



3P ADVISORY
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Dress for Success Welcome Back(pack)

Program Evaluation

July 2023

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Executive Summary

The "Welcome Back(pack)" program, led by Dress for Success, plays a crucial role in providing fundamental support for women transitioning from prison back into their communities and employment across Tasmania. The program addresses immediate barriers by offering essential resources and nurturing emotional well-being, contributing to empowering women to rebuild their lives and gain independence.

Extensive research on women released from Victorian prisons underscores the significance of personal agency and self-efficacy in supporting desistance from crime. With a clear focus on empowerment, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program directly works towards this by providing essential resources, including clothing and personal care items, to boost women's confidence during their transition.

The program's impact extends beyond material provisions, as it instils a sense of support and hope, reminding participants of their inherent value and potential for successful reintegration. Through collaborative efforts with government and non-government organisations, Dress for Success strengthens the network of vocational supports and opportunities for women post-release, ensuring a smoother path and connection into these essential services.

Feedback from program participants provides compelling evidence of the transformative power of the support provided. Underpinned with a sense of gratitude, they share stories of restored dignity and renewed hope. The contents of the backpacks go beyond tangible items; they ignite a spark of self-value and pride.

Although the "Welcome Back(pack)" program is still in its early stages, it has already achieved remarkable success, and has positioned itself as one of the essential elements of support for women transitioning from prison in Tasmania. Each backpack enables women to have access to the tangible resources necessary to feel confident about their transition, and begin their next stage with access to the essential supports, resources and feelings that foster a successful reintegration into society.

Summary of Findings

The "Welcome Back(pack)" program has undergone a comprehensive evaluation, drawing insights from various sources, including the experiences of program participants, statistical data from state and national research, and through review and analysis of established best practices for women being released from prison. This assessment has highlighted the program's immediate and enduring benefits, not only for the individuals involved but also for the broader Tasmanian community.

The "Welcome Back(pack)" program evidences the transformative power of targeted and individualised support. In a relatively short time, it has bridged a critical support gap for women upon their release, and the program's benefits extend well beyond the provision of tangible resources. In addition to vital material support like clothing and personal care items, feedback collection has revealed equally valuable non-material benefits experienced by the participants. These non-material gains encompass a renewed sense of self-worth, increased confidence, and a profound belief in their ability to rebuild their lives. The program's impact, as evidenced through the feedback from the women it serves, demonstrates its unique capacity to provide comprehensive benefits that address not only the material aspects of their transition but also the deeper, personal dimensions contributing to successful reintegration. As it continues to expand, its potential to generate medium to long-term benefits for both the women it supports and the dedicated prison staff who witness its effects daily becomes increasingly evident.



no longer have to wear my pjs

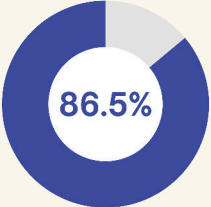
202
BACKPACKS
provided to
155
WOMEN



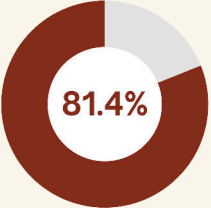
100%
of women surveyed
reported their backpack made them feel more
prepared for their release back into the
community

ACCESS TO RESOURCES

86.5% of women reported that prior to receiving their backpack, they did not have any clothing or toiletries to take with them upon release




81.4% of women reported that prior to receiving their backpack, they did not have a bag to take personal items with them upon release



POSITIVE IMPACT

97.68%
of women reported that their overall experience with the Welcome Back(pack) initiative has had a positive impact on them



A person wearing a white cardigan with small black polka dots is sitting at a grey desk. They are looking at several sheets of paper with text on them. A black pen is resting on the papers. The background is slightly blurred, showing a white chair and a plant.

Program Summary and Background

Need and Rationale

The need for effective support for women transitioning from prison to employment is well-documented in both local and international research studies. Addressing the additional barriers faced by these women is crucial to reduce recidivism and facilitate successful rehabilitation (Ross & Brown, 2003).

Research on women released from Victorian prisons emphasises the significance of personal agency and self-efficacy in supporting desistance from crime (McIvor, Trotter & Sheehan, 2009). It highlights the importance of embedding programs within transition planning that promote these empowering qualities.

