



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

2021 INSPECTION OF BORONIA
PRE-RELEASE CENTRE FOR WOMEN

139

NOVEMBER 2021

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accountable public sector*

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2021 Inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women

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Inspector's Overview

BORONIA IS HARD TO FAULT, BUT THERE ARE SOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (Boronia) continues to shine as a prison where meaningful opportunities are provided to women who are sent there for the pre-release part of their sentence.

System level reforms and investment over recent years has seen expansion in the women's prison estate in Western Australia and the development of form and structure to the roles of each facility.

The role and function of Boronia is well known and clearly understood. As the name suggests, it is a pre-release centre for female prisoners. But for most female prisoners their incarceration journey starts elsewhere. Most, if not all, women spend time in other prisons before they are sent to Boronia, that could be at Melaleuca Women's Prison, Bandyup Women's Prison, Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison or any of the other regional prisons that accommodate women. All play an important part in the progression of women to Boronia.

Boronia is very different to more traditional prisons. Everything from the perimeter fence, the grounds and accommodation, through to the operational philosophy, are geared towards maximising the potential for rehabilitation and preparation for release. The Boronia philosophy is based around principles of respect, responsibility, empowerment and opportunity. Even simple things like the women being referred to as residents rather than prisoners make a difference.

We saw examples of each of these principles in the day to day operations and practice of the facility. We observed mutual respect between staff and residents. We saw a joint commitment to focus on providing the conditions for the women to develop skills and capacity for rehabilitation on release.

Unfortunately, only around 10 to 15 per cent of the total female population are resident in Boronia at any one time.

We saw many positives, but our report also identifies several opportunities for improvement. Although Boronia generally operates on a model of trauma informed practice, there should be more programs to support individual women who have experienced trauma in their lives. There should be more opportunities for Aboriginal women to reside there and, when they do get there, to provide additional culturally appropriate supports. For example, an Aboriginal Health Worker and a Life Skills Officer would be invaluable additions for both Aboriginal women and many other women.

The Department's response to our 14 recommendations was mixed at best, with only one recommendation supported outright. The remainder were only noted (7), supported in principle (4), or not supported at all (2). The Department's response is attached to this report.

Somewhat surprisingly, one recommendation that was not accepted by the Department related to an upgrade to the security of the perimeter fence. The unusual aspect to this recommendation was that its objective was to keep intruders out rather than residents in. We heard of examples where intruders had scaled the fence and moved around the compound

BORONIA IS HARD TO FAULT, BUT THERE ARE SOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

without detection. We did not agree with the Department's assessment that the fence was adequate, and we are pretty sure that this assessment will not provide much comfort to the women residents.

Boronia is a valuable public asset that is generally maintained to a high standard, as evidenced by our observations during this inspection and many of the photographs in this report. But those photographs also show evidence of damage that requires maintenance. The extent of some of the work is such that it probably requires someone with relevant trade skills rather than resident maintenance workers who are supervised by a maintenance officer. Regardless of whether the Department notes, accepts or rejects our recommendation, the evidence shows that urgent repairs are needed before it deteriorates further.

Limited availability of post-release accommodation for prisoners is a problem we see in every inspection, and Boronia is no different. The Department's response to our recommendation relating to sourcing more post-release accommodation options for prisoners, noted the problem and the fact that this is largely beyond their control. We understand that the problem is complex and housing stock is in short supply.

But the personal impact of this housing shortage was brought into stark relief during a meeting we held with residents who were due for release. In a group of around eight women, half were very positive about their future and excited to be going home to reconnect with their children and families. In contrast, the others in the group, many of whom were Aboriginal women, were anxious about their future and the fact that they had uncertain accommodation arrangements or that they had no alternative but to return to arrangements that had led to their incarceration in the first place.

A further complication for many women on release from prison is that they will require stable accommodation in order to have their children returned to them from State care. There is a moral imperative for governments and us more broadly as a community to do more to address this issue.

The Department's response to seven of the 14 recommendations in this report was 'Noted'. This is a category normally used for recommendations that are noted by the Department but largely outside their control or primarily directed at another agency or organisation. I have raised this with the Acting Commissioner and written to the Department seeking clarification.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We have three experienced Independent Prison Visitors who are community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services. They attend Boronia on a regular basis providing an opportunity for the women to raise issues and feedback information to our office. I acknowledge the importance of this volunteer work and thank them for the contribution they are making to our oversight of Boronia.

BORONIA IS HARD TO FAULT, BUT THERE ARE SOME OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

It is important to also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the acting Superintendent and staff at Boronia and from key personnel in the Department. The residents who took the time to speak with us and share their perspective on being imprisoned in Boronia also deserve special acknowledgment and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would particularly acknowledge and thank Lauren Netto for her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

29 November 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This was our sixth inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (Boronia). Our first inspection occurred in 2006, two years after it opened. We have a substantial inspection history of Boronia, and a good understanding and appreciation of its philosophy and challenges.

STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

There was some instability in the senior management team, and satisfaction in the leadership team had declined. Whereas previously we have commented on the ongoing stability of the management team, in 2021 we found key positions in the team not substantively filled. This led us to our first recommendation which was to ensure that senior management positions be substantively filled.

Perceptions among staff about the support and communication they get from local management had worsened since our 2018 inspection. We thought this could be an indicator of the instability in the senior management team.

We also noticed a decline in satisfaction relating to human resource processes, particularly around leave applications. Whereas in 2018, 51 per cent of staff had rated these as 'mostly effective', in 2021 this had slipped to 25 per cent.

SECURITY

Boronia is a safe environment. Residents and staff told us they felt safe there. Relations between staff and residents were respectful. Staff were proactive and residents felt comfortable approaching staff if they needed help.

The Senior Officer Security was the only dedicated security position in Boronia's staffing complement. The position and its workload is equivalent to that of a Security Manager at any other prison. In other sites, this position has a team of staff assisting them, custodial and administrative. And whilst Boronia is a small site, we think that safety and security is just as complex there as at other prisons, just in different ways. The SO Security could benefit from some support, even on a part-time basis.

We found some gaps in procedural and physical security. There was no system in place that alerts officers that they still have their keys in possession when they leave the site. And we were concerned that the fence surrounding Boronia, whilst appropriately unobtrusive, did not present much deterrent for intruders getting into Boronia.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

The reception area had undergone some refurbishment in response to recommendations we have made following previous inspections. The open-plan reception area had been enclosed and was now a discrete and dedicated reception space, allowing new residents being welcomed to the centre a lot more privacy.

The cell sharing risk assessments were not being routinely completed. We noted this in our 2018 inspection too. This is a checklist that staff need to complete which assess the suitability of a resident to share a cell. Only 50 per cent of residents had been assessed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is an essential tool for keeping residents safe. We have recommended that these need to be done for each resident required to share a cell.

Boronia manages vulnerable residents appropriately and models a trauma-informed approach. But there were no specific programs to address abuse and trauma.

DAILY LIFE

Boronia is 17 years old and showing its age. We observed a level of wear and tear that we have not seen before. This included cracks in internal walls, chunks of plaster missing, paint peeling off walls. We were concerned about the level of disrepair and neglect. We thought that, in some instances, this actually presented safety issues for the women and possibly their resident children. We have recommended that the Department externally contract services to address these maintenance issues, and not expect the internal, already overwhelmed, maintenance crew to take on this work.

Resident satisfaction with the food service had declined. This was mainly due to the increase in price of red meat that impacted on the amount of this that residents could purchase within their allocated budget. We acknowledged that this was beyond Boronia's local control. We also acknowledged that household meal budgets would be increasing to accommodate the rise in prices.

The social visits experience at Boronia remained excellent. And e-visits and reduced phone call costs went some way to lessening isolation from family, particularly during COVID-19 lockdown periods.

HEALTH AND SUPPORT

We found a strong health services' team in place. Resident satisfaction with health had increased, and processes were working well.

But there were some gaps in the health service at Boronia. Filling these gaps would transform the health service from good to outstanding. This depends on investing additional resources in the health team. Specifically, these gaps were in the area of health promotion and Aboriginal health. To this end we made two recommendations to increase resources and supports for health promotion activities, and to establish a part-time Aboriginal health worker position.

