



Using Evidence to Steer the Ship: From theory to high-quality correctional practice

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**Corrections Victoria – *Safer Prisons, Safer People,
Safer Communities***

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Justice
and Community
Safety

Acknowledgement of Country



Magical Meeting Places

Matthew S - 2023

Artwork Story

This painting is about two different Mobs living off the same river and waterways but having different ways of living. Both Mobs have magical meeting places where men can go and learn off each other and the Elders.

I acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first peoples and traditional owners and custodians of the land, waterway, and sky upon which we depend.

I acknowledge and pay respect to ancestors of this country, elders, knowledge holders and leaders: past, present, and emerging.

As a department we commit to reconciliation by supporting and walking alongside our Aboriginal leaders and colleagues to reduce the over representation of First Nations people in our system.

Some history...Pendulum swings in correctional approaches to behaviour change



1900s-1950s: Punishment and Deterrence Strategies



1950s-Early 1970s: Intervention Strategies

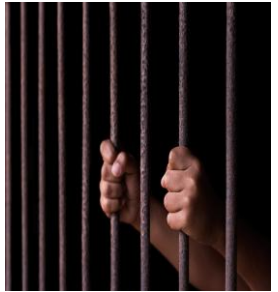


“...with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts that have been reported so far have had no appreciable effect on recidivism”



The 'nothing works' doctrine

In 1979 Martinson recanted this statement, insisting: ... "some treatment programs do have an appreciable effect on recidivism"



But by then, it was too late...

Some history...Pendulum swings in correctional approaches to behaviour change

Mid 1970s-1990s 'Nothing Works' Legacy: Punishment and Deterrence Strategies



1990s-Present: Intervention Strategies



Present and Beyond: Change-Focused Strategies through evidence-based practice



For Corrections Victoria, this has led to the development of the **Correctional Practice Framework**

Contemporary Context: 'What Works' And what doesn't work...





After 'Nothing Works' came the 'What Works' research, which found:

- ***Sole focus on punishment makes recidivism worse***
- Meta-analyses identified principles that offered reliable reductions in recidivism
 - Risk Need Responsivity (RNR), and...
 - Desistance Theory
 - Trauma Informed Forensic Practice
 - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
 - Community v Prison (Therapeutic Communities)
 - Multi-Modal
 - Strengths Based Approaches
 - Therapeutic Alliance
 - Pro-Social Modelling
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - Re-entry and reintegration

Approaches to behaviour change that don't work...



Approaches which blame, punish, and judge people who have offended in the hope that their behaviour will change are *doomed* to failure

- A pessimistic view about the person's capacity to change,
- A focus on what they are doing wrong, and
- A reluctance to encourage and reward positive behaviours are all related to poorer outcomes

And we've just established that these types of approaches are not just neutral in their impact, they have the potential to make recidivism worse...

Approaches to behaviour change that don't work...let's consider compliance

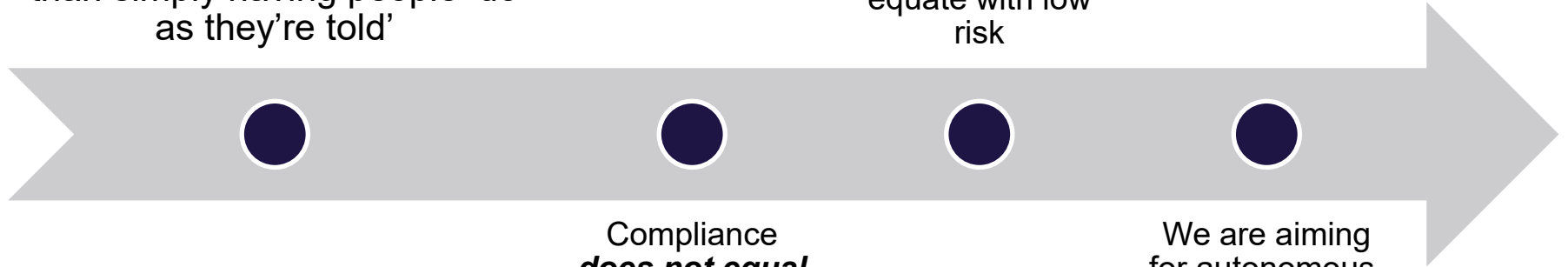


Although compliance can be one marker of success, the larger goal must be more than simply having people 'do as they're told'

