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### **Delivering sport development programs in correctional facilities**

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#### *Background*

Sport is increasingly being used as a method of community development and engagement, including programs related to crime-reduction and anti-social behaviour. Although there is an established body of research on sport programs aimed at decreasing anti-social behaviour and criminal activities (Coalter, 2007; Crabbe, 2000; Morris, Sallybanks & Willis, 2003; Nichols, 2004; Sandford, Armour & Warmington, 2006; Smith and Waddington, 2004), there is little research undertaken on the role and outcomes for participants and providers of sport programs within correctional facilities. This study examines the soccer program within the Port Phillip Prison, established in 2007, which uses engagement with sport as a method of rehabilitating prisoners during their confinement, and reintegration into community street soccer programs upon release.

#### *Objectives*

*This program provides an appropriate case study to examine the process of sport development programs within correctional facilities and seeks to identify: the experiences and outcomes for the participants, the experiences and outcomes for the program providers and to develop an understanding of the role of sport development for these institutions and populations.*

#### *Methods*

The method employed to explore sport development programs within correctional facilities was framed around an ethnographic case study analysis of the Port Phillip Prison in Melbourne, Australia. Individual interviews were held with both the soccer program participants (twelve participants in total), and staff from The Big Issue and Port Phillip Prison involved in the development and delivery of the program. The researcher attended a number of weekly soccer training sessions, and other program activities and tournaments to undertake interviews with participants, and observation of the program delivery and participant interaction in the program environment.

Semi-structured interview protocols were developed in consultation with the Corrections Victoria staff and the program coordinator to cover the following key themes:

- experience of the soccer program within the Port Phillip Prison

- interest and participation in sport programs outside of the correctional facility
- factors influencing participation in the program (both positive and negative)
- perceived outcomes from participation in the program (both positive and negative)

Data analysis was undertaken via qualitative coding (c.f. Strauss and Corbin) of interview transcripts using the NVivo software package, seeking to organise data into patterns and themes to build an understanding of sport development programs within a correctional facility environment.

### *Results*

Interviews with participants, program delivery staff and participant observation identified three key themes: participant experience, behaviour modification and potential benefits.

The inherent experience of sport participation for inmates within correctional facilities was positive, activities had a positive effect on the inmates' mood, and the general feeling within the Unit. The novelty of new activities and new people helped to pass the time for the inmates and increased their sense of happiness and reduced their feelings of stress, anxiety and tension. Linked with this sentiment was the idea that, for some participants, being out on the pitch, running around in a fun and supportive environment gave them a sense of being outside and of freedom. That sense of freedom can be likened to being 'in the zone' or that experience of 'flow' that a person has when involved in something interesting and challenging.

Although not asked as a direct question to the participants, one key focus of the research study was to uncover any positive effects on the participants and the Unit overall, particularly positive behaviour modification. Both participants and staff noted key behavioural changes that they could attribute to the soccer program, including: motivation to participate, development of a sense of teamwork and improved relationships with other inmates, opportunity to role model and rehearse appropriate behaviours, and an overall calming influence on the unit.

One key question asked to all participants in the research project, was to outline the impact of the soccer program on their experience in the Prison. A number of positive benefits for participants were identified as follows: assists with sleep, reduced smoking, improved fitness and skills and links with the outside community, and the opportunity to develop and share skills.

### *Conclusion*

The ability of a program such as the street soccer program is an effective method of developing bonding social capital between the inmates, demonstrated through the articulation of the importance of teamwork, and their ability to 'get along' with each other improving on the soccer days. As important as the development of bonding social capital between the inmates, is the establishment of linking social capital, through a pathway to external support networks and opportunities upon release, which may have a positive influence on recidivism by providing an alternative peer-group to the participants.

