



CRC community
restorative
centre

EVALUATION OF THE REINTEGRATION HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM (RHSP)

*Evaluation by ARTD for the
period July 2021 to May 2023*

*Presentation prepared by CRC's
Advocacy Research and Policy
Unit (ARPU)*



CRC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we all work and live. We recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community and pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

We acknowledge the tireless advocacy and work undertaken by First Nations people in advocating for systemic change in the criminal justice system.

This always was, always will be Aboriginal Land.



What This Presentation Will Cover

1. *About the RHSP Evaluation*

- *About the evaluation*
- *Evaluation questions*
- *Methodology*

2. *Key evaluation findings*

- *About clients*
- *Referrals*
- *Case plans*
- *Support provided*
- *Co-location*
- *Housing outcomes*
- *PWI*
- *CJS outcomes*
- *Relationships*
- *Implementation*

3. *Evaluation Recommendations*



60 minutes

About the RHSP Evaluation





Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP)

A partnership between DCJ and CRC

About RHSP

- 3 year pilot program (July 2021-June 2024) delivered by CRC, and funded by the NSW Department of Communities & Justice (DCJ).
- RHSP aligns with the NSW Government's No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness and the NSW Homelessness Strategy (2018).
- RHSP trials a new approach through co-location of CRC staff in DCJ Housing offices and direct referral from custodial settings.

The RHSP operates in six locations, with two CRC case workers based in each DCJ Housing office.

Inner Sydney
(Strawberry Hills)

Western Sydney (Mt Druitt)

South Western Sydney
(Liverpool)

Western NSW
(Dubbo)

Illawarra
(Coniston)

Hunter
(Newcastle)



About the RHSP Evaluation

Conducted by independent research consultants

. The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) engaged ARTD to conduct this implementation and outcomes evaluation of the Reintegration Housing Support Program (RHSP) pilot



CRC's ARPU provided close oversight of the evaluation to ensure it was being conducted with ethics and rigor.



Ethics approval for the administrative data analysis and interviews with clients was sought from the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) Human Research Ethics Committee and granted on 23 February 2023 (Approval number: 2024/22).



The evaluation relates to the period from program inception (1 July 2021) to 31 May 2023.



About the RHSP Evaluation

Evaluation questions

Evaluation question:

***‘Did the RHSP
reduce
homelessness
amongst people
exiting prison in
NSW?’***

To what extent the RHSP has been implemented as intended?

To what extent has participation in the RHSP impacted intended short and medium-term outcomes for clients?

What early evidence exists to indicate that the RHSP will achieve the intended long-term outcomes for clients?

To what extent has the co-location of RHSP support workers with DCJ Housing offices facilitated access to housing support for people who are at risk of homelessness through:

- RHSP workers having an increased understanding of DCJ Housing products
- DCJ Housing workers having an improved capacity to support this cohort
- Streamlined referral pathways and processes

To what extent were there any unintended positive or negative outcomes of the program?