Nor does it equate with low risk

Compliance **does not equal** change

We are aiming for autonomous, sustained change, *post* engagement with us





Meaningful Compliance

Correctional systems aim for **'formal compliance'** (the technical conformity to rules)

- But we must strive to secure 'substantive compliance' – the genuine engagement with the sanction and its purpose, through a recognition of its legitimacy

Comply *and* Cooperate

- People are more likely to comply *and* cooperate with consequences and their purpose, if they perceive and experience them, and the authority used within them, to be reasonable, fair, and just

Substantive compliance

- Is inextricably linked to the process of desisting from crime, and therefore rehabilitation, and as such, is a focus of the CPF

Our starting point is this...



When people are sentenced to a term of incarceration, the sentence they receive IS their punishment



Time spent incarcerated is not an added opportunity to punish people (we now know this has a perverse impact) – particularly given that, with the odd exception, they are all going to be released back into our community



Corrections Victoria (CV) has a vision to create 'safer prisons, safer people, safer communities', and we are ethically responsible for ensuring that our practices do just that





- If people are ‘punished’ by the courts and the loss of liberty *is* the punishment
- **The goal of a prison sentence or community correctional order then, is to prepare people to function safely and contentedly in society upon release, without supervision**
- Our goal within CV?
- To help create ‘good neighbours’




What does creating 'good neighbours' mean?



- ***'To produce a person who, when the sentence has been served, is drug-free or in control of their drug use, has a suitable place to live, can read, write and do math, has a chance on the job market, can relate to family and friends and society at large, are able to seek help for problems that may arise after release and can live independently' (Norway's official correctional policy)***
- This person, has meaningful connections within a meaningful life – this is the antithesis of the circumstances in which (most) people who choose to commit crimes exist






Importantly, this person, upon their unsupervised return to the Victorian community, is functionally able to live a life that is both **self-supporting and prosocial**



This is how all correctional systems best serve the rights of victims



This means that our correctional services must hold an expectation of change for *all* individuals and provide both the space and opportunity for this development

The Correctional Practice Framework



This goal, paired with 'what works' evidence, led the development of CV's

Correctional Practice Framework (CPF)

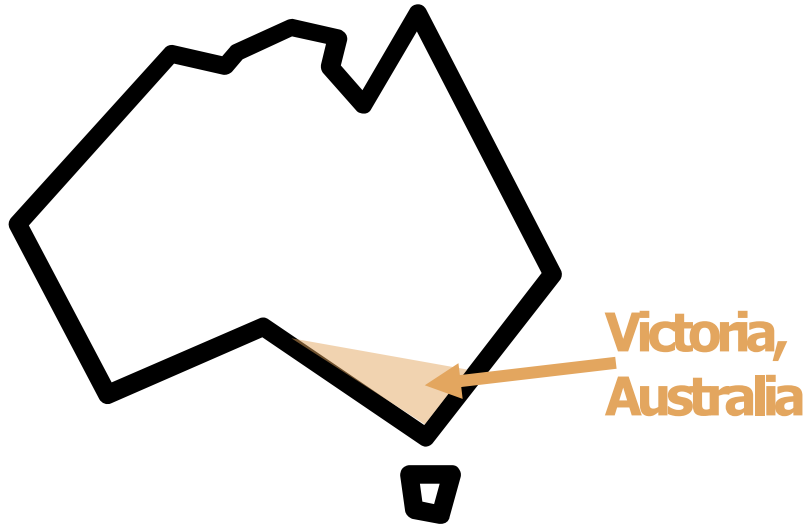
The CPF advocates that high-quality correctional systems work to both **prevent** and **create** outcomes

