



Evaluation of the Reintegration Housing Support Program

Executive Summary

Evaluation Period: July 2023 - June 2025

Prepared by CRC's Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit (ARPU)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement of Country

The evaluation team would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our offices at Community Restorative Centre (CRC) stand, to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal peoples within these boundaries.

CRC's Canterbury office is on the land of the Wangal and Bediagal peoples, our Broken Hill and Wilcannia offices are on the land of the Wiljkali and Baarkintji peoples, and our co-located offices in Penrith/Nepean are on the land of the Darug and Wiradjuri peoples. We also have co-located offices in Coniston/Dubbo/Liverpool/Mt Druitt/Newcastle/Strawberry Hills on the lands of the Dharawal, Wiradjuri, Darug, Awabakal, Worimi and Gadigal Peoples.

Acknowledgements

1. Reintegration Housing Support Program's (RHSP) project clients between July 2023 – June 2025.
2. Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF). PRF are key funders of the CRC Advocacy Research and Policy Unit (ARPU), who conducted the evaluation.
3. CRC's Advocacy and Research Program Unit (ARPU) staff that conducted this evaluation and contributed to this report include Stella Settumba Stolk – ARPU's Senior Research Fellow, Angus Jack Mason – ARPU's Aboriginal Research Officer, and Rory Gillard – ARPU's Manager.
4. RHSP program managers, Kelly Parker and Regina Brady, and CRC Chief Executive Officer, Alison Churchill, who supported the evaluation. This included providing organisational insight, writing case studies, and providing guidance to the evaluation questions and interpretation of some of the results.
5. The six clients and their case workers, whose personal stories and experiences both before and after being enrolled into the RHSP program have formed the case studies in this report. Their courage and willingness to share their stories provide an invaluable, human-centred perspective that is critical to understanding the program's true impact.
6. Kirsty Trethowan, a staff member of RHSP, whose powerful speech has been included in this report. Her voice provides an invaluable staff perspective to understanding the program's achievements and the journey of its clients.

CONTEXT

Homelessness and incarceration are intricately connected. People in prison experience homelessness at a rate of 66 times that of the general population. In addition, homelessness and unstable housing are social determinants of incarceration. The necessity of services, like RHSP, that address the intersection of homelessness and incarceration is crucial.

THE RHSP PROGRAM

The RHSP provides wrap-around psychosocial support to improve overall wellbeing among people exiting prison and to reduce their risk of recidivism and homelessness. Taking a housing first approach, the program supports people exiting prison who are at risk of homelessness to access housing and sustain their tenancies. The RHSP is funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and delivered by the CRC. The program model sees two RHSP transition workers co-located within DCJ Housing offices in metropolitan and regional locations.

EVALUATION

CRC conducts evaluations to its programs to learn and adapt its services, demonstrate the effectiveness of its support models, and advocate for research-led solutions that reduce recidivism and improve people's lives. A previous evaluation of the RHSP project was conducted for the period July 2021 – May 2023, and recommendations made were adapted. This evaluation relates to the period between July 2023 – June 2025.

This evaluation aims to answer the question **‘Did the RHSP reduce homelessness and improve wellbeing and recidivism outcomes amongst people exiting prison in NSW?’** through addressing the following key evaluation questions:

1. What are the client experiences of receiving support through RHSP?
2. What are the RHSP staff experiences of providing support?
3. To what extent does RHSP respond to its intended client base?
4. To what extent has RHSP impacted long term housing outcomes for clients?
5. To what extent has RHSP impacted client wellbeing outcomes?
6. To what extent has RHSP reduced client risk of re-incarceration?
7. What are RHSP's cost savings to the criminal legal system?

A desktop review of key program documentation to understand the program and its operations was conducted. To further provide policy background to the evaluation, a targeted and rapid review of literature highlighting the unique contribution that NGOs like CRC can make for people exiting prison compared to government was conducted, to illustrate best practice for post-release housing programs in the Australian context.

The evaluation qualitative study, which addressed questions 1 and 2, included: i) client case studies to provide examples of some clients' journeys and experiences of receiving support through RHSP, and ii) a speech by an RHSP staff member to demonstrate staff experiences of providing services.

The evaluation quantitative component included a descriptive analysis of Client Information Management System (CIMS) data to answer the evaluation questions 3 - 6.

The costing data used was from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) report on the inquiry into enhancing the coordination of housing supports for individuals leaving institutional settings (Martin et al., 2021), the analysis compares criminal legal system costs for individuals receiving long-term housing through RHSP against those receiving private rental assistance or homelessness services. The net-benefit per individual five years post housing is estimated. RHSP's total cost savings to the criminal legal system five years post housing per annual cohort, based on the number of individuals that received long-term housing between 2023-2025, are estimated. Costs are reported in 2025 Australian dollars.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Demand far exceeds capacity

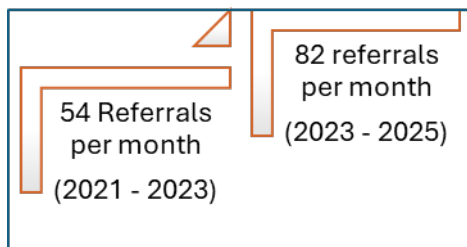


Figure 1: Rate of increase in program referrals

The program registered an increase of 52% in the rate of referrals since the last evaluation report, from an average of 54 referrals per month (976 referrals between September 2021– February 2023) to approximately 82 referrals per month (1,970 referrals between July 2023 – June 2025).

