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Pathways of learning for employment within a correctional centre: The remote Aboriginal experience

Eva McRae-Williams



Australian Government
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About the author

Based in Darwin, Dr Eva McRae-Williams is the Principal Research Leader for the Pathways to Employment project with the CRC-REP and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Eva's research interests are in work, employment and livelihood studies; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies; and the field of education.

For additional information please contact

Ninti One Limited
Communications Manager
PO Box 3971
Alice Springs NT 0871
Australia

Telephone +61 8 8959 6000 Fax +61 8 8959 6048 Email: communications@nintione.com.au

www.nintione.com.au

The CRC-REP produces two series of reports: working papers and research reports. Working papers describe work in progress for the purposes of reporting back to stakeholders and for generating discussion. Research reports describe the final results of completed research projects.

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Shortened forms

BCS	Berrimah Construction Services
BIITE	Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education
DCS	Department of Correctional Services
NT	Northern Territory

Executive summary

The Northern Territory's Department of Correctional Services (DCS) has developed a number of initiatives that engage inmates in formal employment training. This agenda is reflected in the 'Sentenced to a Job' initiative and through the Berrimah Construction Services (BCS) program, formerly known as BIITEBUILD. As a partnership between Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and DCS, the BCS program provides a live-work learning environment where inmates are involved in the construction of correctional facilities.

The case study discussed in this report was undertaken in 2014 and focuses on the learning experiences and aspirations of five inmates involved in the BCS program and of a further five who were not involved in this program or undertaking activities within the broader Sentenced to a Job initiative. All inmates in this study were Aboriginal men coming from the (remote) Katherine region and were classified as low security by DCS.

A case study methodology was used, with qualitative methods applied to gain a deep understanding of the learning experiences and aspirations of inmates. The study was guided by the question: How do differing learning experiences through the prison influence employment and other aspirations?

A thematic analysis of the data found five key themes. The first, **reflection as learning**, highlights how incarceration provided the necessary space and time for valuable learning through self-reflection. Formal and structured learning opportunities, while valued in the prison, were peripheral to opportunities for 'clear thinking'. The second theme, **interactive learning**, brings to the fore the process of learning for surviving in prison and the instrumental role of other incarcerated family members in this shared process.

The third theme to emerge related to the **values derived from work**. Inmates involved in the BCS program identified themselves as having a work ethos prior to their engagement in the program. The program helped them maintain a work identity and provided a routine supportive of employment practices. In contrast, the inmates not involved in the BCS program did not have an established identity as 'worker', nor did the activities they undertook in the prison support identity transitions. The fourth theme, **prison as a vehicle for employment**, challenges the notion of incarceration as a barrier to employment through highlighting inmates' perceptions of its enabling qualities.

The final theme, **aspiring beyond reality**, captures the fact that inmates simply wanted a good life. They wanted to be with family, to be on country, to engage with Elders and children, to strengthen and share culture, to reinforce their Aboriginality and, for some, to get a job. However, alcohol abuse patterns and the difficulty of overcoming associated dysfunction were insurmountable for the inmates in the study.

The study concludes that the BCS program was perceived by those involved as valuable. Incarceration provided the opportunity for valued learning, although this learning may not have been the intended learning outcomes or attributable to formal or structured programs. The study further concludes that post-release supports, which include rehabilitative programs in community, together with a proactive and supportive parole environment, are necessary and well overdue.

Background

The case study presented in this report forms part of a larger Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) research agenda and is situated within the CRC-REP Pathways to Employment project. The CRC-REP has three goals:

1. To develop new ways to build resilience and strengthen regional communities and economies across remote Australia
2. To build new enterprises and strengthen existing industries that, provide jobs, livelihoods and incomes in remote areas
3. To improve the education and training pathways in remote areas so that people have better opportunities to participate in the range of economies that exist.

With particular relevance to the third goal, the Pathways to Employment project is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who reside in remote communities navigate their way into meaningful livelihoods?
2. What kinds of work might help to support sustainable livelihood outcomes?
3. What kinds of learning could support meaningful livelihood agendas, aspirations and pathways?

This case study on the learning experiences and aspirations of incarcerated Aboriginal people was co-developed with the Northern Territory (NT) Department of Correctional Services (DCS). The extant evidence finds that inmate access to employment-related training and live-work opportunities can reduce recidivism rates (Dawe 2007, Graffam et al. 2012). In response, the DCS has developed a number of specific initiatives that aim to involve the majority of inmates in formal employment training. This agenda is reflected in the Sentenced to a Job prisoner employment initiative. The objective of Sentenced to a Job is to develop relationships between employers and the correctional system whereby prisoners can improve educational levels and gain vocational skills while in custody, and employers can benefit through filling skills shortages and minimising recruitment costs (Department of Correctional Services 2013).