Environmental containment alone is a short-term 'fix'
People need to desist *into* something

Sustainable change is achieved through meaningfully supporting everyone's personal rehabilitation journey

Involvement in the criminal justice system declines as involvement in other legitimate institutions intensifies

Corrections Victoria in context



- **14 prisons**
- **≈ 6,800** people in prison
- **114.9 people per 100,000 imprisoned**
- **≈ 5000 staff**

Rehabilitation must sit at the centre of *all* corrective missions



The CPF is the foundational document that details CV's theoretical and operational approach



It aims to guide practice **system wide**, in a way that is empirically supported, to get the best outcomes for everyone

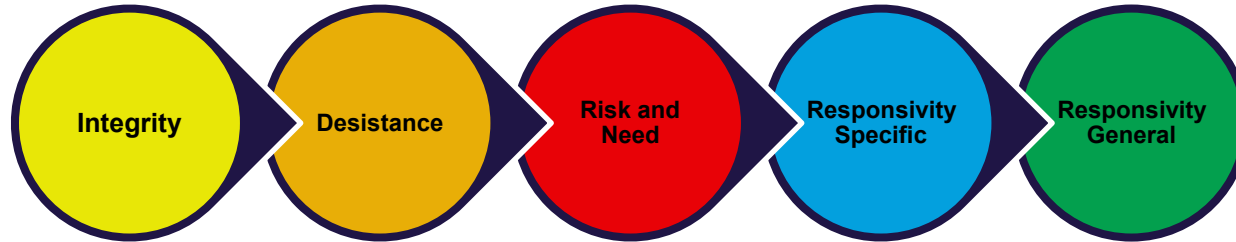


It recognises that correctional services are supporters and enablers of rehabilitation, **not** producers of it



Correctional Practice Framework (CPF): Theoretical and Practice Principles

There are five theoretical principles of the CPF, with practice principles aligned with all five



<https://vicgov.sharepoint.com/sites/VG001572/groups/63/Shared%20Documents/Correctional%20Practice%20Framework.pdf?action=interactivepreview>