Only 29% of referrals were accepted, leaving 71% referrals unassisted. The primary reason for unassisted referrals was insufficient program staff (49% of referrals). **This showed that RHSP is experiencing an overwhelming demand that far exceeds its current resources.**

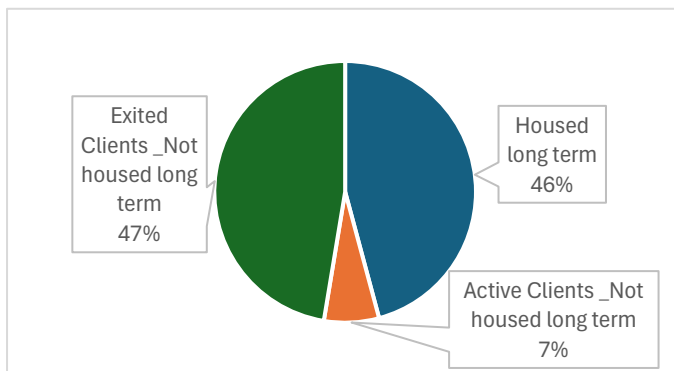
2. Clients with multiple intersecting needs

The data revealed a **growing engagement with clients who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**, who now represent 44% of RHSP's clientele, up from 36% in the last evaluation report period (2021 – 2023).

The majority of clients (88%) were already experiencing homelessness at the time of their referral, while the remaining 13% were at risk of homelessness. Overwhelmingly, 73% of clients had a prior mental health diagnosis. **This highlights the multiple, intersecting needs of the client base.**

Most referrals came pre-release (58%), indicating that **the program's services are most often engaged before a client leaves custody.**

3. Housing Outcomes



Of the 574 accepted clients in the reporting period, 46% were assisted with long term housing, representing a **significant success in providing stability for nearly half of program participants** (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Client long-term housing outcome (N=574)

The percentage of enrolled referrals that were assisted with long term housing at each location ranged between 28% - 54%. The Mount Druitt location achieved the highest success rate, successfully housing 54% of clients. **Conversely, the data highlighted significant regional disparities.** Dubbo recorded the highest percentage of clients who were not housed long term at 72%, followed by Newcastle at 61%.

The majority of clients who were housed long term, 53%, were referred pre-release, showing a **greater success in long term housing outcomes when clients' support journey began before they left custody** (Figure 3).

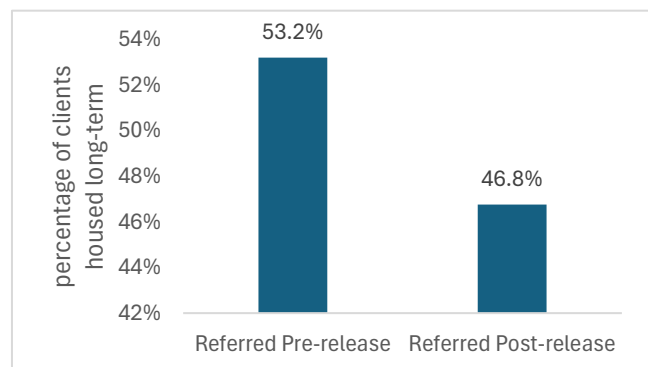


Figure 3: Percentage of long-term housed clients who were referred pre/post release (N=263)

4. Impact on client wellbeing

The holistic services provided by RHSP address multiple dimensions of wellbeing, from emotional stability to practical needs. Every case study showed that securing safe and stable housing was not only a pivotal first step in breaking the cycle of homelessness and reoffending, but enabled clients to focus on recovery, reconnect with family, and engage in community life.

With a secure home, Gerald¹ has been able to focus on other critical areas of his life, including strengthening bonds with his children, continuing his substance use treatment, and meeting his obligations with Community Corrections – extract from Gerald's case study, Dubbo location.

¹ Pseudo names have been used to protect client identities.

Shawn¹ has built the confidence to use public transport and engage in community activities like fishing, gardening, and going to cafes - extract from Shawn's case study, Newcastle location.

A consistent finding across all case studies in the evaluation is the profound impact of the case worker - client relationship. The trust built through relationship provided the motivation needed to make difficult changes. This unwavering commitment to clients was further seen in a staff speech included in the report.

We've housed clients with acquired brain injuries, whose condition contributed to their repeated incarceration, to access NDIS and get the right care in place. Care that allows them not just to stay housed, but to live with dignity and support - Kirsty Trethowan, RHSP Staff member.