The "Welcome Back(pack)" program by Dress for Success directly contributes to enhancing self-perception for women transitioning from prison in the short-term. The provision of resources, including clothing and essential items, addresses the disadvantages faced by this group when seeking employment. Additionally, the program collaborates with existing government and non-government organisations, providing a valuable contribution to the network of employment, other community services and initiatives in Tasmania, thereby increasing women's access to these vital resources.

Studies have shown a correlation between employment rates, personal agency, self worth, and recidivism rates. By directly addressing underlying factors that contribute to these aspects in the short-term, the Welcome Back(pack) program has the potential to indirectly contribute to reduced reoffending rates for Tasmanian Female Prisoners in the medium to long-term.

In summary, the need for targeted support in employment and empowerment for women transitioning from prison is evident in research findings. The Welcome Back(pack) program's focus on enhancing self-perception, providing resources, and fostering connections to vital services aligns with these identified needs. By addressing immediate barriers and contributing to women's sense of agency, the program has the potential to positively impact recidivism rates within Tasmania.

Program Goals and Objectives

1. **Target population:**

Women exiting Tasmania's Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison (MHWP)

2. **Addressing Barriers to Employment:**

The primary goal of the "Welcome Back(pack)" program is to address barriers to employment faced by women transitioning from prison to their communities. The program aims to provide sustainable solutions that enhance women's participation in the workforce by offering comprehensive support and resources tailored to their unique needs

3. **Fostering Self-Worth and Confidence:**

In addition to facilitating employment opportunities, the program recognises the importance of emotional well-being in successful reintegration. It seeks to foster a heightened sense of self-worth and confidence among women, empowering them to embrace their journey of reintegration with optimism and a positive outlook on their future.

4. **Collaboration and Targeted Support:**

The program collaborates with various government and non-government organisations, strategically positioning itself as a valuable addition to existing employment services and initiatives. Beyond complementing existing support systems, the program's unique approach offers additional benefits and outcomes that stand alone, enhancing the support available to women upon release.

5. **Supporting Women Exiting MHWP:**

The program focuses on providing support to women leaving the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison (MHWP). Its primary activity involves providing women with essential clothing packages and direct access to Dress for Success support services. These resources aim to

facilitate their access to both essential self-care resources and employment opportunities upon release.

Program Structure and Activities


The "Welcome Back(pack)" program adopts a structured approach to support women transitioning from prison to their communities, with a focus on enhancing their employment prospects and reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

1. **Clothing Package and Direct Support:** Women leaving the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison (MHWP) receive a thoughtful package of clothing, toiletries, and essential items. They are directly linked with Dress for Success to access employment support services upon release. Since its inception in August 2020, the program has provided 202 backpacks to 155 women, with feedback indicating a remarkable 100% satisfaction rate.
2. **Comprehensive Career Support:** Upon release, women are offered one-on-one career support sessions at the Dress for Success boutique. These sessions encompass CV and interview preparation, taking advantage of day release opportunities for women before their full release. The individualized assistance ensures that each woman is equipped with the necessary tools to confidently pursue employment opportunities.
3. **Planned Program Enhancement - Holistic Employment Workshops:** The program plans to extend beyond the clothing package support offered upon release with the introduction of employment workshops within the prison environment. These workshop will aim to encourage women to prepare their resumes and applications while still in prison, laying the groundwork for a successful job search upon release. Modeled after the successful "Success Works" program by Dress for Success Sydney, these workshops offer a holistic approach to empower women with essential job-seeking skills.

In summary, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program structure comprises three essential elements:

1. The provision of backpacks with clothing and essential items.
2. One-on-one career support sessions offered at the Dress for Success boutique, focusing on CV and interview preparation, and facilitated during day release periods.
3. Planned onsite delivery of Instant Impact workshops at MHWP to prepare women for job searching and application processes.

By providing comprehensive resources, practical pre-and post-release workshops, and personalised career support, the program works to create a positive and empowering transition experience for women, setting them on a path towards meaningful employment and successful reintegration into the Tasmanian community.

A woman with vibrant purple hair is smiling and looking at a laptop screen. She is in a meeting with other people, one of whom is seen from the back. The scene is set in a modern office or meeting room with a window in the background showing trees. A blue semi-transparent box is overlaid on the image, containing the title text.

Evaluation Overview and Methodology

Evaluation Introduction

Dress for Success Hobart (DFS) plays a pivotal role in addressing women's workforce participation, aiming to overcome barriers to employment through its comprehensive support and resources. As a collaborative partner with various government and non-government organisations, DFS adds unique value to the range of Tasmanian employment services and initiatives, ultimately working to increase employment outcomes for Tasmanian women.