Practice Principle 1

Maintain System Integrity

Practice Principle 2

Employ Strengths-Based Approaches

Practice Principle 3

Manage Risk and Target Intervention Needs

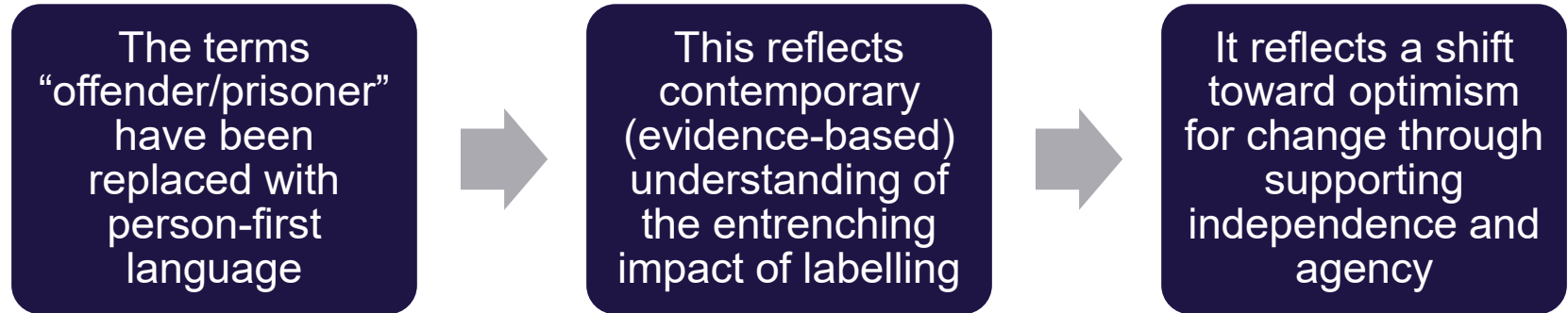
Practice Principle 4

Support Agency and Personal Rehabilitation

Practice Principle 5

Provide Evidence-Based Opportunities and Environments for Change

Language matters



This is an ***integral*** part of the process of desistance from crime – allowing people an opportunity to discard a ‘criminal’ identity and connect with a prosocial one

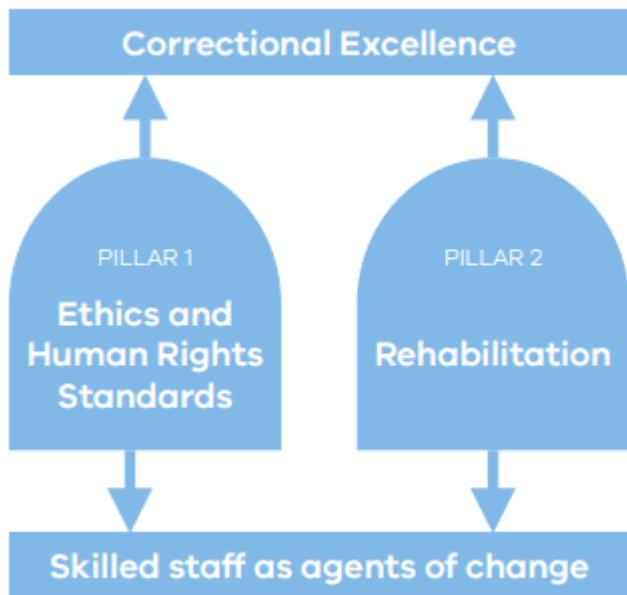


The language of policy and practice matters

Language can be used to criminalise someone, to the extent of defining them

- Speaking only to and about people in terms of their risk status(es), their deficits, and their pasts, is a barrier to rehabilitation and reintegration through entrenching criminal identities (in the minds of both the people themselves, and the staff who work with them)

Staff are the foundation of success



Victoria's justice service strives to be a model of excellence by reflecting international best practice in forensic environments and human rights standards

There are two interlinked pillars in this model of excellence:

1. Ethical Values, and
2. Rehabilitation (must sit at the centre of all corrective missions)

Staff are the key to success

Frontline staff
are key
personnel in any
correctional
setting

In reality, frontline staff
can be finely tuned risk
detection barometers –
able to detect
impending disruption at
early stages through
extensive face-to-face
contact

Historically
underutilised, and
traditionally neglected
as a resource as
highly effective
forensic practitioners

And significant
change agents
through their
development of
prosocial and
consistent
professional
relationships



Key considerations for operationalisation



Responsiveness



The Working Alliance



Trauma-Informed
Correctional
Practice





Responsiveness

Responsiveness is key to fostering desistance from crime, and the change process itself, as both are contextual and individual

- Must be responsive to ***all*** the individuals to whom it has relevance if it is to strive for efficacy for everyone within the system
- Shift away from generalising from an understanding of male behaviour and correctional environments designed for men