Another significant gap was the lack of specific life skills support for residents. Some residents found it easy to manage the self-care arrangement at Boronia, while others struggled and could do with more support. We recommended that the Department create and fill a Life Skills Officer position at Boronia.

While we found that Boronia did provide a culturally safe place for Aboriginal residents, we thought that elements could be strengthened, in particular the provision of specific programs to engage Aboriginal women.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Boronia's resident child policy gives incarcerated mothers the opportunity to have their child reside with them. This is a key reintegration strategy. The resident child program is managed by the Manager, Family and Community Services, who was dedicated and compassionate. We thought that opportunities for mums with older, teenaged children were lacking. And there were gaps in the provision of diverse parenting and related support programs.

REHABILITATION AND REPARATION

Boronia was moving towards a system of more meaningful case management. The appointment of a new Senior Officer Assessment and Case Management was largely responsible for driving this process. There was more cohesion between the reintegration team, and residents' access to the team had improved.

Resident engagement in education and training has always been high at Boronia and remained so in 2021. But unstable staffing and COVID-19 restrictions had impacted on education service delivery. COVID restrictions had limited residents' access to the education centre, as well as access by external education service providers. And the lack of consistent permanent staffing was frustrating and challenging for residents and educators.

Engagement in tertiary studies was severely hindered by lack of access to essential internet-based resources. As a result, the number of residents enrolled in tertiary education had declined from 15 in 2018 to two in 2021. The issue of access to online services and information is broader than this, however. The Department has an obligation to ensure that persons in its care have opportunities to develop digital literacy skills.

Employment levels within the centre were high and there were strong links between education, employment and training. The external, pre-release employment program (PEP – Prisoner Employment Program) was hampered by slow approval processes.

PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

There were strong local systems in place to support residents' reintegration journey. The Transitional Manager (TM) provided a good service and residents thought she did a good job. Contracted services were also well-engaged, but there were some gaps in re-entry services. These services concentrated on the Perth metropolitan area, and we learned that there weren't always regional service providers to which residents could be referred if they were returning to regional communities. Further, the lack of accommodation options for women getting out was a big concern.

The section 95 community work and recreation program had been impacted by COVID-19. At the time of the inspection in May 2021 the program was still not back on its feet, although approval for it to recommence came during our inspection.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

Ensure senior management positions are substantively filled.

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Department should explore options to improve the security and detection systems for the external fence at Boronia.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Create an additional position to be assigned to reception.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure cell sharing risk assessments are done for each resident required to share a cell.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Introduce programs addressing grief, abuse, and trauma.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Department should contract services to fix the maintenance issues at Boronia.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Increase resources and supports for health services at Boronia to engage more health promotion activities.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Establish a part-time Aboriginal health worker position.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Create and fill a Life Skills Officer (VSO) position to provide structured support and education in basic life skills including nutrition, food preparation and budgeting.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Implement programs to engage Aboriginal women and which reflect the diversity of the Aboriginal women residing at Boronia.

RECOMMENDATION 11

In future ensure key positions like the MFCS are appropriately backfilled over periods of planned leave.

RECOMMENDATION 12

Source and fund a suite of family/parenting programs suitable for the needs of Boronia's residents.

RECOMMENDATION 13

Pilot a system of controlled online access for people in custody at Boronia.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Department of Justice establish partnerships with relevant agencies to increase the range of accommodation options for people leaving prison.

FACT PAGE

NAME OF FACILITY

Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women.

ROLE

Minimum-security prison for women with a focus on reintegration. Provision for children to live with their mothers until the age of four, and for older children up to the age of 12 to have regular extended day and/or overnight stays.

LOCATION

Boronia is located on Noongar land in suburban Perth, eight kilometres south east of the Central Business District.

BRIEF HISTORY

The facility opened in May 2004. It is Western Australia's only dedicated pre-release centre for women.

CAPACITY

Original design capacity – 71

Total capacity in 2021 – 95

POPULATION INFORMATION

The population ranged between 81 and 84 residents during the week of the inspection in May 2021. There were six mums with resident children. And Aboriginal women made up 20 per cent of Boronia's residents.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE PRE-RELEASE CENTRE FOR WOMEN

Boronia is the only pre-release centre for women in Western Australia. It opened in May 2004 and was designed to accommodate 71 women and prepare them for reintegration with their communities. It is located only eight kilometres from Perth's CBD, and nestled amongst aged care residences and university/tertiary education facilities. Accommodation is in 17 shared houses. The facility fits in with its suburban neighbours, with nothing outstanding that identifies it as a prison. This is appropriate given its purpose as a reintegration centre.



Photo 1: A typical suburban environment

Boronia has a specific philosophy that shapes its operational performance. The four principles of this philosophy are:

1. Personal responsibility and empowerment – residents have choices and the facility provides a safe space for them to feel empowered in making good choices.
2. Family responsibility – connections with family and community networks are encouraged and facilitated through opportunities like the resident mothers and children program.
3. Community responsibility – opportunities exist for residents to participate in external community activities.
4. Respect and integrity – reflected in the environment as well as relationships between the residents and staff.

These principles may be unique to Boronia, but are really basic life principles. They provide an important foundation for Boronia's residents to prepare to reintegrate into their lives outside prison.

INTRODUCTION

1.2 THE 2018 INSPECTION

Three years ago we found that Boronia continued to provide a respectful and safe environment for residents and staff. Ninety-one per cent of the residents who responded to our pre-inspection survey felt that officers treated them with dignity. And 97 per cent said they felt safe most of the time.

There was good engagement among residents with education and work, and enough opportunities to maintain contact with family and friends. The nurses and the GP provided a good service, although the team lacked a specific mental health resource, and dental services could be better.

Residents could manage their day-to-day lives fairly easily at Boronia. They could shop at the centre's supermarket for household and personal items on certain days of the week. They could participate in a range of meaningful activities to fill their days. And there were reasonable social, spiritual and psychological support structures in place to access when they needed.

We did think, though, that Boronia could be doing more in the reintegration space, in particular around community activities. We made two recommendations to this effect. The first was to increase resident participation in unsupervised community work and other activities under section 95 of the *Prisons Act 1981*. And the second was the same, but applied specifically to activities for mothers with resident children at Boronia. We explore how the Department has progressed these recommendations further on in this report.

1.3 THE 2021 INSPECTION

We conducted our sixth inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (Boronia) in May 2021. Our first inspection occurred in 2006, two years after it opened. So we have a substantial inspection history of Boronia, and a good understanding and appreciation of its philosophy and challenges.

This inspection was our first inspecting the facility against our new revised inspection standards (OICS, 2020). The standards provide benchmarks against which we can assess the treatment of prisoners and the overall functioning of a facility. We use the standards as a framework for our inspections, rather than report against each of them individually.

Our 2021 inspection followed a traditional inspection format and methodology. It started on Sunday 23 May with two team members attending to observe social visits and any weekend recreation activities. The full team of seven was on site from Monday 24 May to Thursday 27 May.

In April we conducted surveys with all staff and residents. Staff filled out their surveys electronically, and 77 per cent of Boronia staff responded to the survey. We administered the surveys in person to the residents. The resident response rate was 76 per cent. These were good response rates. The survey results provide a good snapshot of the facility. These results are reflected throughout this report to support inspection findings, highlight any anomalies between reality and perception, and as general background information.

INTRODUCTION

Within our model of continuous inspection, we remained vigilant in our monitoring of Boronia between inspections through liaison visits, telephone contact, and monthly visits by the three Independent Visitors assigned to Boronia.

Chapter 2

MANAGING THE CENTRE

2.1 LEADERSHIP AND STAFF RELATIONS

There was some instability in the Senior Management Team

This finding was contradictory to what we have found previously. In other inspections we have commented on the ongoing stability of the management team in place at Boronia. In 2018 we said this was positive and not something we find often in prison environments. We did, however, question whether this could be stifling innovation and fostering complacency.

Things have changed somewhat and in 2021 we found key positions in the senior management team not substantively filled. In fact the two most senior positions – Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent Operations and Security (ASO&S) – were occupied by acting staff. And while both staff members in these positions were experienced and had worked at Boronia in other substantive roles for a long time, we were still concerned that having actors in these top positions over a long period of time could be destabilising for the centre.