The challenges faced by women transitioning from prison are well documented. A history of prison-time creates additional barriers to gaining employment. Since 2020, DFS has been committed to supporting women in the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison (MHWP). The Welcome Back(pack) program was introduced to facilitate women's access to employment opportunities upon release.

Moreover, the program aims to extend its impact by providing employability workshops, including Instant Impact sessions, to inmates in MHWP, fostering vital job-seeking skills.

Funding for the Welcome Back(pack) program is provided by the Department of Justice. To ensure its effectiveness in achieving the intended outcomes, this evaluation employs a comprehensive methodology and program logic to assess various outputs and outcomes.

The primary aim of this evaluation over the initial two-year period is to summarise the valuable insights, successes, lessons learned, and areas for potential program enhancements or modifications that have been captured. The evaluation is designed to gauge the Welcome Back(pack) program's success in achieving its key goals in the short-term. In addition, the evaluation will also seek to identify strategies for analysing the program's long-term effectiveness for implementation moving forward.

Through this evaluation, we aim to offer a detailed analysis of the program's achievements, challenges, and potential for sustained impact. By providing a comprehensive assessment, the evaluation will serve as a foundation for informed decision-making and continuous quality improvement approaches, ensuring that the Welcome Back(pack) program remains an effective and empowering resource for women transitioning from prison in Tasmania.

Methodology Overview

The evaluation of the Welcome Back (Pack) project aims to inform comprehensive approaches to support Tasmanian women transitioning from prison and seeking employment, addressing short, medium, and long-term needs.

Given that the program is new to the state and has only been operating for a small window of time, the findings of this initial evaluation will aim to understand how closely aligned the program's activity is to meeting the employment and transition needs of women exiting prison, and represent the positive-impact this is having on the individuals who have accessed the program. The evaluation will then use these findings combined with insights from best-practice models and successful approaches within other jurisdictions, to inform the development of recommendations for improvements that have the potential to increase both the long-term sustainability and success of the model, and opportunities for the monitoring and identification of more medium-long term outcomes being achieved.

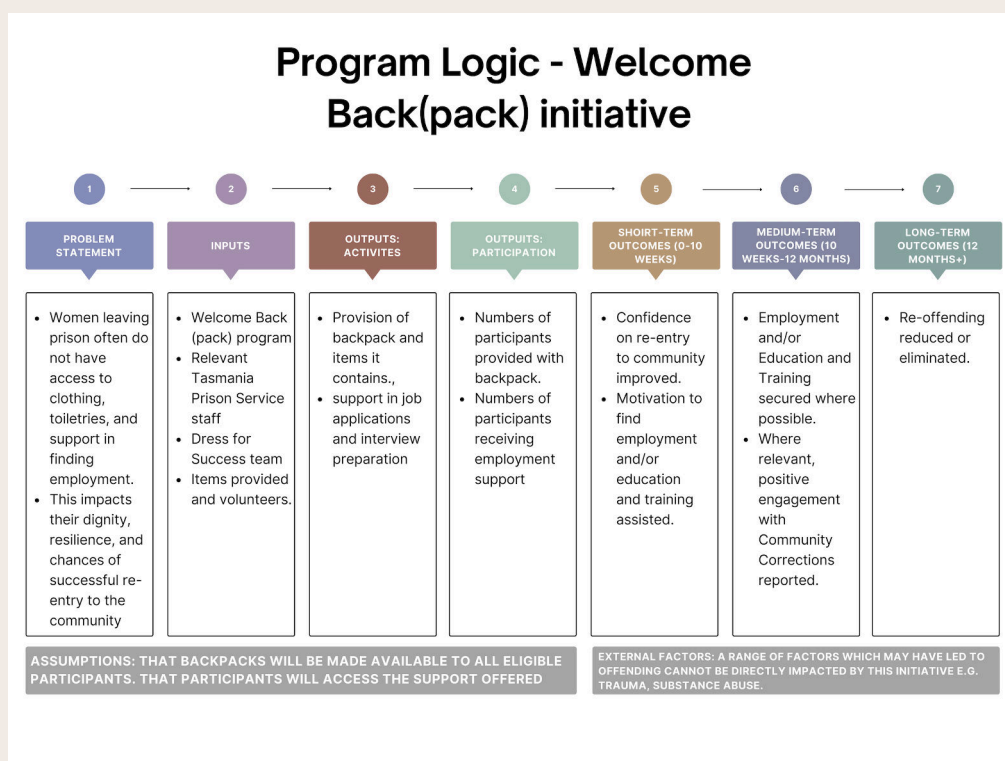
A monitoring and evaluation framework has been devised to support this evaluation process. It serves several crucial purposes, including:

- Understanding and analysing the model's effectiveness.
- Clearly articulating the model's goals and establishing measurable short, medium, and long-term objectives.
- Defining the relationships between the model, its activities, and external factors.
- Demonstrating how the activities are linked to the desired outcomes and impact.