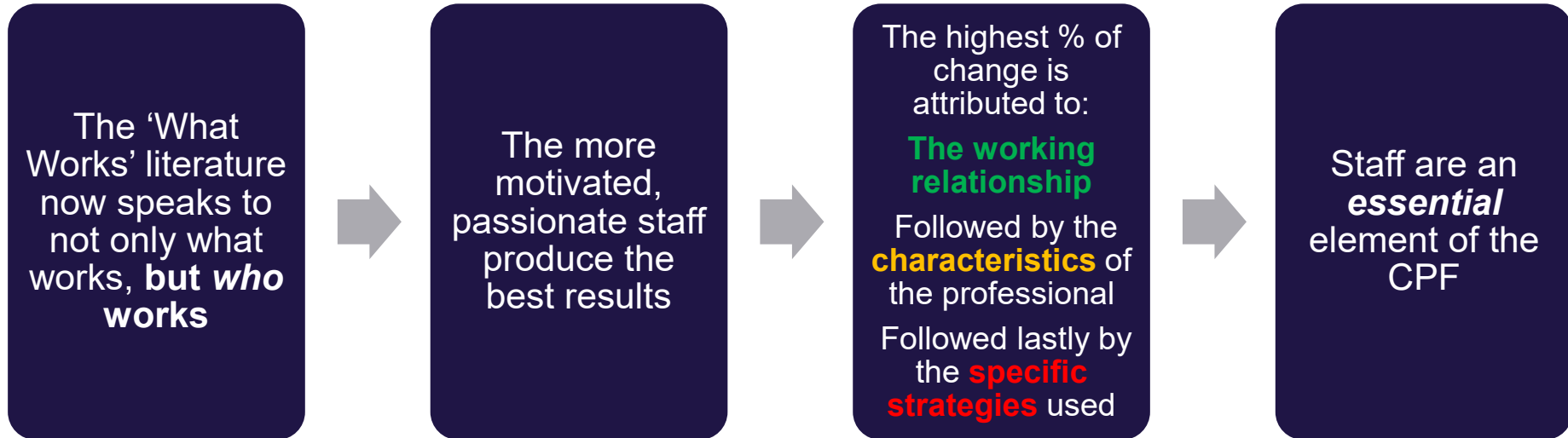


Responsiveness

Maximising personal autonomy through self-determination allows for people to feel greater competence and connection to their motivation to act

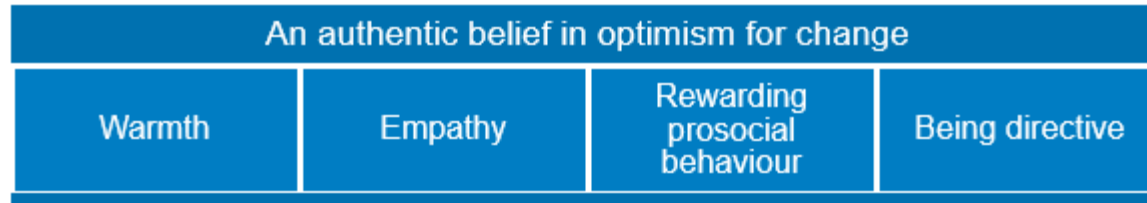
- First Nations people
- Women
- Transgender and non-binary people
- People with cognitive impairment
- People with neurodiversity
- People from multicultural, multifaith, and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People with mental and physical health issues
- People with AOD issues

The Working Alliance



The Working Alliance is the vehicle for change

- ▶ Professional relationships are the most powerful drivers of change
- ▶ Marked by: Engagement, Collaboration, Purpose



- ▶ **Punitive, depersonalised approaches bring only an ‘illusion of control’, whilst actually exacerbating issues, including violence toward staff**
- ▶ Importantly, working alliances create dynamic security within our system
 - Supporting staff longevity, contentment, and mental health



Trauma-Informed Correctional Practice

Developmental trauma causes long-term issues with broad scope across a person's life, including:

- Mental health
- Educational attainment
- Employability
- Relationship stability
- Substance misuse

These traumas, at their point of origin, demand survival responses

These survival responses manifest in adulthood as **dynamic risk factors** which lead to **offending**

This has been described in contemporary research as the “trauma to prison pipeline”



Trauma-Informed Correctional Practice

Australian prisons: 64.9% men (84% men with SO's) and 70.1% women with developmental trauma

Developmental trauma is now viewed as an influential driver of offending and how people engage with the system – offence paralleling behaviours



Trauma-Informed Correctional Practice

Two primary goals of trauma-informed correctional practice:

To view maladaptive, problematic behaviour and presenting problems **through the lens of potential trauma**




To avoid re-traumatising people or replicating disempowering dynamics in the working relationship

'What Else Works'? Taking a strengths-based approach

- ▶ Rehabilitation cannot be reduced to a focus on a person's past, but must also look to how to connect people meaningfully to future citizenship
- ▶ Targeting risk is necessary ***but not sufficient*** for reducing reoffending in a sustainable way
- ▶ **The longer-term safety of the public is best supported by a system that is designed and delivered to support *sustained change*, not just exert finite control**
- ▶ Strengths-based approaches, those that develop and foster protective factors, support desistance from crime

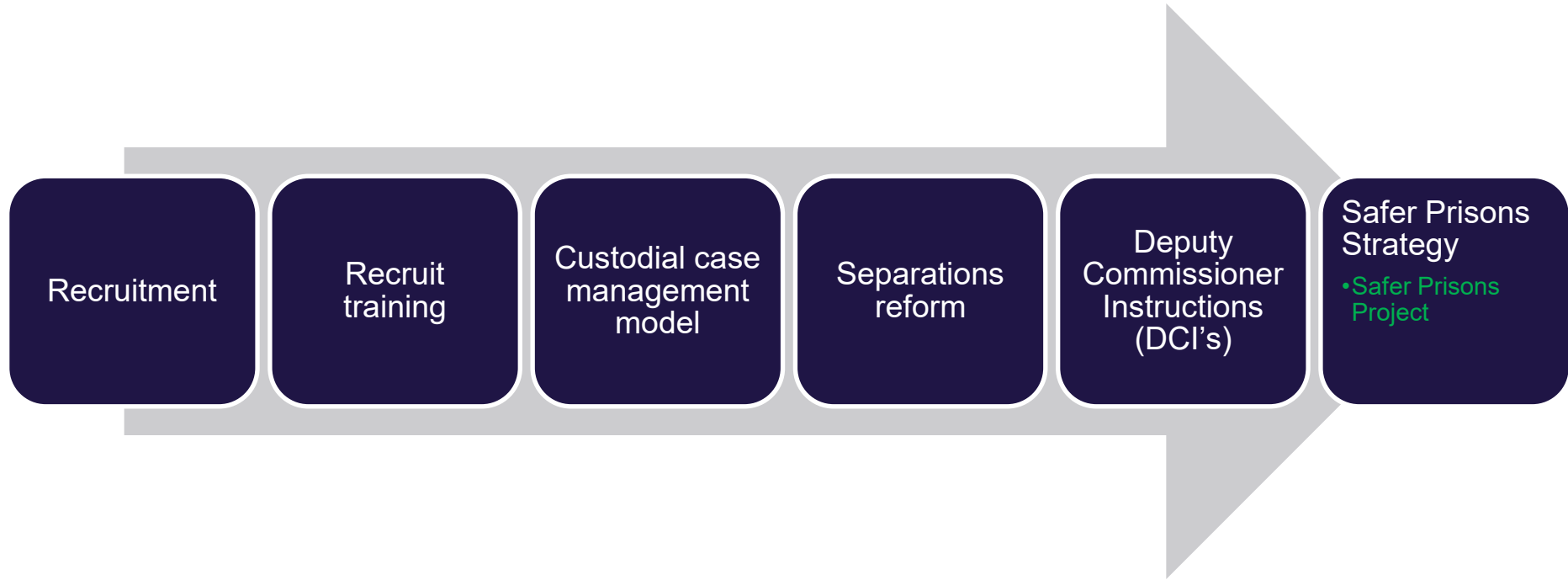
One of the most established empirical findings in criminology is this:

Sooner or later, almost everyone participating in serious criminal activity, *gives it up and quits* (Laws & Ward, 2011)



A desistance lens draws attention to the **protective factors** that mark choices *not* to offend