In addition, the DCS has had a pre-existing partnership with Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) to advance employment outcomes of inmates through attainment of skills and qualifications in the construction industry. The Berrimah Construction Services (BCS) program (formerly known as BIITEBUILD) aims to provide a live-work learning environment through Darwin Correctional Centre, whereby inmates are involved in the construction of prison facilities. Since 2012, there have been 73 individuals who have graduated with a Certificate II in Construction and approximately another 51 who have partially completed the Certificate. Other attainments in skidsteer and forklift driving and in welding have also been achieved. The qualifications gained from the BCS program position these individuals favourably for eligibility in the Department's Sentenced to a Job initiative.

This case study has focused on the learning experiences and aspirations of five inmates involved in the BCS program and a further five inmates who were not involved in this program or undertaking any activities within the Sentenced to a Job initiative. All 10 participants in the study came from, or intended to return to, the larger Katherine region, including remote areas. The aim of this case study was to document the experiences of inmates in the BCS program and, in doing so, gain an insight into the nature and value of learning by Aboriginal men in correctional spaces. By including inmates who were not involved in the BCS

program, the opportunity to contrast the two groups has been created. The insight gained through this study will enable DCS and other correctional services providers to examine the relationship between program intent and recipient experience and use that knowledge to promote quality improvements.

Literature review

This case study about pathways of learning within a correctional centre fits within a larger Pathways to Employment project which is informed by a theoretical and conceptual framework that aims to make visible the cultural assumptions embedded in contemporary pathways discourse (see McRae-Williams and Guenther 2012). In this discourse, the logic of a pathway between education and employment is rarely questioned. Developing competency in work-related skills, or broadening the skills of those already in the workforce, is the underlying aim of most educational and training programs in contemporary capitalist societies (White, 1997). Pathways from education to employment are usually conceptualised in academia and in policy and program development as A to B journeys: linear, hierarchical and causal (McRae-Williams and Guenther 2012).

Within the dominant way of understanding pathways, both real and potential barriers that inhibit the linear and hierarchical progression of individuals from education to employment have become a focus of inquiry. Incarceration, or contact with the justice system, is commonly seen as such a barrier (Miller 2007), as employers may be unwilling to engage people who have criminal records (Graffam and Hardcastle 2007). Similarly, it is widely acknowledged that adult prisoners typically have inadequate literacy skills and/or school education and a history of unemployment (Dawe 2007). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, these pathway ‘barriers’ become more significant due to their over-representation in the correctional system (Miller 2007).

The Pathways to Employment project aims to challenge and expand the dominant pathways discourse with its assumptions of linearity and causality and its consequent focus on the identification of barriers. Instead, the research focuses on exploring the different forms of learning (both formal and informal) and the role of life experiences and aspirations in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples’ navigation of education, employment and livelihood journeys. How these journeys align, or not, with formally mapped or assumed education to employment pathways or how they intersect with, or challenge, dominant pathways discourse is the focus of this larger research project (see Guenther and McRae-Williams 2014, McRae-Williams 2014, McRae-Williams and Guenther 2014).

This case study begins from the position of acknowledging the complex social and emotional issues experienced by people in Aboriginal communities in remote NT. These experiences and their related traumas are linked to explicit and implicit processes of colonisation and marginalisation and the associated demands for cultural adjustment and change (Holmes and McRae-Williams 2009). This trauma is documented in the literature through reference to high mortality and morbidity rates, alcohol/drug abuse and limited engagement with formal educational and employment (SCRGSP 2009). Increasingly high rates of self-harm, family and community violence and incarceration have also been documented in the Australian Government’s ‘Closing the Gap’ Prime Minister’s reports from 2009 to 2014 (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2014).

In the 2011 Census, approximately 27% of the NT population identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with the large majority of these individuals residing in remote and very remote regions (ABS 2011). In 2013, the NT had the highest imprisonment rate of all Australian states and territories, with 86% of all

prisoners being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background and the majority of these having experienced prior periods of adult imprisonment, that is, they had a high rate of recidivism (ABS 2013).