The substantive Superintendent had been seconded to head office shortly after our 2018 inspection. The ASO&S position holder had been away on secondment to a couple of other prisons for even longer. There had been several people move through this position over the past few years. Some had been a good fit for Boronia while others had not, causing a measure of disruption in services and outcomes for the residents. This is probably understandable given Boronia’s unique operating philosophy and long history of stable leadership.

These acting arrangements also created flow-on vacancies. The staff member seconded into the ASO&S role was the substantive Principal Officer (PO). So the PO position was filled by a Senior Officer acting in the position.

Boronia is a small facility with a very specific philosophy. It is easily disrupted by constant changes and actors in the senior positions. This inevitably impacts on the residents, because different people coming from different prisons may find it difficult to adjust to Boronia’s way of doing things.

Recommendation 1

Ensure senior management positions are substantively filled.

Satisfaction with management support and leadership had declined

We found much diminished perceptions across all measures relating to management support and leadership in our pre-inspection survey of Boronia staff. This table shows this decline comparative to our 2018 survey responses. The question asked respondents to rate each of the measures using a ‘poor’, ‘mixed’ and ‘good’ scale. The results in the table reflect the percentage who answered ‘good’.

MANAGING THE CENTRE

Table 1: Proportion of staff rating management support/leadership as 'good'

	2021 inspection	2018 inspection
Support from line manager	44%	57%
Communication from line manager	39%	57%
Support from local management	39%	57%
Communication from local management	36%	51%
Support from head office	14%	26%
Communication from head office	19%	26%

We have found that perceptions of support and communication among staff at Boronia have waxed and waned over the past few inspections. In 2015 we found a decline which the then Inspector, in his exit debrief following the conclusion of the on-site inspection, said was a 'cloud at a facility that is otherwise performing well'. When we returned in 2018, we found these to be much improved, largely due to an improved communication strategy that had been developed by management to engage with staff. We referred to this communication strategy as 'exceptional practice' back in 2018 (OICS, 2018, p. 53).

So it was disappointing, but perhaps not that surprising, to find such a decrease in staff confidence in support and communication from local and head office management in 2021. This change could reflect the instability at senior management level.

Perceptions about preferential treatment were affecting staff/management relations

Some officers felt unfairly treated compared to others, particularly over HR-related processes such as leave approvals. Some officers complained about mixed messaging they received about needing to manage their leave liability, but then when they apply for leave it is rejected. Those officers who did have their leave applications approved were then perceived, by others who had not had successful leave approvals, as receiving favourable treatment.

We noticed a decline in satisfaction in our pre-inspection survey results relating to human resource processes. In 2018, 51 per cent of respondents said they thought processes around leave applications were 'mostly effective'. In 2021, this had slipped to 25 per cent.

We understand that the HR team had worked hard to put in place processes to manage and dispel these negative perceptions. They distribute a leave roster to all staff 12 months in advance which clearly outlines what leave periods are available when. Staff who apply for leave during periods that don't fit in with this overall leave plan should expect to have the leave application refused.

MANAGING THE CENTRE

Management was well aware of these issues, which appear to have been ongoing for some time. One strategy that had been implemented to try and manage these perceptions was to escalate most leave approvals to the Superintendent (annual leave, long service leave, planned personal leave and purchased leave). This shifts any perception of bias or favouritism away from the HR team. But we did not think these delegations should be the remit of a Superintendent, and we don't think this is a sustainable long-term solution.

2.2 A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Residents and staff told us that they felt safe

Ninety-four per cent of resident survey respondents said that they 'mostly feel safe' at Boronia. We have always found this to be the case at Boronia. Ninety-seven per cent of staff who responded said they either 'mostly' or 'always' feel safe. There is no doubt that the small population, high level of staff engagement and purposefully busy routines all contribute to the safe feel and settled environment.

The proactive engagement between staff and residents was evident both on site during the inspection, and in our pre-inspection resident survey results. Almost 90 per cent of residents said they would approach uniformed staff if they needed help or support. Our observations during the inspection and conversations with residents further supported this finding. Staff were consistently out in the prison, accessible to and engaging with the women.

Relationships between staff and residents were also mutually respectful. This came through clearly in our pre-inspection surveys. In the resident surveys:

- 65% of respondents felt that officers apply the rules fairly.
- 88% said officers were respectful during cell searches.
- 77% said officers treat them with dignity.

These figures are all well above the state averages across these measures which range between 40 and 47 per cent.

And in the pre-inspection staff surveys, 97 per cent of staff said that they get on 'generally well' with residents.

2.3 MANAGING SITE SECURITY

A one-person security team

The position of SO Security was vacant at the last inspection with an officer acting in the position. It has since been filled on a permanent basis, which was a good outcome. It is a busy role, even for a small site like Boronia, which has its own unique security-related challenges.

The position and its workload is equivalent to that of a Security Manager at any other prison. In other sites, the Security Manager would have a team to work with, including custodial officers and administrative staff. We acknowledge that Boronia is a small site. But we also

MANAGING THE CENTRE

think that safety and security is just as complex at Boronia as at other, larger prisons, just in different ways. We think that the SO Security position could function more proactively with some administrative support, even on a part-time basis.

Emergency management scenario testing was good

Boronia was testing its emergency management capabilities regularly. Scenarios used to test these were 'live' and particularly relevant to the kinds of emergencies a facility like Boronia is more likely to encounter. One of these was a test of the Centre's capacity to coordinate an evacuation of all residents. A cohort of residents was used in this exercise. The evacuation point was the neighbouring prison officer training academy. The scenario was appropriate and the 'lessons learned' from this exercise were being used to plan a full evacuation exercise with all residents in the future.

Some gaps in procedural and physical security

Boronia has no system that alerts officers that they still have their keys in their possession as they leave the prison. We understand that the prison had considered installing a system like an alarm that activates if anyone walks out the front doors with their keys still on their person but had decided against this. The reason given was that this was not consistent with the ethos of the centre.

We think that these systems are quite common in the community and do not necessarily detract from the low-security feel and look of Boronia. Having a system in place that alerts people that they still have keys to the site on them is good risk-management practice and an important aspect of procedural security. Boronia should reconsider installing some sort of detection system at the front gate.

The fence surrounding the facility looks like any general neighbourhood fence. Its unobtrusiveness is deliberate. The function of Boronia as a pre-release centre is reflected in the physical location and appearance of the site. And so the fence separating it from its neighbours should blend in as much as possible. We did, though, have some concern about this aspect of the physical security of the site. The concern was not about residents getting out over the fence, but rather about intruders coming in.

In the 12 months leading up to this inspection, there were five known incidents of intruders coming over the fence and entering the prison. In some of these instances, staff did not know there was an intruder in the prison until the intruder exited back over the fence. This was because the fence alarm/detection system failed when the intruder entered the prison and only activated upon their exit. Only one of the five intruders was caught.

We believe that these intrusions were, in most cases, accidental, rather than deliberate attempts by members of the public to enter the prison grounds. It is more likely that they were hoping for a short cut home, or thought they were entering an aged care residence, not a prison.

MANAGING THE CENTRE

There are many options for additional fence security that don't impact on the aesthetics of the design. Unobtrusive, silent detection systems and sensor lighting would assist staff in detecting intruders, and alert intruders before they start to climb the fence. Increased but still unobtrusive signage along the fence identifying the site as a prison and warning against trespassing could also be a useful deterrent.

Recommendation 2

The Department should explore options to improve the security and detection systems for the external fence at Boronia.

Chapter 3

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

3.1 RECEPTION, PROPERTY AND ORIENTATION

Positive changes to the reception area

We were pleased to see some structural and process changes in the reception area that improved the security and privacy of the space. We had reported on this in our previous two inspections in 2015 and 2018. In 2018 we made a formal recommendation that Boronia '[E]stablish a dedicated reception area which will provide privacy, security and space, and ensure appropriate staffing' (OICS, 2018, pp. 14, Recommendation 2). By 2021 there had been some changes to the area which addressed the recommendation in part.