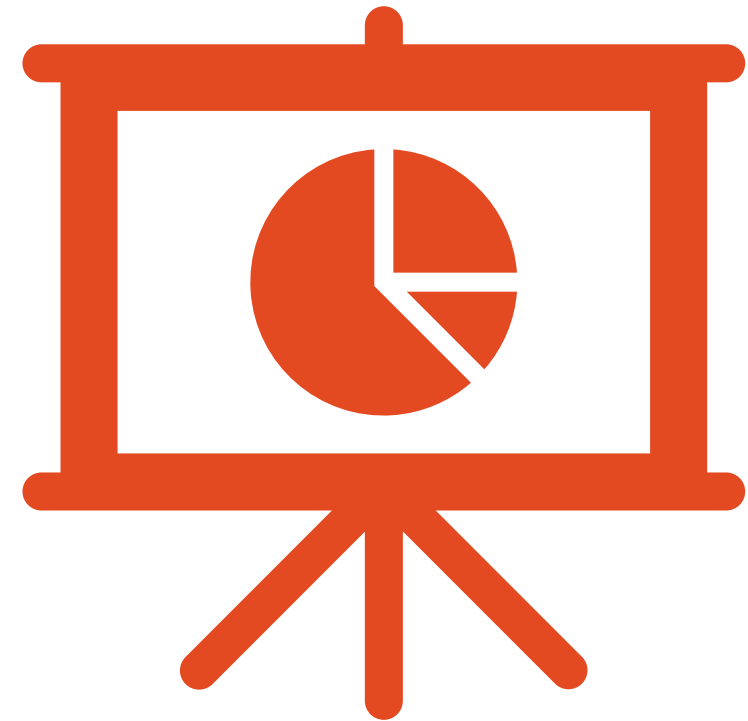
About the RHSP Evaluation

Evaluation methodology

This was a mixed methods process and outcomes evaluation.

Method	Details
Literature and document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Desktop review of key program documentation to understand the program and its operations.• Targeted rapid literature scan of like programs illustrating best practice for post-release housing programs in the Australian and international context.
Staff and stakeholder interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 13 semi-structured interviews with RHSP and DCJ staff.• 3 semi-structured interviews with other stakeholders involved with the RHSP.• Interviews with staff and stakeholders were conducted from November 2022 to April 2023.
Client interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 20 semi-structured telephone interviews (up to 45 minutes) with program clients across the 6 sites.• Interviews with clients were conducted from March to May 2023.
Quantitative administrative data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We received and analysed de-identified, individual-level administrative data from two data sources:• Extracts from the Client Information Management System (CIMS) for (n=377) RHSP clients from 1 July 2021 to 28 February 2023 (the most recent complete month of program data available at the point of data extraction)• Data extracts from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) and HOMES public housing tenancy data from Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR), for RHSP clients (n=154) and a comparison group of similar individuals seeking support from SHS (n=880) from 1 September 2021 to 28 February 2023.

Key evaluation findings



Key findings- about clients (from CIMS)

Number of clients supported and client demographics

377

RHSP clients
between 1 July 2021
to 28 February 2023

**Aboriginal or Torres
Strait Islander**

26%

Gender*

85% male
14.6% female
0.4% non-binary

Age

9% were aged 18-25
16% were aged 56 years
or older

Clients commonly reported
having a **prior mental health
diagnosis** when starting their
period of support (65% of
support periods).

Most clients had a **recent history of homelessness** both in the last month (37% sleeping rough; 40% in short-term or emergency accommodation), and within the 12 months before starting support through RHSP (45% sleeping rough; 45% in short-term or emergency accommodation).

* Additionally, **0.4% of overall clients were recorded as being part of trans and gender diverse (TGD) communities, which is below the approximated average in Australia of 0.9% of adults 25+ and 2.7% of young people 16-24** ([Higgins et al 2024](#)). This underrepresentation is likely because questions like whether the client has a TGD history are not mandatory in CIMS, and as such this data was not recorded for most clients. More consistency in asking RHSP clients about TGD history will help acquire this needed data.

Key findings- about clients

Reasons for support



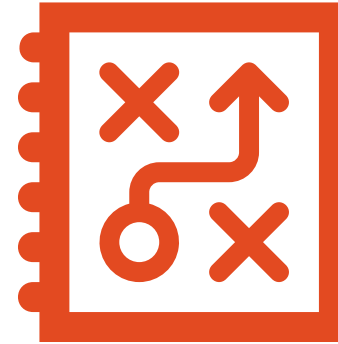
The **most common reason** clients presented to RHSP for support was relating to their **transition from custodial arrangements** (90% of clients).

RHSP clients also required support for:

- mental health (50%)
- problematic drug or substance use (44%)
- housing affordability stress (36%) and;
- unemployment (36%).