The majority of research in the corrections field that has investigated education and employment pathways has used recidivism rates as the key method of analysis to determine the effectiveness of programs or initiatives (Graffam et al. 2012, Tripodi et al. 2010). For example, pathways studies explore what percentage of individuals who participated in an education/employment-focused program were back in custody in a certain timeframe, or how long the period was between release and re-arrest. Weaknesses in methodological design, including significant inconsistency across studies in the way that ‘recidivism’ is defined, have often been highlighted as limitations inherent in this body of work (Armstrong et al. 2012, Graffam et al. 2012, Payne 2007). Despite this limitation, there is a growing consensus that work, vocational and skills training opportunities offered to individuals while incarcerated significantly reduce recidivism rates (Callan and Gardener 2007, Dawe 2007).

Scholars who have found that there is value in providing inmates with work, vocational and skills training opportunities have also emphasised the need for combined post-release strategies and support for effectively reducing recidivism rates (Graffam et al. 2012). Hinton (2004) has highlighted the importance of a ‘throughcare model’, which sees community-based staff and a cross-government approach to meeting the support (including housing) needs of ex-prisoners. Influenced by this ‘throughcare’ philosophy, the Australian correctional service sector has shown support for the implementation of programs that include in-prison and post-release support components (Dawe 2007).

These programs are often shaped by a focus on overcoming risk factors associated with recidivism. Correlates, including age, criminal history, lifestyle, unemployment, poor mental health status, low education levels, residential location (including homelessness), family instability, drug and alcohol use, post-release difficulties and Indigeneity have all been demonstrated to be positively associated with an increased risk of recidivism (Payne 2007). Many of these factors are part of the lived-experiences of Aboriginal males from remote NT communities, increasing the risks of incarceration and recidivism.

The high levels of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander incarceration is an expression of a long history of dispossession and the associated deep wells of loss, pain, anger and grief experienced by Aboriginal peoples on a daily basis (Atkinson 2002). Cunneen (2006) has also emphasised that the contribution of mainstream institutional practices and legal frameworks, in which criminalisation and the use of imprisonment are embedded, cannot be ignored when considering reasons for high levels of Indigenous incarceration. Cunneen and Rowe (2014, p. 340) have argued that ‘these institutional practices are caught within broader dominant cultural values and political relationships that reproduce marginalised peoples as criminal subgroups’.

Wacquant (2008, 2009) has theorised that advanced liberal democracies have increasingly turned to punitive approaches in the management of individuals who have lower socio-economic status. Zoellner (2012), through an analysis of NT Government gross funding allocations to the vocational education and training and justice sectors, has argued that there is strong support for Wacquant’s proposition that governments are increasingly using imprisonment as a tool in managing the economy and dealing with those deemed to be disadvantaged. Holmes and Stephenson (2011), in an evaluation of the NT Government’s Elders Visiting Program, noted that there was a growing emphasis on offender control and associated capital investments rather than on rehabilitation, which has seen resources shifted away from program development and delivery. This trend is true across the Western world, and Wacquant (2009) further argues that this approach serves as a powerful mechanism to reinforce marginality, creating a ‘surrogate ghetto’. Prisons, he maintains, are spaces where dispossessed and dishonoured groups are managed as a substitute apparatus for the containment of those on the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder.

Despite the issues of equity and social justice levelled at contemporary Western prison systems, several authors have demonstrated that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience of incarceration is not conclusively a negative one (Beresford and Omaji 1996, McCoy 2006, Ogilvie and Van Zyl 2001, Turgeon 2001). Beresford and Omaji (1996), for instance, described incarceration as an initiation process or ‘rite of passage’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. For the Western Desert people, McCoy (2006) found that incarceration had become a normalised part of one’s life journey that could be a positive experience with significant meaning.

Similarly, Turgeon (2001) observed that incarceration could mean having, for the first time in your life, your own room, medical attention, clean clothes and bedding and medical and health services. Further, Ogilvie and Van Zyl (2001) found that a central theme in the narratives of young men in custody in the NT was access to resources that were unavailable within their home communities. They described school and work in detention as harder and more rewarding and the variety of activities, enhanced food range, opportunity to be with mates and the opportunity to become stronger and smarter as positive experiences of incarceration (see also Holmes and Stephenson 2011).

This case study aims to expand on the preliminary work of others to examine the nature of experiences related to informal and formal learning in the prison setting. According to Miller (2007), few publications have investigated the prevalence, design or quality of educational services in prisons for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander inmates. By drawing on the BCS program, with its embedded structured learning, this case study contributes this knowledge base.