The open-plan reception area had been enclosed. This was an important change. It had transformed from being part of the main thoroughfare in the administration building to a discrete and dedicated space. In creating this space, it had become evident that another access point was needed to provide residents direct entry from the main prison into the reception area, and so a new door had been installed.



Photo 2: The reception area in 2018 before the external door was installed

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE



Photo 3: The new door leading from reception into the centre

We remain concerned about the resourcing assigned to manage this busy area. There is only one SO position assigned to reception each day. It is a crucial role in the prison and the workload involved requires more than just one officer. We raised this in 2018. We said the officer has to ‘juggle and prioritise jobs’ and warned that ‘sometimes amidst this whirlwind of activity some tasks were sidelined’. We concluded by saying we thought this ‘undermined the reception process at Boronia’ (OICS, 2018, p. 14).

No additional resources have been assigned to this busy operational area. We understand that management has attempted to secure funding for an additional position to be assigned to this area, but these requests have not been approved. We urge the Department to reconsider this. Not doing so is a risk for the facility.

Recommendation 3

Create an additional position to be assigned to reception.

Prisoner property – increased security but storage still problematic

In 2018 we were dissatisfied with property processing in the reception area. Then, incoming property was haphazardly stored in the open-plan reception room, until an officer was available to process it, which could be a few days. During this time, the property was not secure. In 2021 the reception area had been transformed into a separate area that could be closed off and so we were no longer so concerned about the security of prisoner property that was temporarily stored in this area.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

In 2018 we were also concerned about storage capacity of prisoner property. It was designed to store property for around 70 residents. But Boronia's capacity had increased to around 90, and storage capacity had not increased. This situation remained in 2021 with a resident population of around 81 during the inspection.



Photo 4: Property storage was at capacity

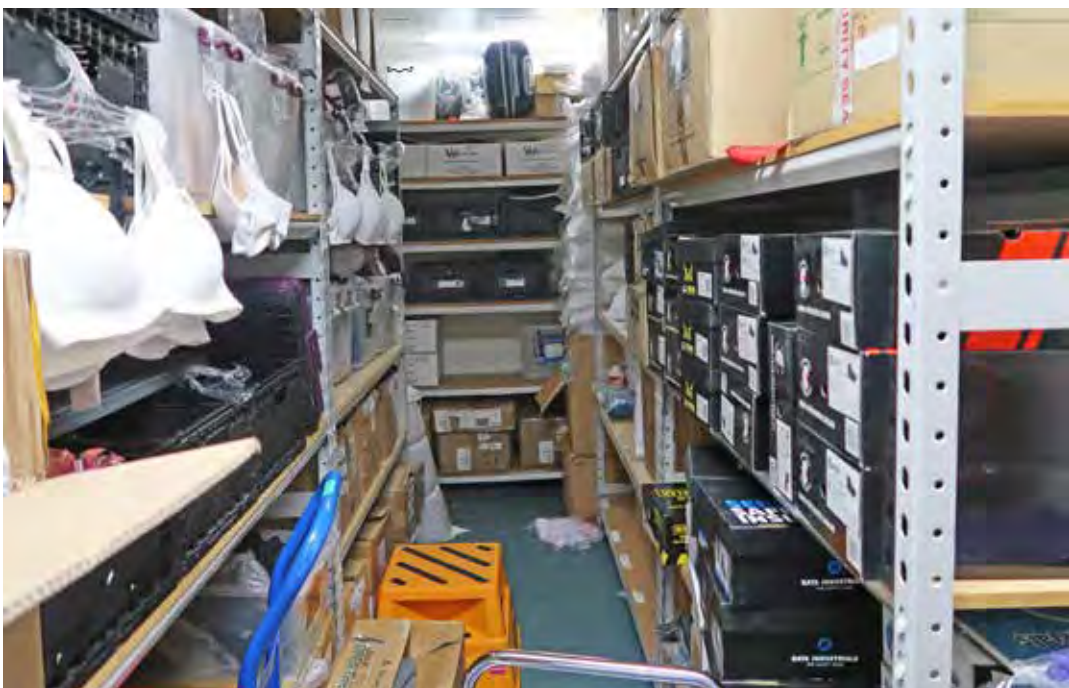


Photo 5: Hazards in the walkways

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE



Photo 6: Various items stored in the property storage area, not just residents' property

These photos also show that there was a mix of items stored in the property storage area, not just residents' property. We noticed more items blocking the walkways around the shelving than during past inspections. These present hazards in the area. We worried that the property store was becoming a general storage facility. This was not good practice. It is potentially not safe from an occupational safety perspective. And it also undermines the security of residents' property if access to the area cannot be managed and restricted to only certain personnel.

Orientation continued to work well

The orientation process was well-entrenched at Boronia and continued to work well. It was supported by a Local Order (LO 40) that clearly outlined the process and the various responsibilities of personnel across the site in the orientation process. The orientation booklet had been updated so all the information was relevant and up to date.

The peer support team continued to play an integral part of the orientation process. They were responsible for most of the physical site orientation. All peer support residents were on the orientation roster. Their responsibilities included a site tour of the centre and introductions to key Boronia staff.

Our pre-inspection surveys indicated that women felt informed enough when they first arrived at Boronia. Seventy-four per cent responded that they were given enough information on arriving at Boronia. And about half said they got good support and help from staff.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

3.2 MAINTAINING RESPECTFUL RELATIONS

Boronia has an up-to-date anti-bullying policy

Boronia had a recently reviewed and updated anti-bullying policy. New Boronia Standing Order 10.6 came into operation in May 2020 and clearly stated the expectations for resident behaviour towards others, the procedures where allegations of inappropriate behaviour had occurred, and the consequences of substantiated cases of bullying behaviours. It operationalises the new Commissioner's Operating Policies and Procedures (COPP) 10.6, which provides department-wide requirements for the management of bullying.

The new policies included an emphasis on support for alleged victims, that information about the policy should be included in prisoner orientation processes, that dynamic security should be the strategy to reduce bullying behaviour, that a centralised, accessible bullying register should be kept, and that action plans should be created in instances of bullying.

We found there were very few reported cases of bullying at Boronia. Pre-inspection survey results, observations and discussions with residents seemed to support that this was a true reflection of the generally safe environment at the prison, rather than an under-reporting of bullying behaviour.

There was one active incident of alleged bullying that had recently occurred, and we found that this had been managed in accordance with the new Standing Order. This did not mean that the individuals involved were necessarily satisfied with the outcome of the management of the alleged events. But staff were well aware of the issues involved, had taken action to try and address concerns and continued to be engaged with the individual.

We were concerned about awareness of the policy amongst the residents. Whilst residents were clear that bullying at Boronia is not tolerated and there were penalties in place for bullies, they did not know the specifics about the policy and its processes. It may be worth formalising information sessions about the policy, like verbal presentations as part of the orientation process, and poster displays across the site.

Cell sharing assessments are not always completed

There were around 81 residents at Boronia at the time of our inspection in May 2021. Boronia's original capacity was for 71 residents. Crowding across the whole prison estate has impacted on Boronia's capacity, with more residents being accommodated than rooms available. So some residents have to share a room.

In 2018 we noted that Boronia was not completing cell sharing assessments for its residents. This is a checklist staff need to complete which assesses the suitability of a prisoner to share a cell. It takes into account the individual circumstances of each prisoner to ensure it was safe, decent and appropriate for them to share a cell with others, or with specific prisoners. They should be completed at all prisons to ensure accountability for prisoner safety.

During our 2021 inspection, we found that approximately 50 per cent of residents had been assessed which is better than the previous inspection but there is a need for all incoming prisoners to be assessed. We were told that staffing levels and workload impacted on whether these assessments were done or not.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

The cell sharing risk assessment is an essential tool for keeping residents safe and maintaining a safe environment in general. The women at Boronia are placed there because they have displayed consistent respectful and appropriate behaviour. But this should not assume that they can share their intimate living space with anyone. The cell sharing risk assessments ensure appropriate co-placements of women so residents remain settled and feel safe. They should be done for all residents who are required to share a room at Boronia.

Recommendation 4

Ensure cell sharing risk assessments are done for each resident required to share a cell.