Key findings- Referrals

Referral source



*Where did
referrals to
RHSP come
from?*

44%

**Adult
correctional
facilities**

32%

**Social
Housing
(DCJ
Housing)**

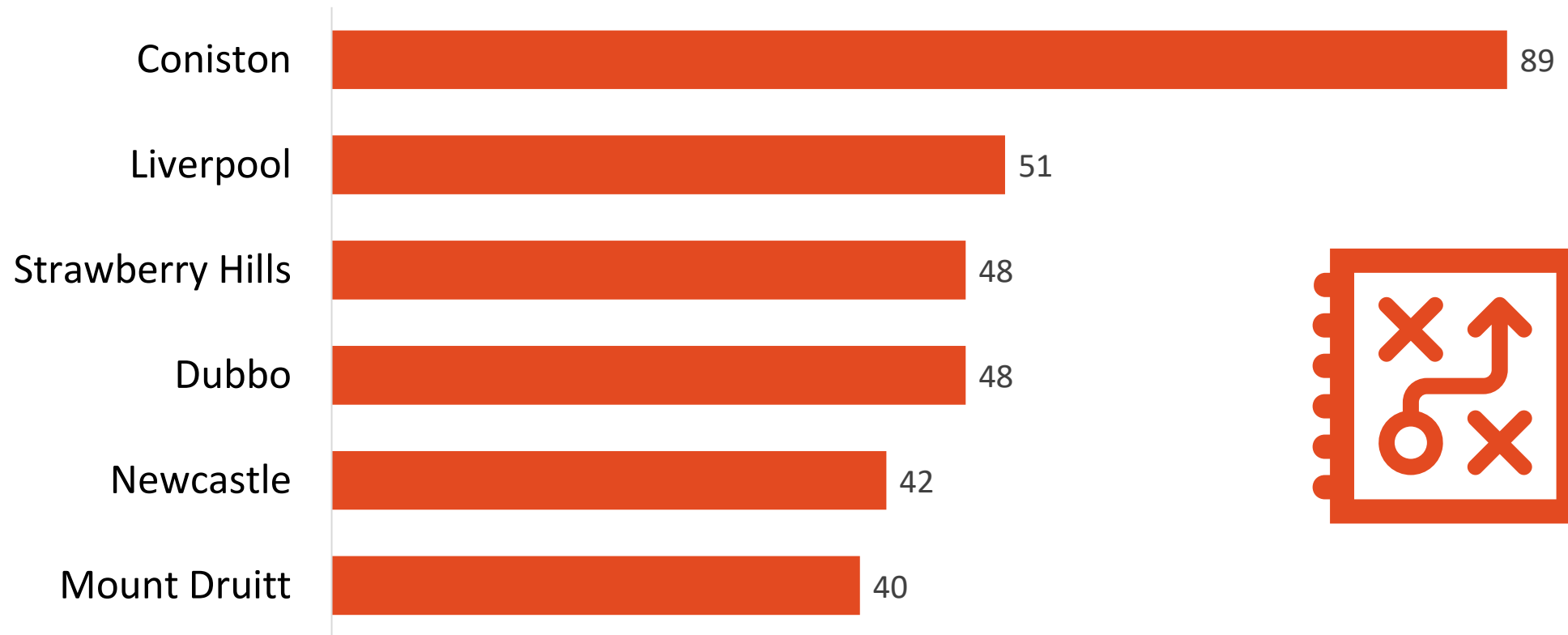
24%

Other

(includes other
agencies, juvenile
justice, drug and
alcohol, legal
support, aged care,
hospitals)

Key findings- Referrals

Accepted referrals by RHSP site



Source: RHSP CIMS data – Intake, July 2021 – February 2023.

Note: Client site identified through CIMS – Intake List.

Key findings- Case plan

Case plans developed



69%

of clients accepted on to the program had at least one **case plan** developed.

This is lower than the target of 80% of referrals outlined in the program guidelines.

