.7)

Table 24 Mothers' Family Communication & Satisfaction scores

Mean (SD)	Have not attended	Attended	All mothers
Family Communication	41.0 (7.3)	38.5 (8.5)	39.9 (7.9)
Family Satisfaction	37.5 (9.2)	36.3 (9.0)	36.9 (9.0)

In summary, responses suggest no clear differentiation between mothers or fathers who had or had not attended a parenting program. It should be noted that there was a wide variation in responses in many cases, as demonstrated by the relatively high standard deviations. This wide dispersion and non-normality of data may have obscured statistically significant findings and support a descriptive analysis as reported here.

The stress associated with child visits was clear, with higher scores amongst attendees of parenting programs perhaps influenced by the greater insight and understanding that these programs generate. The high scores in regard to balanced family cohesion and flexibility are somewhat unexpected and may reflect an over-estimation of these factors. It appears to contrast with the respondent's own experience of parenting. Similarities were evident between those who had attended a program and those who had not. This was particularly clear in regard to parents' experience of paternal parenting style where the measures of indifference, abuse and overcontrol were almost identical. A similar fathering style was apparently experienced, which may correspond to participants' reports that their fathers were often absent in their upbringing.

9 CONCLUSIONS

The Breaking the Cycle for Incarcerated Parent research study will contribute to the knowledge base for Corrective Services NSW in the ongoing development of parenting support, programs and activities for incarcerated parents and their children. The overall study has produced many examples of positive outcomes for inmates and stakeholders of enhanced skills, improved communication and changed attitude to parenting among many inmates. The provision of parenting education and support has received some criticism and recommendations have been made to improve the parent education quality and access to this parenting education and support.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall the data from the Breaking the Cycle research study has been extremely positive in terms of the provision of parenting support and education, given the extremely challenging context of correctional facilities and the essential requirement to ensure the ongoing safety of inmates, staff and visitors as well as the wider community. The following recommendations have been identified based on the data from the Breaking the Cycle research study.

Increasing contact between incarcerated parents and children

- Review of policies and procedures that hamper ongoing contact between parents and their children e.g. arbitrary movement of inmates between centres, access to regular postage, access to phones to ring children outside of school hours, access to parenting programs for parents on remand.
- Assist parents gain information and opportunities to contact their children on a regular basis
- Increase opportunities for parents to interact with their children in a supported and relaxed environment.
- Provide visiting areas that are child-friendly for different stages of childhood e.g. teenagers require different facilities and activities to young children.
- Ensure that planned visits between parents and their children are able to occur without sudden and unexplained cancellations.

Parenting programs

- Review and update current programs to ensure they remain relevant to the participants.
- Develop a system of ongoing evaluation to ensure the programs maintain fidelity
- Continue and expand parenting programs across NSW correctional centres to increase the number of parents participating.
- Update resources, especially culturally appropriate videos, handouts, pictures and parenting examples for use in parenting programs
- Extend current programs or develop new programs to incorporate additional topics to expand the applicability of the programs to parents with older children e.g. MAAD to include material for older children and teens, Babiin Miyagang to include material to help participants with the transition to post-release life (e.g. housing, health, self-care, and other issues). If this is not possible develop and provide additional programs for parents with primary school aged children and teenagers.
- Utilise CSNSW staff who have been trained as facilitators for BM/MAAD to increase the number of sessions offered each year. This requires additional training (refresher course), initial support in running programs and flexibility in rostering to enable them to run a program at different correctional centres.
- Related to point above – continue to involve Indigenous officers in facilitating BM program, given importance of cultural identity, understanding and mentorship.

11 REFERENCES

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Appendix A – Additional Feedback on Babiin Miyagang Program

Written responses from participants

The researchers received access to written responses from several men who had just completed the program. Their comments included:

- I have learnt things I didn't know. Makes me feel good about myself and think... it will help me be a better father. I have learnt things that help me understand fatherhood and my role. It has opened our eyes and made us think (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- It has enabled a better understanding of our history and good positive tools for being a better parent, father and dad to my daughter and family ... has been a good experience for our Aboriginal brothers and people.... It has been a great program with a great, smart and strong teacher in Uncle... (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- I would like to teach my kids when I get out and teach right from wrong (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- It makes me think about how to be a better Dad ... it will bring me closer to my kids and family (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- [How are you feeling about the program?] Alright, excited, great, give me more! [How do you think the program will help your relationship with your children and or extended family members?] It all areas, with all relatives, siblings and immediate family. [Have you discussed the program with other Aboriginal men? If so what has been their response?] 'Why can't I be there?? Tell me more about it, give me some advice ... Don't do something stupid by changing Tony. He himself makes the program successful and gets all the right information across in an understanding easy way!!! Thank you (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- Everything I've learned here I can take home (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- A positive outlook on what's really going on. It was good (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- It really open my eyes on how life really was ... Unk was clear when he explain everything to us (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- I'm feeling good about the program because you get good advice ... I think it will help me and my boy's relationship very good (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- I feel very good about the program. It makes me think about a lot of things that I should do and things that I shouldn't do... I think that the program will help me with the relationship with my children. I will do more for them and listen more an show them love every day ... I would like to say that doing this program has a lot of me thinking and I think the facilitators are doing a good thing for us inmates (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- The program got me positive thinking about my life (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- It was good to be a part of this program and I feel good and happy to learn about my culture ... I think it's made me realise that my family are more important than anyone else and that they come first ... it was good to be a part of and made us all feel closer by doing this program together I would like to say thanks to uncle and everyone else for putting this program on for us (Babiin Miyagang Participant - Long Bay February 2014)
- ... This programme has opened my eyes and hopefully through the grace of God will make me a better Dad. I've enjoyed the course because it's made me think about issues that I've never thought about

before. Thanks for the time you've given up for me and my classmates. I know that you've travelled a long way to facilitate this course, you've taken time away from your family to help us better understand what being a good Dad is all about. My personally, I've realised that the small things like spending time with my children, talking to and listening to what they have to say, making time to play with them are some of the most important parts in raising my babies. I feel that I've been very selfish and that things have to change so my children will become better men and women when they grow up. That my addictions have a great impact on my babies. Hopefully these vices can be dealt with and that I can be sober. At this time I am, but that's only because I'm in gaol. Thank you for making me realise that there are agencies that can help me with regards my addictions, housing, problems with paying the bills. I now realise that at some stage everyone needs a helping hand. I shouldn't feel ashamed to ask for help if I need to. It's not a weakness. In face a real man has the sense to use these facilities that are available in the community. I realise that I've wasted a long time by being in prison and all the time that I've missed with my children has directly affected my babies. My hopes and dreams are for a better life, a simple life, a drug free life no more gaol. To become a man that has turned his life around. To become a better husband, father and grandfather. Thank you ... hopefully I can become the man that I was supposed to be. (Babiin Miyagang Participant – Silverwater May 2014)

Correspondence from CSNSW Officers

The following comments were included in emails from Corrective Services staff members to the program facilitator.

The group loved every minute of the sessions. There aren't many courses where we have to ask the boys to leave at the end of the group. They all spoke highly of the classes and looked forward to every session. You're welcome back here any time. (Educator)

[Officer] from FACS contacted me on the 22/2/16 to talk to [male inmate] who was told by her that his child had been taken into the custody by FACS.

I told [officer] that [inmate] had completed an Aboriginal Parenting program with myself and [program facilitator] here at Yetta last year and she seemed very impressed with him doing the program and told [inmate] that it would go a long way towards him gaining custody if he tries to gain custody of his child. (SAPO).

Appendix B – Outputs of the Breaking the Cycle Program

The following publications and presentations have been produced to date:

Publications

Rossiter, C., Power, T., Fowler, C., Jackson, D., Hyslop, D. & Dawson, A. 2015, 'Mothering at a Distance: what incarcerated mothers value about a parenting programme', *Contemporary Nurse*, vol. 50, no. 2-3, pp. 238-55.

Fowler, C., Rossiter, C., Dawson, A., Jackson, D. and Power, T. 2016 forthcoming, Becoming a 'better' father: supporting the needs of incarcerated fathers, *The Prison Journal* – in press, accepted 20 January 2016.

Rossiter, C., Jackson, D., Dawson, A., Fowler, C. and Power, T. "Learning to be a better man": insights from a fathering program for incarcerated Indigenous men', submitted to *Australian Journal of Social Issues* - under review.

Rossiter, C., Power, T., Fowler, C., Elliott, K., Dawson, A. "We saw, we felt, we thought": collective critical reflexive processes in prison interviewing' - submitted to *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*.

Conference presentations

Fowler, C., Dawson, A., Rossiter, C., Power, T., Hyslop, D. and Jackson, D. (2015). Breaking the cycle for incarcerated fathers, 26th International Nursing Research Conference, Sigma Theta Tau International, San Juan, Puerto Rico.