Various avenues for requests/complaints and residents had confidence in these

Residents we interviewed said that they felt they could make requests and lodge complaints and they had confidence in the processes around these. This was no doubt a reflection of the high level of interaction between staff and residents, and the respectful relationships between them.

Each house also held unit meetings, which was a formal group process for issues and household requests to be made. These were being held regularly. For individual issues, residents could also fill in a 'white form', a standard request form used across prisons. Residents fill these out and hand them to unit staff who then pass these on to the relevant managers.

Complaints could be made internally through the unit meetings or a letter to the Superintendent. Externally, residents could complain to the Department of Justice complaints service, ACCESS, either by phone or in writing. The Department also has processes in place to facilitate confidential correspondence from prisoners to various external parties and independent agencies, including: the Ombudsman, the Minister, the CCC and various other complaints bodies. There are yellow confidential envelopes available which allows prisoners to send letters to various agencies listed on the envelopes. Mail sent in these envelopes may not be opened and read by anyone other than the addressee on the front of the envelope. We observed that the envelopes were available in various locations across Boronia, easily accessible to residents.

There was some frustration among residents over the delay some had experienced in having their queries responded to and resolved. While prisons must often go through set processes in order to approve or resolve certain matters, the philosophy of Boronia that supports self-empowerment and responsibility places an obligation on staff and management to facilitate that for the women. Not being consistently responsive undermines Boronia's philosophy.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

3.3 SUPPORTING VULNERABLE WOMEN

Boronia models a trauma-informed approach

Boronia continues to model its policies and practices in ways that show respect and consideration of many residents' histories as victims of abuse and trauma. This is consistent with the Centre's Guiding Philosophy statement about emphasising 'cooperation over compliance'; respecting 'the inherent dignity of all people'; and empowering women (DOJ, no date). It also recognises how some common prison practices can retraumatise victims, and so supports the model of trauma informed care that Boronia strives to deliver.

Boronia does not use strip searching as part of its security strategy. This is absolutely appropriate to its security classification as a minimum-security facility, and to the low-risk nature of its residents. It is also consistent with a women-centred and trauma-informed approach.

A review we completed in 2019 (OICS, 2019) supports this approach, and provides an evidence base for why using invasive procedures like strip searching do not actually achieved the results one imagines. The review found:

- Strip searches are not an effective method of locating contraband.
- Strip searching is harmful, humiliating and degrading, especially to those who have already experienced trauma.
- Most searching is not intelligence led, and does not produce results.
- Reducing or eliminating strip searches has not increased contraband entering prison.

Boronia's residents were also not subjected to routine restraint (handcuffs) when being transported outside of the prison by Department staff. In an anomaly of practice however, the residents were restrained if having to be moved by the Department's transport contractor. This was due to the risk of penalties for the contractor if a resident should abscond/escape, and the resulting reputational damage.

We have recommended in other reports that the contract should reflect a risk-based approach, and if a prison does not recommend restraint in transport, then the contractor should be able to treat the prisoner with the same dignity the Department affords them. This has not been taken up.

But there are no specific programs to address abuse and trauma

While generally providing an empowering environment for residents, Boronia does not provide any programs to support and address ongoing issues of trauma, abuse or grief. Many women interviewed during the inspection said that such volunteer, non-criminogenic programs would be highly valuable to them.

EARLY DAYS AND DUTY OF CARE

Boronia's Guiding Philosophy states that it is committed to the delivery of a trauma informed model of care with the aim to 'positively support the holistic health and wellbeing' of residents within its 'safe therapeutic setting'. However, the therapeutic aspect of the model is limited by the absence of programs to provide this support.

Such programs would also recognise and address the anxiety experienced by many women who are nearing release. They face the prospect of having to re-enter the abusive and traumatic environment that led them to prison originally. Boronia needs to consider sourcing appropriate programs that would provide these women with tools and strategies that will prepare them to manage these situations and make informed and empowered choices in the future.

Recommendation 5

Introduce programs addressing grief, abuse, and trauma.

There were systems in place to manage vulnerable residents

We did find that there were systems in place to support vulnerable and/or at-risk residents. Prisoners experiencing a mental crisis are managed under the Department's At-Risk Management System (ARMS). These prisoners are monitored within this system through a Prisoner Risk Assessment Group (PRAG) that meets weekly in most sites.

Things were slightly different at Boronia because the cohort there did not include women with acute mental health problems. Boronia did not have the capacity (in respect of 24-hour medical coverage) to manage such unwell women. The women placed there were generally settled, and any critical mental health needs they may have had would have been addressed by another prison prior to their transfer. Further, Boronia offered a stable and supportive environment and residents feeling anxious or otherwise mentally unwell were picked up quickly and support systems were put in place for them. So, it was unusual for a resident to be placed on ARMS at Boronia. Indeed, there had only been one resident on ARMS in the 12-month period before the inspection.

Still there were women at Boronia who were vulnerable and did need specific intervention and support for their mental wellbeing. This was mainly through individual counselling provided by two Psychological Health Services (PHS) counsellors who attended Boronia twice a week. The counsellors said that Boronia was one of the busiest sites they worked at with close to half the population engaged with PHS.

While the service was well-utilised by residents, they were only just meeting demand. Having coverage three, rather than just two, days a week would provide better opportunities to meet current demand and facilitate additional referrals and requests for support.

Chapter 4

DAILY LIFE

4.1 REGIME AND LIVING CONDITIONS

A purposeful regime

The regime at Boronia mimics that of a normal daily routine in the community. It provided residents with lots of choices about how to fill their time, including options around work, recreation, personal development, and education activities. The women have to manage their own routine each day, without much, if any, intervention from staff. The regime requires a high level of personal responsibility and self-determination, appropriate for a pre-release facility. These are important skills to develop for successful reintegration.

A community-style, decent living environment

Boronia's residents reside in community-style houses with shared bathroom, kitchen, laundry, and living room facilities. These five-bedroom houses originally provided single person occupancy, but two rooms in each house have since been doubled up. The three nursery houses have two bedrooms each, and two houses for residents with special needs provide another five bedrooms. The Centre was originally designed to accommodate 71 women, but with the doubling up in rooms in the standard houses, the capacity had been increased to 95. During the week of the inspection in May 2021 the population ranged between 81 and 84 residents.



Photo 7: Residents live in shared houses with common facilities

DAILY LIFE



Photo 8: Some residents have to share a room



Photo 9: Communal living room

DAILY LIFE

Residents are expected to maintain a high level of personal and communal hygiene. And although staff were required to monitor this through daily inspections of the houses, residents were mostly self-motivated enough to keep their living environments clean and tidy without this added oversight. Residents rated their living conditions highly in our pre-inspection survey. Ninety-one per cent said they thought their accommodation and bathroom facilities were 'good'.

Similarly, the grounds and gardens were thriving.



Photo 10: The gardens were lovely

DAILY LIFE



Photo 11: The gardens surrounding the spiritual centre



Photo 12: A lot of care went into maintaining the grounds

DAILY LIFE

Some infrastructure was showing signs of wear and tear

The facility is 17 years' old and showing its age. There is a lot of wear and tear on the facility which is to be expected given the volume of people going through the place. And we observed signs of this to an extent that we hadn't seen at previous inspections.

This included cracks in internal walls, chunks of plaster missing and paint peeling off walls. We were concerned about the level of disrepair and neglect. We thought that in some instances these constituted safety issues for the women, and possibly their resident children. In particular, sections where the plaster had fallen off the corners of walls exposing the metal framework which had sharp edges.

The photos below show the state of disrepair.