	At least one case plan developed		No case plan developed		Total	
Site	N	%	N	%	N	%
Coniston	68	76%	21	24%	89	100%
Dubbo	39	81%	9	19%	48	100%
Liverpool	41	80%	10	20%	51	100%
Mount Druitt	33	82%	7	18%	40	100%
Newcastle	29	71%	12	29%	41	100%
Strawberry Hills	29	60%	19	40%	48	100%
Total	239	75%	78	25%	317	100%

Key findings- Case plan

Case plans developed pre and post release



Working with clients pre-release FACILITATED client engagement with the program

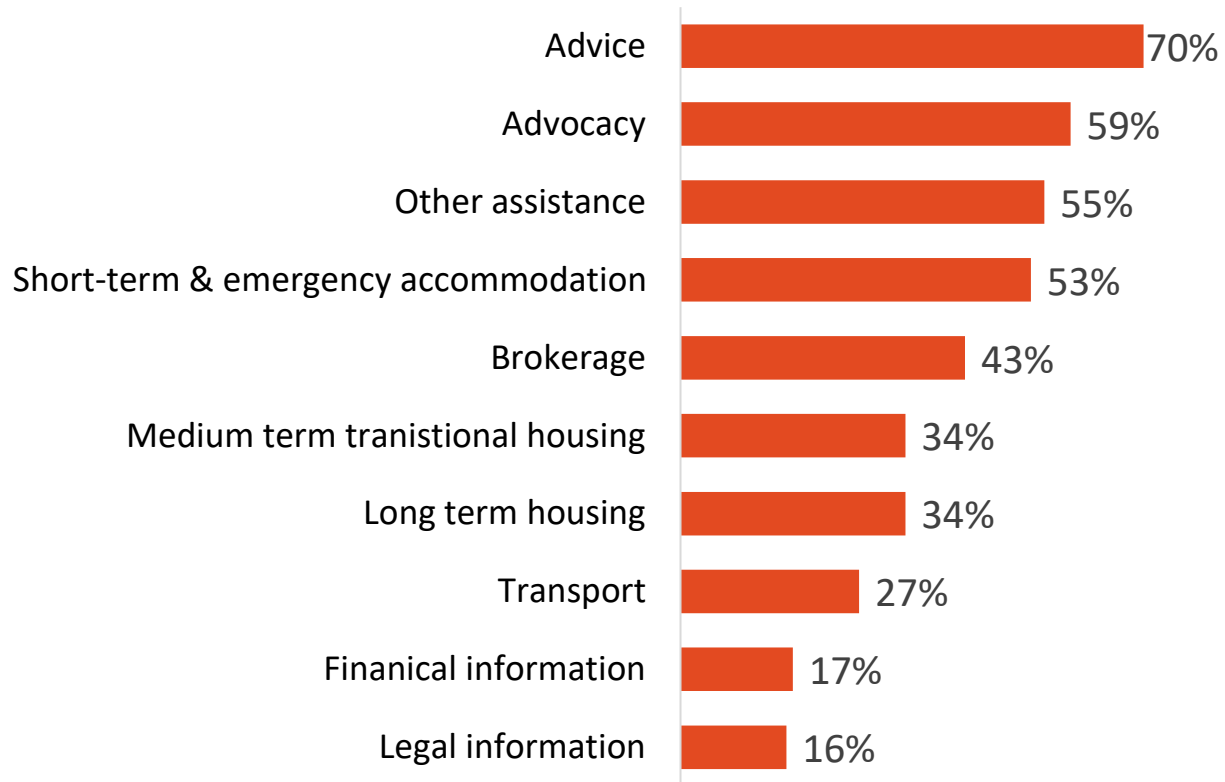
People, I guess who haven't been released from prison –you don't understand. The ID, helping you with your identification and the phone – those two things, you just can't function in the world without them. So, they definitely know what's important and what to do and yeah just took away so much anxiety. (Client)

[I have] more luck with the guys that I have known prior to release... having built that trust... They know that I'm gonna stick to my word. They know that I'm gonna do what I say I'm gonna do. And they know that I can help them. I do not have that rapport if I have not met them prior to release. (RHSP worker)