Undertaking the research

Using a case study methodology, this inquiry applied qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding (or a rich picture) of the learning experiences of inmates and the associated impacts on their aspirations. This case study did not aim to track participants post-release, nor did it document the success of employment initiatives on recidivism rates. There were two groups of men in the study: those who were involved in the BCS program and those who were not.

Guiding questions were used in semi-structured interviews to contribute to the main research question: How do differing learning experiences through the prison influence employment and other aspirations?

A series of visits were made to Berrimah Correctional Services to:

- introduce the researcher to staff and provide an overview of the study
- negotiate access to inmates
- undertake data collection with inmates not involved in the BCS program (non-work program inmates)
- undertake data collection with inmates involved in the BCS program.

Correctional Service personnel recruited participants to the study based on agreed eligibility criteria, which included being male, Aboriginal, from or returning to the larger Katherine region and classified as a low-security inmate. Participants were invited to the study and given the option of engaging with the researcher either on an individual or group basis. All those invited to the study agreed to participate, and all inmates elected to engage with the researcher in pairs or groups of three. Each pair or group, with the exception of one group, comprised family members.

The participants ranged in age, with six between 20 and 30 years old, two between 31 and 40 years old and two being over 40 years old. All participants indicated that they had family in prison with them and other close family members who had passed through the correctional system. The majority of participants were parents (and/or grandparents). For all participants, their present incarceration was not their first incarceration, that is, all were recidivists.

Interviews with non-work program participants were undertaken in a designated office within the low-security section of the prison. Interviews with those in the BCS program occurred on the Berrimah-based work site, located within the prison.

During interviews, participants were not asked details about the nature of the offences that had led to current or past periods of incarceration, nor were they asked about the length of incarceration or their potential release dates. As noted, interviews were framed around guiding questions that related to the aims of the case study research. Interviews took an average of 40 minutes each and were of a conversational style to afford inmates the opportunity to share their experiences in a more comfortable and meaningful way. Brief handwritten notes were taken during interviews, with detailed field notes recorded immediately following. Data were subsequently thematically analysed.

This case study received human research ethics approval from BIITE and approval to conduct research from DCS.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is its size, as the number of participants in each group is small. However, the study aimed for a deeper understanding of inmates' experiences, and the findings reveal that, despite the small numbers, there was a shared story emerging in the data.

A further limitation of the study may have been that all inmates participated in interviews that were conducted in English, although this was likely not their first or primary language. To minimise this limitation, the researcher encouraged inmates to discuss questions with one another in their own languages. Generally, adaptations of Kriol were used in these discussions and the researcher was able to draw on her Kriol skills to understand parts of the interactions.

Study findings

Following data analysis, there were five key themes to emerge from this study: reflection as learning, interactive learning to navigate prison culture, values derived from work, prison as a vehicle to employment, and aspiring beyond reality. These themes are discussed below.

Reflection as learning

All participants emphasised that incarceration provided space and time for valuable learning. However, the 'learning' that was attributed the highest value related to self-reflection and not the intended learning outcomes associated with the range of specific or formal programs inmates may have participated in during their incarceration. Being in prison, they explained, afforded them the opportunity to be alcohol/drug free and to 'think clearly'. The value of this clear thinking was firmly associated with their increased capacity to be self-reflective. This sentiment is captured in following comments made by inmates:

You can think and use your mind for anything ... how to become a better person. Think about things in a different way.

Looking back at the past to free yourself.

Think about the outside world – think about the mistakes you made.

Some participants described the ‘talking circle’ (anger management) initiative as being supportive of self-reflection processes. Others, on the other hand, said that these programs were of little value, tending to be more about Correctional Services staff fulfilling the requirements of their jobs:

Those courses, they are nothing! You tell your story and it just makes that worker look good for their bosses ... More like just for them and not to help us.

The learning that was valued by participants in prison was derived simply from the experience of being incarcerated, together with being sober and having time to think clearly and reflect. Formal or structured learning opportunities, while valued, were peripheral to this reflective learning opportunity that prison created.

Interactive learning to navigate prison culture

The second most valuable learning derived from incarceration was what participants learned from fellow family inmates: how to survive and navigate prison culture. Once again, participants did not highlight experiences or values associated with formal learning or structured programs until the researcher pressed the issue with probing questions.