Photo 13

DAILY LIFE



Photo 14



Photo 15

DAILY LIFE



Photo 16

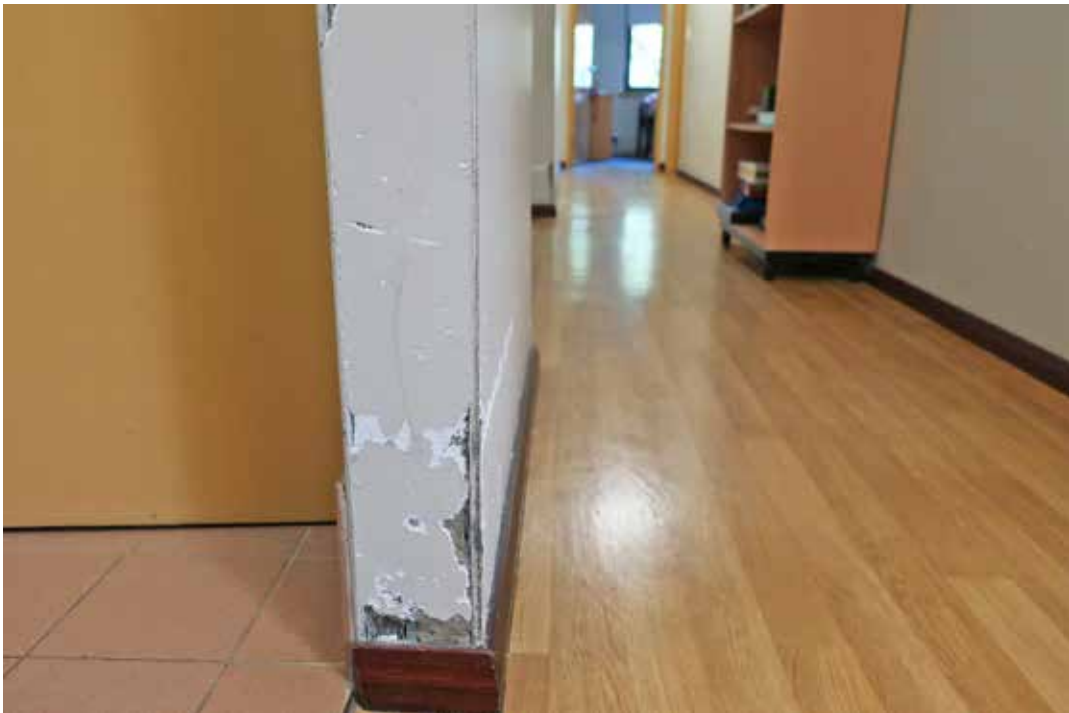


Photo 17

DAILY LIFE



Photo 18



Photo 19

DAILY LIFE



Photo 20



Photo 21

DAILY LIFE



Photo 22



Photo 23

DAILY LIFE

There is a maintenance work crew made up of residents and led by a committed and experienced VSO who tend to the basic maintenance issues across the site. But the extent of the maintenance required at Boronia should not be the responsibility of the single maintenance team out there. The Department is responsible for maintaining its assets and we believe the Department should intervene to fix the maintenance problems at Boronia.

Recommendation 6

The Department should contract services to fix the maintenance issues at Boronia.

4.2 CLOTHING AND BEDDING

Resident satisfaction with clothing and bedding remained acceptable

As was the case in our previous inspection of Boronia, we found that the prison continued to supply a variety of clothing suitable for different activities, work locations, and physical needs of its residents. Importantly, all clothing was personal issue and there was no sharing of any items (including underwear) that we often find at other prisons. Residents were likely to be satisfied with their clothing and laundry because they were responsible for their own laundry management. They have access to washing machines in their own houses to wash as needed. The survey approval rate for laundry was 83 per cent.

Some residents expressed frustration though that they were not issued with clothes dryers until 1 June each year. This was an environmental sustainability practice to discourage residents from relying on the dryers rather than hanging their washing outside in the sun to dry.

Heavy bedding (doonas, pillows, blankets) could be washed by the Centre's central laundry and this was done regularly. Prisoner survey responses showed increased approval for the standard of bedding up to 78 per cent. Replacement clothing and bedding for residents was controlled centrally at the main Centre laundry. At the last inspection there were complaints about access to an adequate supply of replacement clothing, which could not be stored in the laundry due to restricted storage space. We found that communication about stock supply was better this time around, and residents were generally satisfied with their ability to access replacement clothing.

There were problems with supply for women that needed larger clothing sizes. While some items were eventually provided to the women who needed it, the process seemed extraordinarily drawn out. This left some women with very limited clothing over an extended period.

DAILY LIFE

4.3 FOOD AND PURCHASES

Catering services are efficient and busy

These are managed by the Catering Manager. This is a very busy role at Boronia. The position has become responsible for the central kitchen, stores and shop. This includes overseeing all resident employees, ordering, stocktake, food safety requirements, catering, and budgets. All processes were well documented, and the services were running well.

The service employs up to 20 residents in the kitchen, and six in the shop/stores/supermarket roles. In addition to supplying internal catering for staff, the kitchen is a semi-commercial enterprise that caters for outside functions and provides meals to the Department's training academy. It also provides catering services for internal Departmental functions. At any one time there could be up to eight residents completing a catering traineeship through the kitchen.

All new residents are placed to work in the kitchen for about two weeks. Some residents did not like being directed into the role, but we thought the reasons for their placement there initially were sound. These included to provide some routine to new arrivals, to provide food safe training necessary for the self-care environment and to teach those who needed it some basic cooking skills. It also gave new residents experience in working in one of the primary employment and training options at the Centre.

Resident satisfaction with some aspects of the food service had declined

While satisfaction with the quality of the food remained high (75% rated this as 'good'), satisfaction with the amount of food had declined – from 80 per cent in 2018 to 66 per cent in 2021.

Boronia is an entirely self catering facility. Each resident is allocated a daily budget for food and items are purchased from the on-site supermarket. Residents can choose how to manage their food shopping. Some choose to pool their food budget and share meal planning and preparation, others prefer to only self cater.

There was a good variety of seasonal, healthy food available for purchase and, other than red meat, prices were reflective of community standards. There had been an increase in the price of red meat that was impacting on the amount of this that residents could purchase within their allocated budget. This was the source of the dissatisfaction reflected in the surveys.

This was the most popular complaint we heard from the Boronia residents both in lead up to and during the inspection. Management acknowledged that the price of red meat had gone up substantially, but said they had little control over this as prices were set by the supplier, Karnet Prison Farm.

DAILY LIFE

The meats supplied to the Centre from Karnet were sausages, mince, lamb chops, steaks, and pork roasts. Residents were being charged what Boronia was paying to Karnet, and no more. We were told that before the price increases began, many of the cuts of meat had been priced artificially low and much lower than community prices. Now it was acknowledged that prices were generally higher than at supermarkets in the community.

It would seem that buying produce from the Department's prison farm was costing the prison more, not less, and not providing value for money for the system, or the women. Comparatively, chicken and fish, sourced through private providers, was very reasonably priced. We accept that there are many other system wide benefits from having prison farms and internal food production capacity, but individual prisons should not be expected to pay above reasonable market rates for such produce.

We heard different views about the costs from different groups of staff and residents. Those who pooled their budgets and were experienced in budgeting and life skills said that if you planned menus you could afford red meat several times a week. Also, those houses with the maximum number of residents found the increases easier to manage than those with fewer numbers.

Boronia management informed us that in light of the price increases, and in line with normal practice to increase budgets with CPI, the residents' meal budgets would be increasing. We will continue to monitor this situation at Boronia to assess the impact of this.

Residents were able to purchase personal items from the supermarket too. There was a large range of items available, at reasonable cost. The resident pre-inspection survey rating for the shop service remains high and has even improved since 2018. On this occasion 82 per cent of residents rated their experience as 'good', an increase from 78 per cent last time.

4.4 SOCIAL CONTACT

Still an excellent visits experience

In 2018 we reported positively on Boronia's excellent visits experience for residents, family and friends (OICS, 2018). Eighty-five per cent of residents who responded to our pre-inspection survey said their visitors are treated well at Boronia.

The visits experience at Boronia remains excellent. Social visits occur at the weekend and run for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon and residents are responsible for booking in their guests. These visits take place in the café, a bright, pleasant environment, overlooking Boronia's lovely, manicured gardens and a naturescape playground.

Residents could purchase a range of sweet and savoury refreshments from the café to share with their visitors. They could also purchase barista made coffee prepared by residents who had completed the barista training course.

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The visit session we observed was relaxed and friendly. Staff were present but remained unobtrusive. Residents had opportunities to connect with their children which were an essential part of residents' reintegration journeys.