		No case plan developed		At least one case plan developed		Total	
Site		N	%	N	%	N	%
Coniston	Post-release	16	25%	49	75%	65	100%
	Pre-release	5	22%	18	78%	23	100%
Dubbo	Post-release	6	19%	26	81%	32	100%
	Pre-release	3	21%	11	79%	14	100%
Liverpool	Post-release	2	12%	14	88%	16	100%
	Pre-release	8	23%	27	77%	35	100%
Mount Druitt	Post-release	0	0%	12	100%	12	100%
	Pre-release	7	25%	21	75%	28	100%
Newcastle	Post-release	1	14%	6	86%	7	100%
	Pre-release	11	32%	23	68%	34	100%
Strawberry Hills	Post-release	12	55%	10	45%	22	100%
	Pre-release	7	27%	19	73%	26	100%
Total		78	25%	236	75%	314	100%

Key findings- Support

Top 10 types of support provided to clients



Clients interviewed as part of the evaluation also reported that they valued receiving help obtaining identification, financial stability through applications for government subsidies, assistance with housing furnishings, obtaining emergency items and emotional support.

She (RHSP worker) found a way [to support me with whatever I needed]. Things might have not worked the first time, but she didn't give up.
(Client)

Key findings- Co-location

The value of RHSP co-location in DCJ Housing Offices

- Co-location is an essential feature of the program model and is perceived by DCJ Housing staff and RHSP workers to facilitate access to housing support for people exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness.
- **Co-location enabled program implementation by facilitating a shared purpose and alignment of values** amongst CRC and DCJ Housing staff.
- Close proximity to DCJ Housing staff gave RHSP workers more immediate access to information, including clients' housing status, their waitlist ranking or the general availability of housing. DCJ Housing staff found that access to RHSP workers improved collaboration and access to necessary client information. Staff from both organisations agreed that this **mutual access to information speeds up referrals into the program, application processes and ultimately pathways to housing.**

There are so many things that you learn from just having an informal conversation with someone in the office that you would never know from just coming to an appointment with a client. Or there's so many questions that I asked that I would never actually call DCJ and ask. But I will ask when I'm around the people in the office. (RHSP worker)

If we do have (Housing) staff members that are not sort of regularly touching base with us or not in the office, because a lot of those conversations are incidental conversations where we might say 'oh, you know what, that person's being supported by the RHSP program, I better just check in and see what's happening there', and so we just walk across... So, I think having them, having the RHSP program co-located here is a really big part of why this program is, you know, doing so well and why the outcomes are so great. (DCJ Housing staff member)

Key findings- Co-location

The value of knowledge sharing

DCJ Housing workers have increased capacity to support people exiting prison

- RHSP workers observed an increase in DCJ Housing staff's capacity to work with people exiting prison.
- They commonly found that by knowing a client's history and situation better, and having an existing relationship with the worker who is advocating for their client, DCJ Housing staff were more engaged in supporting a client, showed increased empathy and could more proactively cater to client's needs.
- For example, they gave clients more time to present ID or were more likely to make reasonable exceptions to standard processes like letting clients refuse an unsuitable property.

I have observed that it's definitely changed the way that they engage with the clients. (RHSP worker)

Yeah, I think most definitely it's changed the way that I – it's not like I didn't do it before – but it's just making me have more of an understanding. You know, I'll show that compassion... I think it's given me more of... an idea of their concerns. (DCJ Housing staff member)

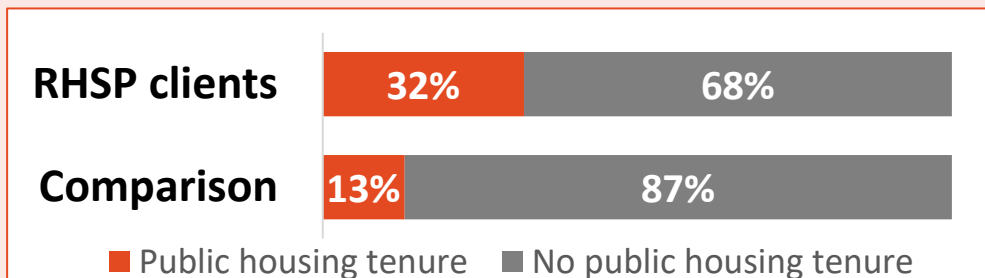
Key findings- Housing

Comparison study

Early evidence shows that the RHSP is effective in achieving long-term public housing outcomes for people exiting prison at-risk of homelessness.