The beginning of the operationalisation of the CPF





Safer Prisons Project

Maximum security Victorian prison with high levels of violence occurring in restricted environments, including staff assaults

No further options to increase restrictions on people perpetrating violence

CV took an evidence-based approach*

Extensive analysis of what was driving the violence



Safer Prison Project

Step 1 : Categorise assaults based on research



Step 2 : Work with staff

Step 3 : Actions to address root causes

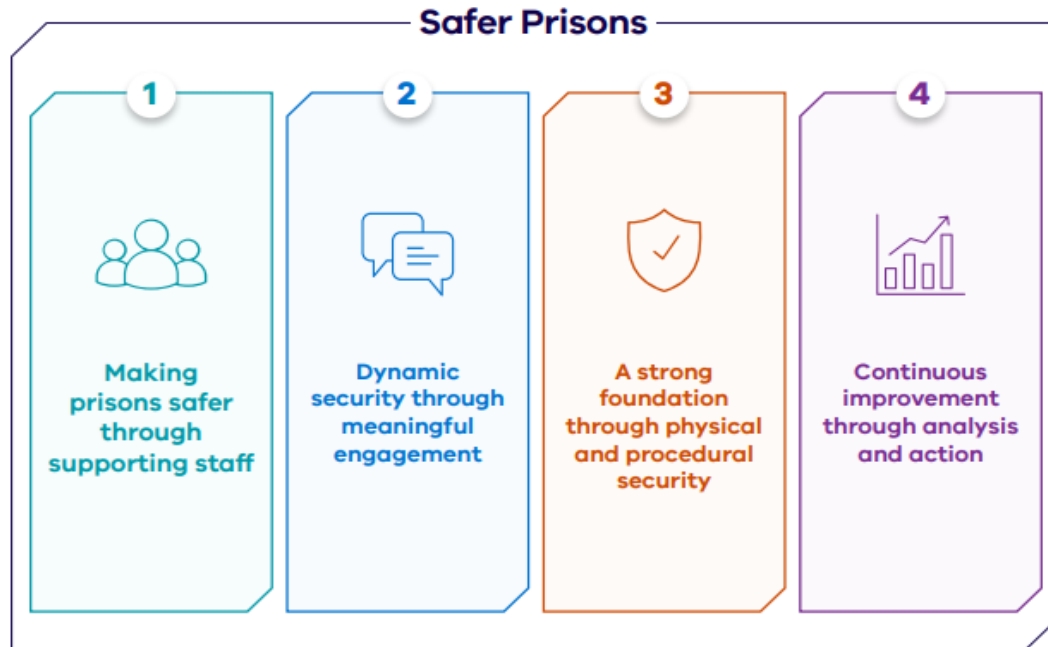
- Incident antecedents indicating most violence stemming from 'protest' causes: frustration driven by perceived injustice/inconsistency in practice



Relied on research from Dr Katherine Doolin (University of Auckland) and Dr Kate Gooch (University of Bath) – see "Preventing Prison Assaults, Prison Service Journal, May 2022, No 260, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies."

Safer Prison Project

Safer Prisons Strategy (the four areas)



- Engagement with staff
- New training package for staff
- Corrective action to target cause
- Implementation of reflective practice

Safer Prison Project Outcomes



Almost 50% reduction in
staff assaults



43% reduction in
workers' compensation
claims



Conclusion

A system that offers no possibility for rehabilitation, makes no space for individual responsibility, and that holds no expectations of the system itself to support change, will reinforce the criminal identity and lifestyle we are tasked with addressing

Conclusion

CV's approach to effective correctional engagement through the ongoing implementation of the CPF has the ability to create:

- Positive long-term, self-sustaining opportunities for the individuals who come into contact with our system
- Security, safety and professional contentment for the staff within the system, and
- Increased safety for the community
- Good neighbours, inside and out



Thank you



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Safety