A Program Logic/Theory of Change has been established, providing the overarching focus for measuring outcomes and impact. This framework guides the evaluation, ensuring that data collection and analysis align with the program's intended objectives and desired transformative effects.

Through this robust methodology, the evaluation aims to offer a comprehensive assessment of the Welcome Back (Pack) program's effectiveness, providing actionable insights to enhance its support to women exiting prison and seeking employment. The participatory approach and focus on outcomes and impact ensure that the evaluation contributes to the ongoing development of a successful and empowering support model for these women in Tasmania.

Program Logic



The Program logic for the Welcome Back(pack) initiative, is designed to assist with ongoing continuous improvement of the program and to assist in its evaluation.

It does so in the context of the relatively modest scope of the program and its limited capacity to directly address a range of factors which affect the success of re-entry into the community for people exiting prison.

The program logic clearly sets out that the initiative aims to improve the dignity and resilience of women exiting prison, thereby impacting their capacity to find employment or enter appropriate education and training, understanding that this will lessen the likelihood of re-offending in the long term.

Approach and Methodology for Short-Term Outcomes Evaluation

To ensure a comprehensive and well-informed evaluation process, engagement has occurred across Dress for Success, the Department of Justice, and program participants. This engagement aims to capture perspectives across a range of touch-points for the program.

The evaluation of short-term outcomes in this initiative prioritises the perspectives and experiences of program participants. To effectively assess and evaluate the achieved short-term outcomes, the evaluation will employ a qualitative approach, engaging in purposeful discussions with the women who have been recipients of the program's support, and drawing on qualitative feedback captured across the life of the program thus far. While participation in these discussions will be entirely voluntary, we recognise the critical importance of gathering insights directly from

those who have accessed the program's services.

The primary objective of seeking feedback from the women is twofold. Firstly, it enables the evaluation to identify areas of improvement and potential refinements to enhance the program's effectiveness and impact. Secondly, the evaluation seeks to highlight the program's successes and benefits, shedding light on the positive outcomes experienced by the women. This information is invaluable in identifying opportunities for program expansion and enhancement.

Through these qualitative discussions, the evaluation endeavours to gain valuable insights into the program's initial impact and effectiveness, as perceived by the women it serves. Their feedback will serve as a foundation for continuous improvement and guide future strategies to ensure the program's sustained support and positive outcomes for the women transitioning from prison.

Establishing Mechanisms to Facilitate the Evaluation of Medium-Long-Term Outcomes:

As the "Welcome Back(pack)" program is still in its early stages of operation, a comprehensive evaluation of medium to long-term outcomes requires the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and data collection strategies. The short window of operation has limited the opportunity to gather extensive data on the program's long-term impact. To ensure a more thorough evaluation of medium to long-term outcomes, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Respectful Data Gathering:** To uphold the rights of individuals who have completed their sentences, it is vital to conduct data gathering on employment outcomes with utmost respect for their privacy and consent. While engaging participants who are still on continuing orders, probation, or parole is relatively straightforward, those who have completed their sentences should have the option to voluntarily share information on their employment status.
2. **Deidentified Community Corrections Data:** For participants under Community Corrections Orders, readily available data on compliance and breaches will be important in demonstrating the program's impact on successful transitions for women exiting prison into the community. Monitoring improvements in compliance and successful completion rates will be a crucial aspect of evaluating the program's effectiveness in the medium term.
3. **Establish Baseline Figures:** Relevant parties, including Dress for Success, the Tasmanian Prison Service, and Community Corrections, should collaborate to set baseline figures for the number of program participants employed or engaged in education and training. This initial data will serve as a foundation for monitoring progress and measuring improvements over medium-long-term time periods.
4. **Longitudinal Data Collection:** Implement a longitudinal data collection approach that extends beyond the current evaluation timeframe. By tracking participants' progress over an extended period, the evaluation can gain valuable insights into the program's lasting effects on their lives and successful reintegration. This approach will enable the assessment of changes and improvements in participants' employment, education, and training outcomes over time, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact beyond immediate results.