RHSP clients were significantly more likely to achieve a public housing outcome (32%) than the comparison group (13%) of people exiting custody who presented to an SHS for housing support.



RHSP clients achieved the tenancy faster (212 vs 233 days). However, this was not statistically significant.

RHSP clients were slightly more likely to exit their public housing within the evaluation period compared to the SHS comparison group (26% of clients housed exited versus 18% of the SHS comparison group 18%). This difference was not statistically significant.

Key findings- Housing

Short-term housing outcomes



Back in the day, what I would have to do is I would have to grab my... bags and whatever I got with me and go into the Housing office. Whereas [my worker] can ring when the 3 days is up and say, 'Can you extend for another 3 days?' Over the phone, rather than me having to physically go into the place. (Client)

The RHSP was effective in achieving short and medium-term housing outcomes for clients.

Clients were able to secure short-term or emergency housing (**50% of the clients supported by RHSP had at least one stay in short-term or emergency housing**), and the average length of stay was **32 nights**.

This is consistent with staff and client reports that the program allowed flexibility in the duration of temporary accommodation that can be provided to clients.

Short-term accommodation during support period	N	%
No short-term accommodation stays	188	50%
At least one short-term accommodation stay	189	50%
Total	377	100%

Key findings- Housing

Changes in dwelling type



	Start of support		End of support		Change
Dwelling type	N	%	N	%	%
Adult correctional facility	109	39%	57	21%	-18%
Boarding/rooming house	12	4%	21	8%	+4%
Cabin	0	0%	1	0%	0%
Caravan	1	0%	2	1%	+1%
Disability support	1	0%	4	1%	+1%
Emergency accommodation	92	33%	25	9%	-24%
Hotel/motel/bed and breakfast	0	0%	2	1%	+1%
House/townhouse/flat	45	16%	119	43%	+27%
Immigration detention centre	0	0%	1	0%	0%
No dwelling/street/park/in the open	6	2%	3	1%	-1%
Psychiatric hospital/unit	1	0%	0	0%	0%
Rehabilitation	1	0%	0	0%	0%
Youth/juvenile justice correctional centre	1	0%	0	0%	0%
Other	1	0%	6	2%	+2%
Don't know	6	2%	34	12%	+10%
Total	276	100%	275	100%	

There were notable changes in where clients were living between the start and the end of their support periods.

- Clients typically started support period either in prison (39%) or emergency accommodation (33%).
- At the end of their support period, 43% of clients were now housed in a house/ townhouse/ flat.