Having a completed case plan was used as an evaluation proxy measure for client wellbeing. A completed case plan indicates that clients are actively engaging with their goals, building structure in their lives, and working toward stability, all of which are factors that contribute to improved mental health and self-worth. At the time of reporting, **76% of clients had a completed case plan, which is an indication of their commitment to make positive life changes, therefore improving their well-being.**

5. Impact on Recidivism

The RHSP has demonstrated a powerful impact in breaking the cycle of incarceration.

Just 2% of housed clients returned to custody, compared to 26% of those without stable housing (Figure 4).

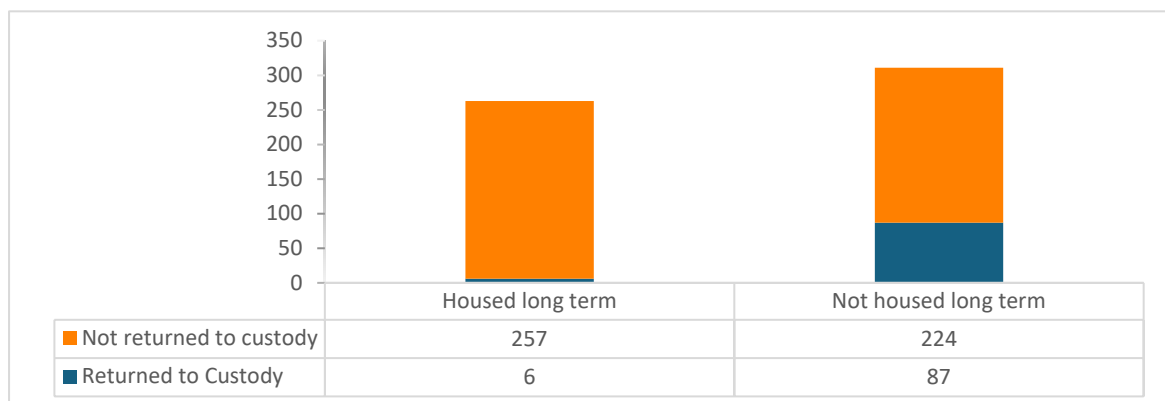


Figure 4: Re-incarceration outcomes for RHSP clients (N=574)

6. Cost Implications

Over a five-year period, RHSP yields net-benefit of:

- \$6,424 per individual when compared to private rental assistance

- \$43,162 per individual when compared to homelessness services

With RHSP assisting approximately 131 individuals annually with long-term housing, the total savings to the criminal legal system are:

- \$841,503 five years post housing per annual cohort when long-term housing is compared to private rental subsidies.
- \$5.65 million per year five years post housing per annual cohort when long-term housing is compared to homelessness supports.

Measure	Long-term housing compared to rental assistance	Long-term housing compared to homelessness services
Net-benefit per individual (5 years)	\$6,424	\$43,162
RHSP total savings per annual cohort 5 years post housing	\$841,503	\$5,654,277
Missed 5-year savings per annual cohort due to unassisted eligible individuals	\$1,029,524	\$6,917,641
Adjusted total RHSP 5-year savings per cohort after accounting for RHSP program costs	\$70,401	\$3,968,647

Table 1: Cost implications for the RHSP

A missed opportunity was identified: 682 eligible individuals were not assisted due to staffing limitations. If RHSP had supported these individuals, the potential additional savings could have been \$6.9 million five years post housing per annual cohort.

A sensitivity analysis accounting for RHSP’s wraparound service costs confirms that the program remains cost-effective, with adjusted net savings ranging from \$70,401 to \$3.97 million five years post housing per annual cohort.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Secure urgent, substantial, and sustained funding:** The evaluation highlights the success of the program in improving client outcomes and reducing recidivism rates. However, the program is only funded until June 2026. Sustained multi-year funding would ensure that the program continues to support clients at risk of homelessness and re-incarceration.
2. **Staffing and resourcing:** The evaluation clearly demonstrates that the RHSP’s ability to meet demand and deliver positive outcomes is fundamentally limited by current staffing levels. Increasing the program’s staff numbers through recruitment and funding commitments will expand capacity and reduce the number of unassisted referrals.

3. **Service availability:** Continued advocacy for increased housing opportunities and services is needed to expand access to long term housing for the 50% of clients not housed.
4. **Regional strengthening:** Strengthen regional presence by creating tailored regional strategies and increasing service availability to address the disparities.
5. **Highlight program success:** The results of this evaluation are compelling. The program should leverage data to demonstrate program impact by highlighting key metrics- for example, the program's impact on recidivism, success in early intervention, and cost savings to the criminal legal system.
6. **Staff data training:** Provide continuous data entry training to staff and encourage data completeness.
7. **Stronger future evaluations:** While the previous 2021/2023 report had a more robust evaluation method, this report lacked a comparison group. RSHP should plan for a more robust future evaluation of the program. A more robust evaluation would also provide the opportunity for a better estimation of the program's net benefit to the criminal legal system and beyond.