5. **Establishing Mechanisms for Comparative Evaluation:** To comprehensively evaluate the medium to long-term outcomes of the "Welcome Back(pack)" program, a comparative approach involving control groups and participant groups can provide valuable insights, but careful consideration needs to be given to how this could be achieved without withholding program support from any women. By conducting studies with control groups—comprising of women who transitioned into the community without the program's support—and participant groups—comprising of women who actively engage with the program—we can assess the program's impact and highlight the program's benefits, suggestions on how this could be conducted whilst still ensuring that current inmates within MHWP are all still offered the support include:
- a. Compare two sets of deidentified insights, one from MHWP program participants, and another from participants within another facility who did not offer the program
 - b. Seek permission from women who may have chosen not to utilise the program to enrol in a deidentified follow-up study alongside active program participants
 - c. Comparing information available about the first 12 weeks post-release for women who may have had a previous transition without the program, to the first 12 weeks post-release when they have had access to the program.

By implementing these recommendations, the program will be equipped to capture the program's effectiveness and lasting impact on women transitioning from prison. Longitudinal data collection, in particular, will offer valuable insights into the program's enduring effects and the potential for sustained positive outcomes for participants. Leveraging community corrections data, conducting qualitative exploration, and establishing baseline figures will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the program's achievements across a longer window of time, and provide more in-depth visibility for areas for continuous improvement in embedding not only successful transitional support programs, but sustainable medium long-term continued post-release support.



Evaluation Findings and Analysis

Literature Review: Alignment between the Welcome Back(pack) program and best practice approaches

A desktop-style literature review has been conducted to further understand best practice approaches for women transitioning from prison back into the community. A report published by Women's Health Tasmania in March 2017, highlighted that, at the time, Tasmania was one of the few states in Australia where there were no established coordinated post-release support programs, and cited that recidivism rates are high, with up to 50% of women re-entering the corrections system. Multiple programs, research documents and reports have been reviewed to gather and analyse the common best practice themes identified in both research, and practice, through analysing the common elements amongst successful programs and initiatives from other jurisdictions.

Amongst a range of initiatives and elements, there was frequent mention of the significance of programs which facilitate an increased sense of dignity/heightened self-esteem and independence, alongside employment support, in facilitating successful transitions for women leaving prison.

Whilst much of the literature reviewed emphasised that both in and post-prison support is often still organised around the needs of male prisoners, it was found that gender-responsive and holistic approaches, such as the support provided within the "Welcome Back(pack)" program, is essential in addressing the multifaceted needs of women transitioning from prison, and empowering them to reintegrate into society with pride and purpose. By aligning with these key themes, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program is well-positioned to support women on their journey toward successful reintegration and breaking the cycle of recidivism.

Other common themes identified as contributing to higher likelihoods of a successful transition, and aligning with core elements and activities of the Welcome Back(Pack) program included:

1. **Restoring Dignity and Empowerment through Employment:** Jurisdictions, such as Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, and the ACT, have adopted a holistic approach to support women's successful reintegration. This includes provisions to restore dignity and foster empowerment through education, vocational training, and employment opportunities. These programs recognise that sustainable employment plays a crucial role in empowering women, enhancing their self-esteem, and providing a sense of purpose. Similarly, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program acknowledges the significance of dignity-restoring elements by offering women clothing and personal care items, empowering them with essential resources to bolster their confidence and self-perception.
2. **Addressing Criminogenic and Human Needs:** Best practice approaches emphasised the importance of addressing criminogenic and human needs, such as housing, mental and physical health, substance abuse, family reconnection, and legal assistance. Programs that provide comprehensive support in these areas enable women to overcome barriers that might have contributed to their incarceration. By recognising the multifaceted needs of women transitioning from prison, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program is aligned with these best-practice approaches through identifying and overcoming both resourcing and skill needs for women exiting prison.
3. **Creating Safe and Respectful Environments:** Studies from other jurisdictions and international research reiterate the importance of creating safe and respectful environments for women in custody, highlighting that restoring dignity and ensuring women feel respected and valued are essential aspects of successful reintegration. The "Welcome Back(pack)" program's focus on providing women with essential items upon release, and in doing so, reinforces the notion of creating an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.
4. **Long-Term Focus:** Literature emphasised that best practice approaches, should be underpinned by a long-term focus on building self-sustainability and sufficiency, underscore the significance of a

long-term focus in reintegration efforts. These approaches recognise that the positive effects of interventions extend beyond the immediate post-release period. By combining the resources provided within the backpack, alongside employment support both within the dress for success service and alongside other existing employment services, the program is contributing to women not just having increased resources at the time of their release, but also an increased likelihood to be equipped with skills and resources alongside support that foster more medium-long-term increases in self-sustainability.