Key findings- Housing

Changes in tenure



Half (50%) of current clients had achieved a rental tenure

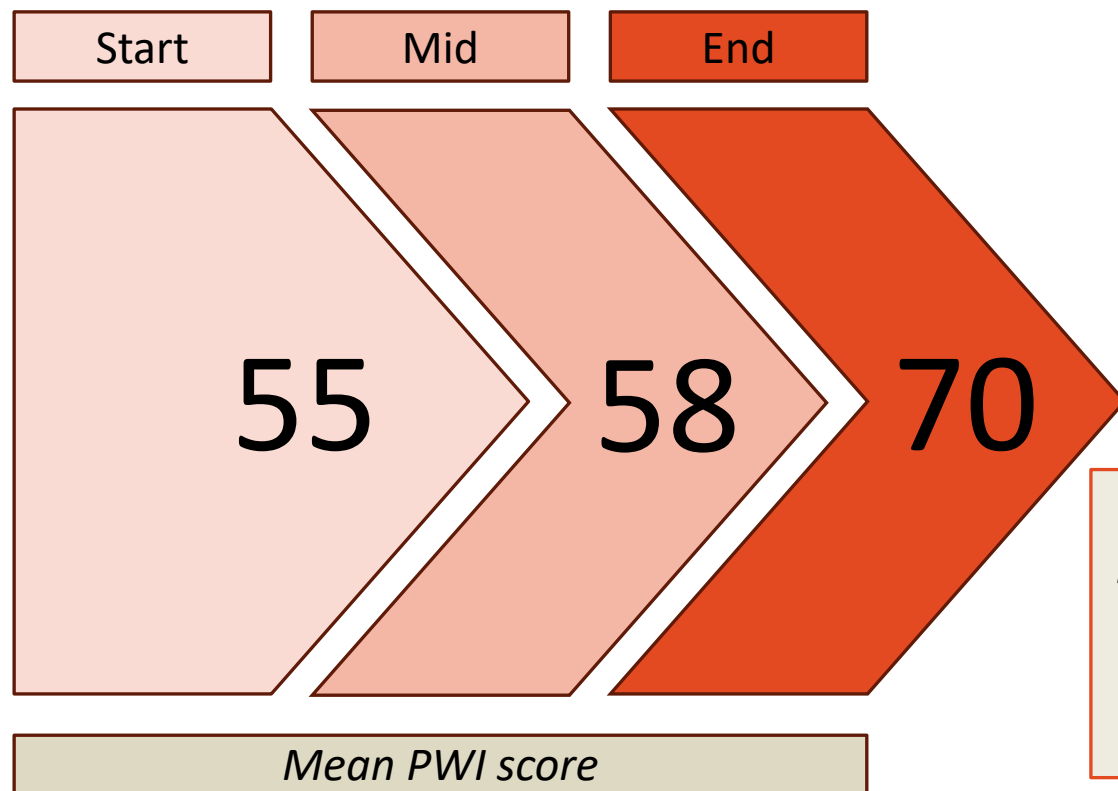
Both current and exited clients were most commonly last recorded to be renting, however the proportion of renters was substantially higher among current clients (50%) than among clients who had exited the program (36%).

	Current		Exited		Total	
Tenure at February 2023/ end of support period	N	%	N	%	N	%
Renter	46	50%	98	36%	144	39%
No tenure	26	28%	92	33%	118	32%
Rent free	13	14%	27	10%	40	11%
Other rent free	7	8%	10	4%	17	5%
Don't know	0	0%	44	16%	44	12%
Other renter	0	0%	3	1%	3	1%
Other tenure type not elsewhere specified	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%
Total	92	100%	275	100%	367	100%



Key findings- Personal Wellbeing Index

Changes to PWI score



There's many, many examples where clients have come very vulnerable (...) and continue to be supported by the RHSP program and just move from strength to strength. So, it's a real privilege for clients to be there and supported by the most amazing RHSP team that we have here. (DCJ Housing staff member)

I'm so happy with where I am at in life at the moment. And even my kids can see that I am happier. They love the person that I am now compared to who I was when I was with their father and in that relationship (...) I'm very proud of myself (...) And a lot of that comes down to [my CRC worker]. (RHSP client)

Key findings- Criminal Justice Outcomes

Rate of return to custody

At this early stage of the program, there is limited evidence regarding the impact of the RHSP on client's involvement with the criminal justice system and/or recidivism rates.

- 22% of RHSP clients were in an adult correctional facility at the end of their support period, and 17% of clients had their support period closed because they had returned to custody.
- Although there was no comparison group regarding returns to custody, a 2020 BOCSAR study found that 43.2% of all people released from custody re-offend within the next 12 months. This suggests that **RHSP clients may return to custody at a lower rate than the overall population of people released from custody.**



*One client (who is currently 47) has been in and out of jail since 19; this is the longest time he has stayed out of jail.
(RHSP worker)*

Returns to custody	N	%	Total
Dwelling at end of support period			
Adult correctional facility	61	22%	283 closed support periods
Aboriginal clients in adult correctional facilities	24	23%	106 closed support periods for Aboriginal clients
Reason for close			
Client incarcerated	47	17%	284 closed support period
Aboriginal clients incarcerated	22	21%	106 closed support periods for Aboriginal clients

