



Department of Justice and Regulation

Corrections Victoria

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Joan Beckwith
By email: Joan1beckwith@gmail.com

Dear Ms Beckwith

Research and support for children with parents in prison

I refer to your email dated 2 April 2016 to Acting Minister for Corrections, Robin Scott MP, regarding support available to children with parents in prison and research into this topic. As your email raises questions that are operational in nature, your correspondence has been referred to me as the Deputy Commissioner of the Offender Management Division of Corrections Victoria, for response.

Corrections Victoria, a business unit within the Department of Justice and Regulation, is responsible for the direction, management and operation of Victoria's correctional system, including prisons and Community Correctional Services. Corrections Victoria develops and implements policies, programs and services that ensure the safe and secure management of prisoners and offenders and seeks to rehabilitate prisoners and offenders by addressing the causes of offending behaviour. Corrections Victoria coordinates a number of services and programs aimed at maintaining connections between prisoners and their families. One such program is the Mothers and Children Program.

The Mothers and Children program is a full time residential program for infants and young children at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. The Mothers and Children Program allows a young dependent child to reside with his or her mother in prison, where it can be demonstrated that this is in the child's best interests and the good order and security of the prison is not compromised. The aim of the Mothers and Children Program is to diminish the impact of a mother's incarceration on her dependent children. It also supports the family ties that are essential to the effective rehabilitation of mothers and their successful reintegration into the community upon release. Further information regarding the Mothers and Children Program and other programs that allow mothers in prison to spend time with their children can be found at the Department of Justice and Regulation website:

<http://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/home/prison/going+to+prison/pregnancy+and+childcare/>.

A number of programs for children also operate at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. Maternal and Child Health nurses from Melton City Council and Mount Alexander Shire Council provide ongoing health checks and immunisation for children residing in prison with their mothers. Melton City Council also facilitates the Mum & Me Playgroup for children residing at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. At Tarrengower Prison, a CatholicCare worker, trained in early childhood development, facilitates a playgroup for children. Children at Tarrengower can also attend day care in Castlemaine two days per week. A Story Time reading program is offered

at both the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower prison, and a weekly music program for children is provided at Tarrengower Prison.

Children who do not live with their mothers in prison are able to visit through the Residential Visits Program and the School Holiday Program at Tarrengower Prison. These programs allow children to stay in the residential unit with their caregiver and spend time with their mother during school holidays and at the weekend.

Corrections Victoria recently commissioned a *Literature Review of Prison-Based Mothers and Children Programs* prepared by the University of Melbourne in partnership with Save the Children Australia and the Peabody Research Institute. The review was commissioned to inform the ongoing quality assurance and future development of the program in the Victorian prison system. The literature review examined the impact of mothers and children programs for children, mothers' parenting and wellbeing, and mothers' recidivism. The review found that there was no evidence of harm to children involved in mothers and children programs in prisons. It also found that mothers involved in such programs may be considerably more motivated to succeed in other prison-related services, including educational and substance abuse programs. The review is available from the Corrections Victoria website at <http://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/utility/prison-based+mothers+and+children+programs>.

I hope that this information has assisted you with your enquiries. As a starting point for further research, you may wish to consult the Australian Institute of Family Studies' bibliography of research into prisoners and their families, available at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/bibliography/prisoners-and-their-families>.

Yours sincerely



Larissa Strong
Deputy Commissioner
Offender Management Division