The only negative finding relating to social visits at Boronia was that the naturescape playground and external café/visits area was off-limits due to COVID restrictions. We were disappointed that these areas were closed. This was not consistent with community standards – playgrounds and al fresco dining areas in the community had been open for some time. We could not understand why the Department was still insisting that these areas remained a COVID risk at Boronia, when this was clearly not the case in the community.

E- visits and reduced phone call costs have lessened isolation from family

Sixty-two per cent of respondents to our survey said it was easy to contact family through e-visits. Three e-visit terminals were introduced in March 2020 as social visits were cancelled because of COVID. This was an important and timely response to the risk of social isolation that we know undermines wellbeing. Women could enjoy two 20 to 30 minute e-visits per week. For residents who did not have local supports or social visitors, this opportunity has been especially meaningful. It also delivers upon an OICS recommendation dating back to 2012 (OICS, 2012, p. 38, Recommendation 13).

As part of the Department's COVID response, the price of phone calls had been fixed. This opened up even more opportunities to contact friends and family, regardless of whether it was a landline, mobile or international call. Residents were grateful for this. Women also appreciated having free phone calls when COVID restrictions were in full force in 2020.

Chapter 5

HEALTH AND SUPPORT

5.1 HEALTH SERVICES

Resident satisfaction with health services had increased

Results from our pre-inspection resident survey showed an increase in satisfaction levels among residents relating to health services. In 2018, 78 per cent said they thought general health services were 'good'. This was up to 83 per cent in 2021.

Residents were also more satisfied with access to medical specialists, dental care and psychiatric care than they had been three years ago.

A strong team and good processes

We found health services provided by a strong, stable team. The team comprised a clinical lead, two part-time nurses, and a full-time medical receptionist. Daily staffing included the clinical lead nurse and one nurse. We heard that this staffing level was sufficient for the day-to-day operations of the health centre.

The health centre is run along a community health practice model. Residents take responsibility for booking their own health appointments – by telephone – just as they would do in the community. The Medical Receptionist books the appointments with the nurses, most often for the same day.



Photo 24: Waiting area in the health centre

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Photo 25: Consulting room in the health centre

Health services were up to date with all their required management plans, care plans and annual screenings. Each nurse had responsibility for a health portfolio, including women's health, blood borne viruses and chronic diseases. Residents managed under a plan were well looked after, and all follow-up work was completed on time.

A GP attended the site once a week which we were told is enough to meet current demand. Health services like podiatry, optometry and physiotherapy also attended as needed when the demand for these warranted a practitioner coming in.

The model of health care, while not the best fit, was working well

We have always been of the view that health services at Boronia should be managed by health staff at Boronia, rather than by health staff at Bandyup Women's Prison which is the current situation. We formalised these concerns in a recommendation in 2018 that 'health services at Boronia should be managed by Boronia' (OICS, 2018, p. 38, Recommendation 7).

The rationale for the recommendation was that the two models of healthcare between the two sites were so completely different that the risk of having them managed centrally is high. It means that the one that generates the most urgency and highest need, being Bandyup, will be the one that attracts the most resources and time and attention. The Department did not support this view or the recommendation.

We stand by the argument that Boronia's health centre should be self managed. But we also note that this seemed to be less of an issue on site in 2021 than it was in 2018. There have been changes and movements in the nursing staff across both sites and some of the intensity

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and stressors have reduced. The Clinical Nurse Manager (CNM) at Bandyup has been away for an extended period. The substantively appointed Clinical Lead to Boronia has been acting in this position at Bandyup, and the nurse acting in the Boronia Clinical Lead position has been at Boronia since it opened. We found that the current approach to managing health services is well-aligned with Boronia's philosophy.

Despite the acting arrangements for the past 12 months, the health team at Boronia had managed to retain stability and permanence. The acting Clinical Lead at Boronia has extensive experience, so was well-positioned to lead the team through the transition. In the 12 months in this position, she had managed to secure a stable nursing team, including a pool of regular casual nurses to draw from.

There were some gaps in the service

We did find some gaps in the health service at Boronia. Filling these would transform Boronia's health service from good to outstanding. This depends on investing additional resources in the health team on site rather than expecting the current resources to fill these gaps.

The team was time and resource poor when it comes to health promotion. They acknowledged that more could be done in this space if they had the capacity. They do what they can to raise awareness among residents about various health issues. So, for example, they have regular commitments with the Asthma Foundation and also stopping smoking initiatives. They have also participated in breast screening awareness campaigns and information sessions on diabetes.

Boronia's residents are preparing for reintegration. This is the perfect opportunity to flood the site with information about how to look after their health. The health team need more resources to be able to do this more effectively.

Another gap we noticed was the lack of an Aboriginal health worker. This would be a good fit for the health team and services at Boronia, and a valuable resource for the Aboriginal residents. We think that even a part-time Aboriginal health worker position should be secured in the health team at Boronia.

Recommendation 7

Increase resources and supports for health services at Boronia to engage more health promotion activities.

Recommendation 8

Establish a part-time Aboriginal health worker position.

HEALTH AND SUPPORT

5.2 KEEPING PHYSICALLY AND SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY

An engaged and responsive recreation program

The recreation program at Boronia was dynamic. It changed depending on the residents' needs and preferences. This was an appropriate model of recreation for Boronia. A committed and motivated recreation officer had been in place since shortly before the 2018 inspection. She had developed the recreation program to accommodate most residents' preferences, with a focus on inclusiveness.

The recreation program at Boronia is different to that in place at other prisons. The regime at Boronia keeps the women busy, and so recreation is something they need to fit into their day when they have time, just like it is for the rest of the community. The recreation officer understood that having a very structured, organised recreation program in place may not be an appropriate model for Boronia's residents. The model in place at Boronia was more flexible and responsive, allowing residents to opt in and out as their needs required. This was good practice for a reintegration facility.

The on-site gym was in great condition. Proper gym flooring was due to be installed and it had been re-painted. There was also new equipment. In the surveys, 94 per cent of the residents who responded said the gym was 'good'.



Photo 26: The gym was in good condition

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Photo 27: Adequate supply and variety of gym equipment

There was a lot of energy to continue to improve the recreation possibilities at Boronia. To this end, custom-made racking had been purchased to be installed in the external area adjacent to the gym thereby expanding the gym area and including different exercise options. This was purchased in July 2018. As of May 2021, this rig was still stored in boxes in a shed, and had not been installed. This was not due to a lack of motivation, but was rather due to availability of resources to get it installed.

The maintenance VSO is the position to process these work orders. But the pressing maintenance issues that need addressing across the site take precedence, and he and his team did not have any spare capacity. Chapter 4 includes a recommendation to address these maintenance issues, which should free up the on-site maintenance team to tend to jobs like installing the rig for the gym.

Some activities had stopped

Restrictions that had been put in place state-wide to try and manage the coronavirus pandemic impacted the community-based recreation activities available at Boronia. In particular, the walking program which allowed eligible residents to leave the centre, escorted by the recreation officer, for walks through the neighbouring suburbs before and after work.

We understand that these restrictions were in place for good reasons – community safety in the immediate term and a view to managing and controlling the virus in the long term. But the restrictions were in place at Boronia far longer than they were in the community.

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When everyone else in the neighbourhood was out and about walking and enjoying the parks and communal areas, Boronia's residents were still not allowed to leave for a short walk around the neighbourhood.

We could not understand why the Department's COVID-19 restrictions were so different to the rest of the community. We think this has been detrimental to Boronia's residents who have missed out on valuable reintegration opportunities by not being allowed to participate in community-based activities.

Approvals for this and all other external activities came through from head office while we were on site for the inspection. This exciting news was very well received by staff and residents. We expect to see the community recreation program at Boronia back up and walking soon.

Chaplains continued to provide strong spiritual support

Resident perceptions about the freedoms they feel they have to practise their religion at Boronia had improved. In 2018 only 34 per cent felt they were able to practise their religion. This was up to 51 per cent in 2021. And 74 per cent of respondents said they would go to a chaplain for support if they needed it.

The facility is serviced by a stable, experienced, committed team of three chaplains of different faiths. Each chaplain attends on a different day of the week, and one attends each Sunday to provide a weekly faith service.