Key findings- Relationships

Relationship between worker and client



- ***Staff are building trust with clients which facilitates outcomes***
- ***Clients felt respected by their worker and appreciated their genuine and reliable support***

They really are here to help. So, therefore, I felt compelled to open up and ask for whatever I sort of needed. (Client)

It is not really about housing; it is about getting you set up for housing (...) It is about how to build the foundations so that you don't just lose it. (Client)

I think it is just how comfortable they make me feel. I can talk to my worker about anything. I don't feel embarrassed or feel down. She is always there to support me. Any interviews or appointment that I feel I need support, someone to come with me, she takes the time out to come with me. (Client)

It felt like real people, real help. There is a real understanding there and a real want to make a better life for someone. I reckon that is the best thing about it, that it's real. It feels good, feels real. (Client)

In all honesty, in no way could I imagine that there could be a better program or better people than the ones I met from CRC... I also can't imagine where I would be without them. (Client)

Key findings- Implementation

Relationship between CRC and DCJ



Collaboration between CRC and DCJ Housing staff enables program implementation

A deeper understanding and valuing of the work of the other organisation, which has been facilitated by the co-location of RHSP staff in DCJ Housing offices, has enabled program implementation and largely successful collaboration between CRC and DCJ Housing.

CRC's organisational features facilitate program implementation and successful client support

DCJ Housing staff spoke about how RHSP workers are well connected with other services and can link clients with them for supports. This was echoed by RHSP workers who described how their networks with community services (including medical services, mental health supports, drug or alcohol treatment, employment services), and the justice system (prisons, parole and community correction) supported information exchange.

The options we had previously... two nights accommodation and then they were basically almost left to their own devices. We got a little bit of support but generally it was go into TA for a couple of days, sort yourself out, let's activate your suspended housing application or put a new housing application in and in most instances [that's it]. They might get a referral here and there, but you didn't know what happened after that. It has filled that gap in a sense by providing that single point for the person who ... is the link to Housing, the link to services and they are there. It's very much providing a better opportunity for an outcome, more likelihood to provide a positive outcome. (DCJ staff member)

Evaluation recommendations





Evaluation recommendations

Awareness & understanding of the program

Increase awareness of the program with correctional services and centres and services that reach into correctional services, through continuing to develop relationships and connections with agencies and individuals making referrals.

Ensure eligibility criteria are clear for agencies and services making referrals.

Program guidelines

Develop a tool or clear guidelines to support transparency and consistency of intake decisions. In particular guidance on regarding the eligibility of clients who are released from custody but are not eligible for a DCJ Housing product.

Continue to develop guidance regarding the roles of DCJ Housing and RHSP staff in accepting referrals and ensure these policies and processes are clearly documented.

Ensure that program knowledge is shared with new DCJ Housing staff to sustain momentum of program knowledge and implementation e.g., RHSP workers presenting about the program to new staff.

Co-locate RHSP workers with the Access and Demand team at DCJ Housing where possible, or other teams that are responsible for pathways into housing and TA.

Program capacity & extension

Consider the intensity of clients' support needs when assessing RHSP worker capacity to take on new clients, ensuring that caseworkers have a balance of clients with lower and higher support needs.

Consider the time required for proactive, flexible and outreach engagement approaches when planning caseloads.

Continue to fund the program and expand where possible, given the program's success providing housing to those exiting prison at risk of homelessness.

Consider flexibility to extend the period of support for clients who require longer periods of support, and/or introduce a step-down approach.

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THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?

[HTTPS://WWW.CRCNSW.ORG.AU](https://www.crcnsw.org.au)

With a special thanks to:

- CRC staff and clients: Alison Churchill (CEO), and Michelle Bryant (Program Director, Operations & Service Delivery)
- DCJ Housing: Jessica Wood (Manager, Homelessness Strategy Implementation) and Bradley Wiseman (Policy Officer, Homelessness Strategy Implementation);
- ARTD Consultants: Stephanie Quail and Sue Bertram

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