Qualitative insights and feedback

“Having my personal belongings inside a backpack instead of a garbage bag means that I can keep a bit of my dignity and walk out with my head held high. It also feels good to walk out owning something for myself.”

The qualitative data collected from program participants highlights a consistent theme regarding the positive impact of receiving a backpack upon release. Participants expressed feelings of happiness, gratitude, and a sense of normalcy after receiving the Welcome Back(pack). The provision of clothing, toiletries, and a backpack contributed significantly to their self-esteem and confidence as they transitioned back into the community.

Analysis of responses to feedback surveys showed that the backpacks played a crucial role in restoring dignity and self-worth, with many participants mentioning that they would have otherwise left prison with nothing or in “embarrassing clothes”. The clothing provided in the backpacks allowed them to feel well-prepared for their release, enabling them to walk out with “their head held high and a renewed sense of confidence.”

“Thank you! It has prepared me on my release and helped me to be organised and have a bag to take as I have nothing and nothing to fit me on release. I have nobody to contact to help me with anything so that's why I am so grateful, I really needed one.”

Participants emphasised the importance of having up-to-date and age-appropriate clothes to wear upon release, as this positively influenced their outlook and feelings about reintegrating into society. Many mentioned that the backpacks not only provided essential items but also symbolised a fresh start and a new beginning, contributing to a sense of excitement and readiness for their post-release journey. Overall, the

qualitative data reflects that the "Welcome Back(pack)" program has had an immediate and positive impact on the program participants.

When reviewed alongside data from Dress for Success's employment program feedback process, it is evident that the provision of essential items and clothing, alongside employment support and vocational training, has not only boosted the participant's self-esteem but also empowered the recipients to face the challenges of reintegrating into the community with confidence and hope for a brighter future.

“

“DFS helps me with writing resumes, styling professional wares and holding workshops regarding mindset, LinkedIn, makeup and so many more. More importantly, it feels warm when you know someone cares about you and knows you are worth it. That really boosts my confidence and motivation to be a better me.”

Participants expressed a heightened sense of dignity and self-worth as a result of receiving essential clothing items and personal care products, empowering them to face the challenges of reintegration with renewed confidence. This, combined with the program's emphasis on employment support and vocational training, was found to be instrumental in equipping women with valuable skills and opportunities for personal growth, in line with suggested elements of best-practice approaches, and supporting women to move towards a positive trajectory for their post-release lives.

Data from pack recipients shows an overwhelmingly positive response, and significant reach and impact:

- 86.5% of respondents reported they did not have any clothing or toiletries to take with them on release before receiving the backpack
- 81.4% of respondents did not have a bag to take personal items with them upon release prior to receiving the backpack
- 100% of respondents either agreed (11.63%) or strongly agreed (88.37%) that receiving the backpack made the feel more prepared for their release back into the community
- 97.67% of respondents reported they were happy with the contents of the backpack
- 97.68% of respondents reported that their experience with the welcome back(pack) program had a positive impact on them



Interview Summaries

Insights from Department of Justice Staff

In an interview with two corrections workers from the Mary Hutchins Prison, we gained deep insights into the transformative influence of the Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program. This discussion highlighted both the positive impact on the Women who have participated in the program, alongside the benefits for the staff within the prison.

Empowering with Appropriate Clothing:

Staff interviewed highlighted that throughout their tenure, inmates often had to make do with clothing that was ill-fitting and unsuitable for various weather conditions upon release. It was noted, for example, that if a woman was arrested in summer – the clothes they were wearing at this time, were what had to be provided to them to wear again upon release, and often were completely unsuitable if their release was in the middle of winter. Similarly, a women arrested at night whilst wearing pyjamas, would not necessarily be able to access alternative clothing to wear upon release, resulting in staff either needing to see if they could source something from a box of second hand clothes or relying on the inmate having resources external to the prison that could potentially provide an alternative for them to wear. Staff strongly praised the contribution that the Dress for Success program has had on changing this for women, and emphasised that by providing age and size-appropriate clothing, the program is instilling a newfound sense of dignity and confidence in the women leaving incarceration.