All participants currently had close and extended family members in prison at the time of the study. Being with family, looking after family and being looked after by family framed much of the positive learning experiences that inmates emphasised. As noted, much of this interactive learning was geared towards surviving in prison and avoiding trouble with other inmates and prison management personnel:

Family help you to learn the ropes.

You got to watch and review what is going on. There are family problems and anger. You have to help each other and know when to go, walk away.

We have to understand the groups and who to stay away from ... I need someone next to me [family/cousin] ... you got to know who the groups are and don't fall in a trap.

You have to help each other to put forward a good face and make sure the officers see you do good things. They [officers] cause you trouble.

Inmates taught other inmates and simultaneously provided the support network necessary to get by safely from one day to the next. This supportive relationship extended to the way that participants elected to engage with this study: together. Inmates also learned from one another how to navigate the prison system, in particular, how to access certain privileges, activities and programs through the completion of forms and getting their name on lists.

When probed about the learning outcomes derived from formal education initiatives (including the BCS program), some participants said they valued the learning experiences these had afforded. Two inmates who were not part of the construction program valued access to literacy and numeracy training. For one of them, it

had helped overcome the shame of filling out forms in prison – this response also showed that literacy is a prison survival skill. The other, who had strong literacy skills, noted the benefits of this learning for others in and beyond the prison setting:

They learn how to read and write in here ... using key cards everything ... in here it helps you ... We're thankful for the courses.

Values derived from work

When asked about work programs, all participants agreed that they were good. Not only were work programs valued in terms of them making it easier to pass the time, but also for the post-release financial security they potentially could offer – even if temporary:

In the past you would get out and have no money, sleep on the street. Now we have job in here, we can have money when we get out for a motel to sleep in.

Those involved in the BCS program all agreed that they had valued the experience:

It's relaxing and good to do something and see it finished.

I like the people. The boss respects me. He knows I am a good worker.

Only two participants in the BCS program emphasised the merits of the learning experience, highlighting they had learned 'new things about construction' and 'about new tools and machines'.

Of significance was that all BCS program participants went to considerable effort to direct the interview towards emphasising their identities as workers, with past work histories and prior established work ethics. This did not necessarily mean that they had aspirations of working in the construction industry, but rather were highlighting their general employability. This group also discussed the likelihood of their return to positions or industries of employment they had held prior to incarceration. This perception of the working self is captured in the following comments:

The routine get up and go to work, it's been with us since kids ... the officers all think we are the same, all Aboriginal people in the same boat – that nobody know about work, but that's not true.

It's in our bloodline, workers. All our family been working.

I've worked all different places, worked at MacDonald's ... and travelled all around Australia as a carnival worker, I have a work history; working is normal to me.

Others in the work group were ambivalent about the value of the education and learning available through the BCS program. They made comments such as, 'I don't need courses. I already have certificates! I already know'. They maintained that they engaged in the program as it was a good way to 'pass the time' and aligned with their worker identity: 'We like to work. That is what we do'.

This finding from the work group contrasted with that of the non-work group for this theme. While the non-work group may have had work experiences to draw from, they did not identify as workers in employment

and were vague about future employment prospects. The priority for this group was returning to their social careers in community with family.

Prison as a vehicle to employment

In contrast to the large body of literature that identifies incarceration as a barrier to employment, all participants in this case study viewed their imprisonment as an enabler to employment. Whether they were engaged in the work program or not, participants did not believe that prison would negatively impact on their ability to secure employment (if they wanted it):

I think it has made it easier for me to get a job – because of the motivation and having a job can help you stay out of here.

They [prison officers / management] will help me get a job; they have helped me in the past, given me a reference.

You can get licences in here – that will make it better for me.

Aspiring beyond reality

When aspirations were explored, participants expressed that they aspired to a good life. They wanted simple things, such as to be with family, to be on country, to learn from and engage with Elders and children, to strengthen and share culture, to reinforce their Aboriginality and, for some, to have a good job. This finding is consistent with cross-case analysis from the larger Pathways to Employment project (see McRae-Williams 2014). The opportunity afforded by incarceration to reflect and imagine this future was entwined with identifying the destructive nature of alcohol abuse in their lives.

All the crime we done, we always drunk, we didn't think. Then I'm in a cell and I think, 'what I bin do?'

Make you want to leave grog when you get out.

Me and my grog don't mix, we get mad!! ... I want a new life.

