

The Vietnamese Transitions Project

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Background

- Lower prevalence of illicit drug use within Vietnamese community than Australian average. (Donato-Hunt et al, 2008)
- However, Vietnamese drug users are less likely to access treatment.
- Non-participation in treatment is correlated with criminal recidivism.



Vietnamese drug offenders

- Vietnamese inmates are isolated while in prison and upon release:
 - Language barrier
 - Lack of support, especially culturally appropriate support.
 - Reluctance to access services.
- Drug use and criminality particularly shameful and taboo in Vietnamese community:
 - Drug offenders are marginalised from community post-release



The Vietnamese Transitions Project

- Funded for 12 months under the National Community Crime Prevention Program.
- Worked with Vietnamese drug offenders post-release, and their families.
- Intensive case management support model.
- Community capacity-building.



Working with project participants and their families

- Building trust essential
- Home-visiting / outreach / client transport very helpful
- Work with families
 - Focus on reconciliation where possible
 - Address needs of other family members and refer them as necessary.



Working with the Vietnamese community

- Changing attitudes towards drug offenders is a slow process.
- Can work through:
 - Vietnamese community radio
 - Vietnamese community welfare organisations



Collaborative intersectoral relationships

- Good relationships with other agencies, especially the Department of Corrective Services and Justice Health, have been essential.
- Assist with their expertise, contacts, and access to prison system
- Need to develop relationships with housing organisations and employment agencies.



The importance of family reconciliation as a goal

- Ex-offenders were more likely to stay out of prison if they
 - Were living with parent/s, partner or close family post release,
 - Had stable housing immediately post release,
 - Had employment or were studying, or
 - Had contact with and support from helpful agencies post release.

(E Baldry; D. McDonnell; P Maplestone & M Peeters (2003) The role of housing in preventing re-offending. *AHURI Research & Policy Bulletin* Issue 36 February 2004)



Case study

This case study explores the complexity of the issues, illustrates some of the ways in which I addressed them, includes cultural issues.



The difficult of family reconciliation

- Unresolved prior family & personal conflict;
- Unrealistic family expectations;
- Lack of respect leading to an abusive family relationship – relationship breakdown;

“My father never understood what I went through in school. He often beat me and used bad language with me without reason, especially when he got drunk”.



The difficult of family reconciliation

- Family rejection
- Inadequate preparation for community re-integration
- Community stigmatisation and prejudice
- Biased treatment & personal favouritism amongst the children;



The intervention approaches

Pre-release period

- Establish initial rapport and trust.
- Encourage hope and positive anticipation in a community life in the future.
- Work with the ex-offenders and their family members to plan a pathway for community re-integration.



The intervention approaches

Pre-release period

- Adequate preparation for the offenders and help the families to be ready to receive the offenders into the family.
- Negotiate on behalf of the clients to arrange accommodation and support.



The intervention approaches

Post-release

- Visit family members and educate them on the special needs of newly-released offenders.
- Encourage family members to engage and provide support to the clients.



The intervention approaches

Post-release

- Encourage the offenders to actively engage/contact their family members to revitalise the relationship between them.
- Provide training and guidance on living and life skills.



The intervention approaches

Post-release

- Create activities, tasks or family projects to occupy their time in a productive and meaningful ways.
- Encourage on-going and active participation in rehabilitation programs and services.
- Provide counselling, emotional & personal support and referrals where required.



Outcomes of the intervention

- Kim continues to engage in our services in a positive and participatory way.
- Kim has volunteered to reduce his methadone dose
- Kim has developed a positive outlook and hopes towards his future



Outcomes of the intervention

- He is happy and satisfied with the achievements of his family projects such as paving the driveway and home maintenance tasks.
- The relationship with his father has been restored and improved significantly. His father asked him to help in some work & projects instead of ignoring him.



Outcomes of the intervention

- He stays off drugs and disassociates with his former peers



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