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Dear Ms Wynn

**RE: Australian Law Reform Commission Discussion Paper on Reducing Indigenous Incarceration Rates**

YWCA Darwin welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) Reducing Indigenous Incarceration Rates Discussion Paper.

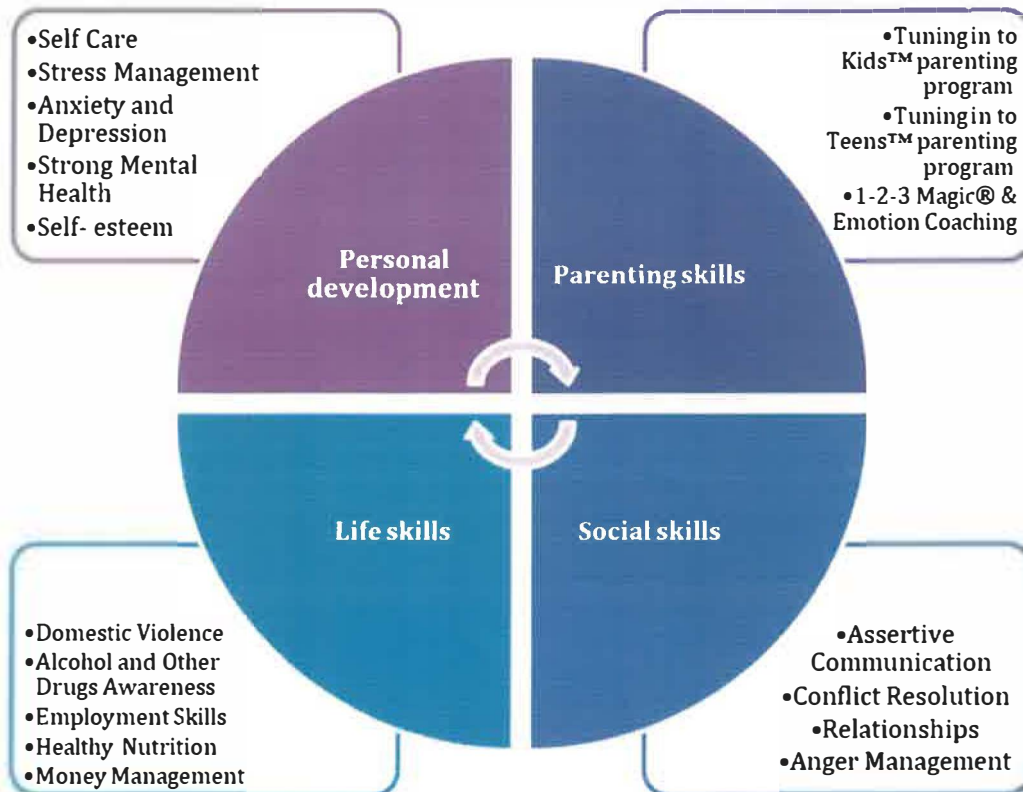
**ABOUT YWCA DARWIN'S WOMEN OF WORTH PROGRAM**

The Women of Worth (WoW) program provides 6 months pre- and 12 months post-release support to women involved in the justice system. The aim of the program is to empower women involved in the justice system to implement positive lifestyle changes. The program uses a holistic and varied approach to equip women for reintegration back into their communities. WoW focuses on providing clients with strength-based case management support, learning opportunities to develop skills and capacity to reduce reoffending as well as practical assistance to reengage with the community.

**PRE-RELEASE SUPPORT**

At Darwin Correctional Centre (DCC), WoW staff members provide psycho-social education and accredited training programs to incarcerated women. The group learning program at DCC covers a range of topics addressing social skills, personal development, parenting skills and life skills.

Below is detailed information on training sessions that are delivered in the Darwin Correctional Centre. These training sessions are delivered over a six month period on two days per week to women incarcerated at DCC.



Alongside the group learning, WoW offers strength-based practical case management support from 6 months pre-release to prepare clients for their upcoming release.

## POST-RELEASE SUPPORT

Upon release, WoW staff assist clients with their reintegration back into the wider community:

- Reconnection with children, family and community
- Advocacy and referrals to a variety of service providers
- Crisis accommodation and long-term housing support
- Domestic and Family Violence support and referral
- Education, training and employment pathways
- Provision of exit packs including food vouchers
- Mental and physical health support
- Transport

Monthly outreach groups further assist women to connect with Women of Worth program staff and other clients who have been involved in the justice system. The aim of the outreach group is to provide a forum for women, who have recently been released, to get together, seek support, build networks, as well as help maintain and reinforce positive lifestyle changes.

## ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Women are eligible to participate in the Women of Worth program if they:

- Are in the care of the justice system (on remand, sentenced or under community correction orders);
- Are aged 18 years and over; and
- Volunteer to participate in the program.
- Women who are incarcerated and have been sentenced must be released from prison or eligible for parole within six months of referral.