Aspiring to walk away from excessive alcohol consumption was tempered by the harsh reality that this road was complex and challenging – almost insurmountable. Despite this realisation, participants wanted to believe it was possible. Participants could espouse the rhetoric around a new beginning and staying out of prison. This was imagined as 'breaking the cycle' by not associating with certain groups of people, by not returning 'home' and through spending time on outstations or pastoral properties, where access to alcohol was limited. Yet the deep roots to their alcohol abuse and long suffering associated with being caught in a cycle of loss and pain were omnipresent:

The pain keep bouncing back. The old people gone now. We have to drink to cover that sorrow, to hide it. Abusing our body the only way – and then you think nobody loves us anymore and you can't get out.

I think about my kids and our Elders. Not many still here now. I think about the old people showing us a different way. It's a hard road. Community too easy for grog. It's all or nothing. No such thing as one can ... You got to be a boxer if you want to survive.

I'm trapped in that little area of my story. I want to go other parts of my story. They only leave me this little story. The debil debil [devil devil] everywhere tempt us more ... that story destruct me.

Conclusion

This case study has gained a deeper understanding of the learning experiences of Aboriginal men during their incarceration and the impacts of this learning on their aspirations. Two groups of inmates were involved in the study: one group were in a program that has specific objectives of improving inmates' employment outcomes following incarceration (BCS program), while the second group did not have places in that program or were not eligible for a work program and participated in general activities available to inmates.

From the study findings it can be concluded that incarceration was experienced as a period of valued learning, consistent with the findings reported by Turgeon (2001) and Ogilvie and Van Zyl (2001) who both observed positive experiences during incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men in Australia. The nature of the learning experienced by inmates was, however, not solely linked to documented learning outcomes associated with specific programs delivered in the prison setting; rather, it was associated with reflective learning – the time to think clearly – and interactive learning for survival. This points to opportunities for rethinking the way that learning in this setting is measured or assessed to move beyond direct linkages between programs and intended outcomes and allow for greater scope to examine additional learning modes and assess their merits. At the same time, it is noted that the emergence of this opportunity challenges assumptions that underlie how pathways through education to employment are conceptualised and engineered.

The case study further concludes that the participants involved in the work program already identified as workers and felt confident in their ability to secure employment post-release. Although it is a reasonable assumption that the work program increased employment options for this group, the construction industry was not necessarily the focus of their employment aspirations. Rather than building confidence and competence in employment, the program for this group was a mechanism to maintain their established work identity and enable them to have a routine that supported employment practices.

In contrast, the participants not in a work program did not see employment or being a worker as core elements to their identity. They had not transitioned, either prior to or during their prison term, to form an identity that aligned with engagement in employment. Although members of this group may have understood the routines and expectations of work, they had not invested in it in a meaningful way or in a manner that intimated their commitment to securing employment post-release. This highlights the need to target inmates who have limited investment in employment for inclusion in work programs. Their inclusion will likely support some to make the necessary transition in identity. Yet this must be accompanied by processes that retain and strengthen their Aboriginality and enable their aspirations to be realised (see also McRae-Williams 2014).

This study also highlights the merit in building on existing relationships of learning within families to assist individuals to feel confident with such transformations. Guenther et al. (2011, p. 9), in a study with a similar population had similar conclusions:

[C]reating opportunities for employment requires more than successful completion of a Certificate ... it requires a shift in identity so that the trainees' values become more closely aligned to the workplace ... We may at first cringe at the thought of training as a vehicle for identity change, but that is what we are indeed doing in training.

All participants in the case study aspired to have a good life. Whether this involved a job or not, managing destructive alcohol consumption was a precursor to fulfilling this aspiration. The reality of this, as discussed in the findings, is grim. Developing post-release supports that are effective and that specifically acknowledge alcohol abuse and/or addiction are necessary. Creative responses, such as embedding relevant programs in the workplace or providing the support and resources necessary for parole officers to be proactive in keeping ex-inmates out of jail (rather than being reactive when they reoffend), are required. This conclusion is consistent with that reported by Holmes and Stephenson (2011, p. 92), who contend that the Department 'must consider the benefits of fostering a proactive culture in the sphere of community corrections and parole'. This might also include the decentralisation of substance abuse programs so that they are more readily available in the remote communities to which inmates return. The request for these services in NT communities is not new, with a recommendation similarly made by Holmes and Stephenson (2011). The decentralisation of service delivery creates the opportunity for the DCS to work in a collaborative and innovative manner with the Department of Health, other government agencies, local organisations and communities to advance positive socio-cultural and economic outcomes.

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