Working with Indigenous offenders / ex – offenders “down under”

Mandy Marsters
Community Restorative Centre
Re Integration Puzzle Conference
Perth 2009
Come from the most marginalised sectors of our communities

Have a myriad of complex issues

Experience of incarceration further isolates and disempowers

Leaves people less equipped to deal with life in the outside world

Indigenous Australians are greatly over represented
Indigenous Incarceration

- In 2008 24% of the Australian prison population were Indigenous (Compared to 2.3% of the general population)

- Indigenous children are 6 times more likely to be under a care order

- Indigenous youth are 23% times more likely to be in Juvenile Justice detention
Prisoner population snapshot

- 80% men, 84% women used illicit drugs
- 78% men, 95% women one chronic health condition
- 74% psychiatric disorders [22% general population]
- 27% men, 18% women scored below pass rate on intellectual disability screener
Prisoner population snapshot

- 37% men, 60% women sexually abused before 16 years
- 45% men, 39% women experienced traumatic head injury
- 20% men, 33% women under DOCS supervision as a child
- 43% of the prison population return 7 postcodes
**Colonisation Process**

Territory disposition / Population displacement

Breakdown of Family/tribal/community structures

Loss language/identity/self determination/esteem

Settler “Nasties”

Enforced govt policies and practices

Poor health/housing/AOD/unemployment etc
“Trauma of genocide, loss of culture, forcible removal are all unresolved and become a sort of psychological baggage.....continuously being acted out and recreated in contemporary Aboriginal culture”

- C.Wesley-Esquimaux and H.Smolewski: Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Health, Aboriginal Health Foundation(2004 p 3)
Canadian Elder Vera Martin refers to a “blood memory. It is a collective memory of what has happened and what has not happened”.
Effective Strategies for Working with Indigenous Colonised populations

- Community based, collaborative responses
- Indigenous community-development, participation and control
- Experiential and interactive learning
- Holistic Approach
Effective strategies for Working with Indigenous Colonised populations

- Understanding historical context
- Importance of decolonisation
- Addressing historic trauma
- Recognition of family, tribe, community
1981 – 49.2% children in care Maori (11%)

Maori staff and activist groups accused CYPF Act 1974 and the department of racism.

Committee to enquire and report on service delivery to Maori

CYPF Act 1989

Moves towards bi-cultural practice

Maori C&YP be placed with family or tribal /racial group (Family Group Conferencing)
Effective Strategies for Working with Indigenous Colonised populations

- Ongoing cultural supervision
- Knowledge of local Aboriginal culture, customs etc
- Cultural competence vs Cultural sensitivity
- Recognise unique status
- Recognise the client as the expert
Effective Strategies for Working with Indigenous Colonised populations

- Continuous review of own services policies and procedures, work practices and environment, service limitations.
Parenting model in Men’s prisons
- Incorporates effects of colonisation on Maori child rearing practices
- Decolonisation process
- Focus on power and control issues
- Exploration of own upbringing
- Set parenting goals with view to connecting with traditional values to improve parenting.
Maori Focus Units

- 60 bed units
- 5 men’s prisons
- Policies, practices and programming according to Kaupapa Maori
changing lives reducing crime