WoW supports Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous clients. Participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people vary, however the majority of WoW clients (70%) identify as Indigenous women.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

The Women of Worth program works with a holistic, women-centred approach including case management, advocacy, psycho-social support and referrals to assist reintegration. The Women of Worth team work in a trauma-informed and strengths-based practice approach of case management, with the principles of feminism, empowerment and social justice underpinning it. Women of Worth is a voluntary program which focuses on providing women with:

- strength-based case management support;
- learning opportunities to raise awareness and promote change; and
- assistance to develop skills and capacity to increase resilience and reduce reoffending.

WoW has had high levels of success engaging with women involved in the justice system due to its client-centred, strength-based approach and voluntary nature. This has been supported by a philanthropic model of funding whereby flexibility allowed the program to respond directly to our client's needs and best interests. Women of Worth believes that people will change when they are ready to do so and supports clients through the cycle of change until they are ready and willing to implement positive lifestyle changes.

## WOMEN OF WORTH PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Data provided by NT Correctional services on 4 September 2017 shows that out of 84 WoW clients, only 3 clients returned to Darwin Correctional Centre for new charges and 12 for breach of conditions.

YWCA Darwin has further engaged Charles Darwin University's Northern Institute to conduct a Realist Evaluation of the WoW program. This evaluation is currently being conducted by Associate Professor Emma Williams, who has also evaluated the Kunga Stopping Violence Project at the Alice Springs Correctional Centre. The realist evaluation aims to investigate ways a program is working or not working, under what circumstances and for what cohorts.

According to Associate Professor Emma Williams, the evaluation found evidence that the Women of Worth initiative has been achieving its results.

Clients are encouraged to provide regular feedback about their satisfaction with the Women of Worth program and staff. The voluntary and anonymous feedback is collated at regular intervals (about every three months) to evaluate client satisfaction and areas of improvement. Clients are further asked to complete a self-rated well-being survey at regular intervals, to evaluate personal development of the Women of Worth program clients throughout the program.

Where possible, WoW staff conduct exit interviews with clients as they leave the program, to continually improve service delivery, but also to help the client review the goals they have achieved whilst participating in the program.

The Women of Worth program has shown great success in assisting clients with regaining custody of their children, obtaining long-term housing, accessing employment and education and reducing recidivism rates.

## PROPOSALS AND QUESTIONS

### **Proposal 5-1: Prison programs should be developed and made available to accused people held on remand and people serving short sentences.**

The Women of Worth program has been designed to support women involved in the justice system. This includes women who are on remand, who have been sentenced or who are under community correction orders. Women who are incarcerated and have been sentenced can access the program once they are within six months of their parole or release date. Women of Worth is currently the only Throughcare program in Darwin that provides support to women on remand.

### **Question 5-1: What are the best practice elements of programs that could respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners held on remand or serving short sentences of imprisonment?**

Women of Worth has shown great success due to:

- holistic, women-centred approach
- trauma-informed and strengths-based practice approach
- group learning programs to raise awareness and promote change
- case management up to six months pre-release to prepare for the upcoming release and reduce barriers of reoffending
- additional 12 months post release support (the same Case Manager who provides group learning and case management pre-release, provides case management to the client up to 12 months post-release)
- voluntary engagement in the program
- regular program evaluation
- client brokerage
- access to cultural supervision

According to Associate Professor Emma Williams, the Women of Worth program has shown great success due to:

*'The paths through which this occurred were evidenced as being:*

- *WoW staff established themselves as worthy of trust in their engagement with clients.*
- *For a woman who lacked belief in her ability to change her life after release, being treated as a 'human' or 'woman' rather than as an offender (in a depersonalising prison environment often reached through disempowering life experiences) by WoW staff, whose judgement was trusted and who had belief in the client's potential, could result in the woman gaining hope of successful change.*
- *Women were able to move from 'hope' to 'purpose', as they began to acquire new behavioural role models in the WoW staff and identified areas of achievable change through their engagement with WoW staff and fellow WoW participants in group learning as well as case management sessions.*
- *The women's sense of purpose was translated into plans for action through case management, supplemented by further self-discovery moments in group learning sessions.*
- *Particularly after release, practical and emotional support kept women on track in achieving desired goals, although the WoW model also had built in elements to ensure that this support did not result in dependency, but in client empowerment over time.*

*The model from this perspective could be expressed as:*

*WoW treats clients like human beings --> this creates hope for change (through group learning and case management) --> and purpose (through case management and group learning) --> which is then supported by problem solving during case management --> followed up by practical and emotional support that is designed to build empowerment and avoid dependency.'*

YWCA Darwin appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) Reducing Indigenous Incarceration Rates Discussion Paper.

Yours sincerely,



Coordinator  
Women of Worth program

YWCA Darwin