Reducing Workload and Family Burden:

One remarkable change observed by staff was the significant reduction in the workload for prison staff during an inmate's release. Before the program's introduction, staff had to scramble to prepare clothing for released inmates, often sourcing items from a box of second hand clothing which were often not in good condition or weather/size appropriate. With the Dress for Success Welcome Backpacks, this process became streamlined and efficient, allowing staff to focus on other essential tasks in supporting and preparing women for release. Furthermore, staff highlighted that the program also relieved families of the burden of providing clothing for their loved ones, fostering a sense of relief and easing the transition process – and creating equity amongst inmates upon release ensuring that even for inmates without family support, they are still able to transition to release with appropriate clothing.

Dignified Completion and Satisfaction:

The availability of the Welcome Backpacks brought a sense of completion and satisfaction to both staff and inmates. In the staff's view, the program offered women a dignified manner of leaving prison, highlighting the ripple effect of its positive impact. In addition, staff also noted they felt a more significant sense of satisfaction and comfort through being able to release women with appropriate clothing – as the staff interviewed raised that it felt challenging both professionally and personally when previously, appropriate clothing was not necessarily a resource they could ensure all women had access to for their release.

Opportunities for Growth and Improvement:

While recognising the program's success, staff also commended the program's expansion for the inclusion of court preparation clothing, speaking of the value that this expansion has had in ensuring that women have

suitable clothing for court appearances, and highlighting the important role this plays in creating greater equity in this process.

In addition to the current and expanded offerings being provided, staff also highlighted that pyjamas is another clothing item many inmates struggle to have access to, preventing significant inequities in the sleepwear and undergarments that women have to wear – and often resulting in ill-fitting, inappropriate or uncomfortable options being all that is available for some women. It was highlighted that there are significant impacts on a women's sense of dignity when they do not have access to appropriate pyjamas – and expansion of the program to support women to have sleepwear and undergarments that are suitable would have a significant benefit to their self-esteem.

Promoting Equity and Inclusion:

Staff emphasised that the Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program made a significant contribution to levels of equity and inclusion in the prison system. It bridged a gap that had long existed, providing women with something more than just clothing – a renewed sense of value and empowerment, and ensuring that women are not starting off their release on a level of disadvantage – as the clothing has ensured all women are released with clothing appropriate for the weather at the time, and the woman as an individual.

Continuity and Holistic Approach:

It was noted that the Dress for Success program's involvement from the beginning of an inmate's journey was crucial, and would increase an individual's sense of comfort and connection to the program both in engaging with anything offered during their time in prison, and in engaging with additional complementary support provided by Dress for Success upon their release. It was highlighted that this connection provides a holistic approach to reintegration, and would ensure women are comfortable to engage with Dress for Success in other spaces, including to access clothing for any court and child access visits.

Challenges and Potential Solutions:

When asked about opportunities to enhance program accessibility, staff recommended the establishment of pop-up shops in the North and Northwest regions, catering to clients who face geographical challenges and may require support for court appearances or job-preparedness upon release. However, she also cautioned against excessive bureaucracy, suggesting that too many entities involved could hinder the program's effectiveness.

Staff highlighted the issue of transportation for released inmates and the socioeconomic challenges they faced, and acknowledged that whilst this is out of the scope of the Dress for Success Program, emphasis was placed on the impact this has on someone's ability to engage with programs like Dress for Success further upon release and moving forward.

Positive Outcomes and Empowerment:

In closing, staff expressed the positive impact of the Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program, instilling excitement and confidence in women upon their release, and significantly increasing job-satisfaction for staff. She noted that the program not only provided clothing but also prompted valuable conversations and changes in self-perception. It encouraged women to embrace their journey towards reintegration with a newfound sense of empowerment, and enabled staff to feel more confident that women being released are appropriately equipped with the clothing they need to re-enter their communities.

Participant Interview Summary

During the interview with one of the participants of the Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program, several key insights emerged regarding the impact and significance of the program on her life.

During the interview, discussion emphasised the immense relief and gratitude the participant had felt because of the program. She emphasised that, without the Welcome Backpack Program, her family would have had to make a lengthy journey from the north-west coast of Tasmania to provide her with suitable clothing upon release. This underscores the program's practical importance in alleviating the burden on families and ensuring that participants are equipped with appropriate attire as they transition back into the community.

The participant also expressed a profound sense of preparedness and excitement for her impending release, attributing these positive emotions to the program. She felt that the program had not only provided her with necessary clothing but had also instilled a newfound sense of hope and readiness for the next chapter in her life. It made her feel more prepared for her next stage, and she commented that this also allowed her to feel more comfortable in feeling hope and excitement above nerves and unease.

When asked about potential expansions or improvements to the program, the participant suggested the inclusion of undergarments and sleepwear for women entering and residing within the prison would be incredibly valuable, including items like singlets to wear underneath things.

In summary, this interview with a Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program participant's feedback highlighted the program's practical and emotional significance. It not only eases the logistical challenges faced by many women and their families, but also fosters a sense of preparedness, excitement, and hope as women transition back into their communities.

Unforeseen Program Benefits: Shedding Light on Hidden Value and Opportunities

One remarkable outcome of the Dress for Success Welcome Backpack Program that was discussed during our interviews with staff, was the establishment of an clothing repair initiative. Staff spoke of a particular trusted inmate with strengths and skills in sewing and clothing repair, who has been able to both work on repairing clothes that have been returned in need of minor repair, and also has been able to teach these skills to other women where appropriate.

Transferable Skills

This opportunity has not only created a meaningful occupation within the prison but has also extended its reach by imparting valuable skills and empowering women. The clothing repair and maintenance opportunities has introduced an avenue for inmates to contribute positively within the prison community and provide valuable skills for women post-release also. By taking on roles related to clothing repairs, and teaching these skills to their peers, women gain a sense of purpose and responsibility. Furthermore, this is providing women not only with a skill that could be used within direct employment capacity, but also with an opportunity for women to ensure the clothes provided within their pack can be repaired or maintained if needed, should they experience normal wear and tear through their use after release. Furthermore, the addition of being able to use this skill to maintain both theirs and their family's clothing items (eg hemming of school clothes for children) if required/desired has both financial and self-esteem benefits.

Empowerment through Education:

Equipping women with skills and knowledge empowers them to make positive changes in their lives. This empowerment is not confined to skill of clothing repair; it extends to their broader sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. As they acquire new skills and knowledge, women often experience an increased sense of agency and a belief in their capacity to create a better future for themselves.

Teaching Others:

This benefit doesn't stop at teaching individual women; it encourages a peer-to-peer learning approach. Evidence highlights that women involved in peer-to-peer opportunities report both increasing senses of community and collaboration within the prison, and also provides the skills and knowledge around the benefits of teaching and guiding others.

Reducing Recidivism:

One of the possible long-term outcomes of this unintended benefit is its potential to contribute to reducing recidivism rates. Women who acquire employable skills and experience a sense of purpose during their incarceration are better equipped to secure employment upon release. This increased employability reduces the likelihood of reoffending and re-entering the correctional system.

A photograph of two women sitting on a beach at sunset, viewed from behind. They are sitting on a light-colored towel or blanket. The woman on the left has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a grey t-shirt. The woman on the right has curly brown hair and is wearing a dark jacket over a red top. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow over the water and sky. The sky is a mix of light blue and orange. The water is calm, reflecting the light from the sun. In the distance, there are some hills or mountains. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Closing Observations

Closing Observations

Through analysis and review of both qualitative data collected from the program's participants, quantitative data from state and national sources, and insights from the literature on best practice approaches to transitional support for women leaving prison, it is evident the "Welcome Back(pack)" program has demonstrated immediate benefits for the individuals accessing support. Furthermore, the program has providing strong building blocks for delivering medium to longer-term benefits to Tasmania as a whole, through delivering a program that is underpinned by elements identified in research as being key enablers to reductions in recidivism.

In summary, the "Welcome Back(pack)" program has effectively bridged a critical support gap for women upon release. Its resounding success and positive feedback from both staff and participants underscore its capacity to bring about positive change in the lives of women preparing for release. The program's achievements are a promising sign of its potential to have a lasting and constructive impact on women transitioning from prison.

The program has a pivotal role in addressing the immediate and pressing needs of women being released - both in supporting with the provision of essential material resources, and instilling a profound sense of self-worth and empowerment in its participants. Moreover, the current and potential expansion opportunities provide an ability for the program's influence to grow further, indicating strong potential for the program to contribute to medium to long-term benefits for both women and prison staff.