The service had been severely disrupted by the COVID restrictions in place. These were more stringent, and in place for longer, than those the chaplains experienced in their other work locations, including aged care residences. Boronia residents said they felt this reduction in support keenly during what was a difficult and anxious time. The chaplains concurred, saying that supports for the Boronia residents overall need to be consistent given the trauma many of them have experienced.



Photo 28: The spiritual centre

5.3 SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS

Missed opportunities to develop essential life skills

We found a marked gap in the provision of dedicated and targeted life skills development for residents. While some were self-sufficient, and did not need any assistance, others were struggling.

The issues we raised in an earlier chapter (see Chapter 4) provide a good context for this finding. The increase in meat prices had made it difficult for residents to manage their household budgets and include meat in their regular shops as they had been able to do before the price rise. Those women with strong skills and experience in budgeting and meal planning were able to find creative solutions around this. Those who lacked these skills found it difficult to manage.

Most women highly valued the ability to self-cater. However, feedback from some residents was that this proved challenging for women who did not have the experience from their lives outside prison to manage this. This led to conflict in some households and some residents preferring not to share responsibilities in their houses because of the perceived inequity they felt between those who could manage and did all the work and those who could not.

We acknowledge that there are some processes in place that facilitate a level of basic knowledge and skill in this area. One is the requirement for all residents arriving at Boronia to work in the kitchen for a period of time. Here they are taught the minimum standards

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for preparing food safely, which they will need to self cater in their own houses. And mothers with resident children had to complete a mandatory course in food and nutrition, necessary for them to make good food choices for their children within a budget.

The kitchen staff, supported by unit officers, were proactive in monitoring how residents were coping with meal preparation and the cleanliness of the living spaces. But this was in addition to their usual duties and at times was a casual observation rather than a formal inspection.

We think Boronia missed an opportunity to specifically teach residents valuable life skills, that would increase their chances of succeeding in their reintegration journey. As a pre-release centre, with self-empowerment, personal responsibility and reintegration as its guiding philosophy, providing basic life skills should be a fundamental component of the regime. To this end, we think a specific resource is required dedicated for this purpose.

Recommendation 9

Create and fill a Life Skills Officer (VSO) position to provide structured support and education in basic life skills including nutrition, food preparation and budgeting.

5.4 SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL RESIDENTS

A supportive environment

Boronia has maintained an Aboriginal representation rate of around 20 per cent over the past couple of inspections. While this is still below the representation rate of Aboriginal women at other female prisons (Bandyup for example has been as high as 45%), we did think that Boronia was working hard to engage with the Aboriginal residents there, and to increase its appeal to the broader female estate.

The overall feel from the Aboriginal residents about being at Boronia was positive. Responses to our pre-inspection survey also reflect this. Sixty-three per cent of respondents said they think staff understand their culture, up from 44 per cent in 2018. And 62 per cent thought their culture was respected by staff, an increase from 45 per cent in 2018.

Women reported supportive relationships with staff and their belief that staff wanted the Noongar women to do well. This is positive. Of staff respondents, 86 per cent thought there was generally good respect for and recognition of culture. Sixty per cent of all staff respondents thought they had received adequate cultural awareness training.

Good initiatives in place to engage Aboriginal women

We heard of several programs and initiatives to help residents engage with culture and tradition, and to strengthen their communities. This is important if Boronia is to continue to strive to be a more effective placement for Aboriginal women.

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One of these programs was the National Empowerment Program (NEP). This commenced during the week of our on-site inspection. It aims to promote wellbeing and resilience for Aboriginal women, their families and communities, reduce psychological distress and build strong relationships within their communities. The residents chosen to participate in this program were very keen to be involved. Even after only one session, one resident told us that she now understood the importance of finding her voice. And most importantly, she believed this was achievable and would bring benefits to her upon release.

There were other programs for Aboriginal women that showed Boronia's commitment to supporting and improving outcomes for these women. There was a family safety workshop delivered by Langford Aboriginal Association and Relationships Australia, the learnings from which will guide programs, services and policy relating to increasing safety for Aboriginal families. The Noongar Boodja Language Program started in November 2020 and ran for five weeks as part of the Aboriginal Languages in Custody program. Women and staff learned Noongar language and participants grew their understanding of their family tree.

Strong cultural and community connections should be strengthened

There were some aspects that could be strengthened for Boronia to position itself as a truly safe cultural space for Aboriginal women. For example, we heard that the meeting place and the fire pit were rarely used. This area is of great cultural significance. Around the fire is where yarning, grieving, sorry time and healing takes place. We thought that the area would be much better utilised if it was more appropriately designed, in line with a specifically Aboriginal women's perspective. The fire could be used by Aboriginal residents to make traditional food. And perhaps residents could be involved in the design and landscaping around the area in line with the Aboriginal seasons at different times of the year.



Photo 29: The cultural space

HEALTH AND SUPPORT

We also heard that the elders' yarning program had struggled to re-secure funding for the current financial year. We understand that this has finally come through, but not without lengthy delays and uncertainty. And the Aboriginal Visitor Service (AVS) visitor had not attended Boronia since August 2020.

Positively, many Noongar women reported that strong family and peer networks helped them through stages of their imprisonment and were an important source of information, emotional support and comfort. But this support should not replace appropriately funded services.

The out of country women, however, did not have these family networks to draw upon. Women told us they missed out on contact with family. We learned that out of country women could not wholeheartedly engage with the opportunities available at Boronia because they felt so preoccupied with what was happening with their family thousands of kilometres away. Their hearts and minds were elsewhere. We present this challenge to Boronia – what can they do to ensure that out of country women are fully supported to engage with and participate in the opportunities there?

Recommendation 10

Implement programs to engage Aboriginal women and which reflect the diversity of the Aboriginal women residing at Boronia.

5.5 SUPPORTING FOREIGN NATIONAL RESIDENTS

More could be done to create an inclusive, multi-cultural environment

Boronia has a multi-cultural population. Twelve per cent of respondents to our pre- inspection survey identified as foreign nationals. Some women were permanent residents and others were Australian citizens. Their countries of origin included New Zealand, China, Vietnam, England, Poland, Macedonia and the African continent. Several women lived interstate.

Women who had been in prison for some time, told us that they would feel comforted by having something familiar in their environment such as culturally specific foods and flavours, films, and books. Although we understand that some consultation has occurred about food preferences, canteen items and celebration days, we heard that progress is slow. Women said there were limited library resources in Asian languages and that the supply wasn't regularly refreshed. They missed being able to read newspapers in their language on a regular basis.

As most of the group were fluent English speakers, none of the women experienced difficulties in understanding expectations or information about Boronia. However, they advised that there had not been an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher for some time and that women with limited English had relied upon peer tutors to grow their skills and confidence. More positively, health centre staff were clear that it was inappropriate for other residents to interpret during medical consultations and an interpreting service was advertised at reception.

Chapter 6

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

6.1 MOTHERS AND RESIDENT CHILDREN

Boronia gave mums and babies a place to call home

Mothers with children under four years of age can apply to have their child reside with them. Boronia offers appropriate accommodation for this purpose. The opportunity for mothers to have their young children reside with them at Boronia is one of its key reintegration strategies.

Currently, this accommodation is in the form of three houses at one end of the site. The houses surround a grassed, children's play area, and are separated from other houses by a gate.



Photo 30: The nursery houses and children's play area

There was space for six mums, two per house, to care for and parent their child. This is well aligned with Boronia's commitment to family, personal responsibility and empowerment. The canteen stocked an appropriate quantity and variety of items for children, and mums received child care entitlements as they would in the community. At the time of the inspection there were six resident mums on site with their children. We understand that Boronia is looking at how to expand their services to include an additional five mums, which may include dedicating two additional homes to the nursery area.

The Manager, Family and Community Services position was a valuable resource

The Manager, Family and Community Services (MFCS) is a position on the senior management team tasked with managing mothers with resident children on site, as well as working with mothers generally to assist them in reconnecting with their children and/or maintaining

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mother/children connections. We had called for stronger engagement between the MFCS and resident mothers back in 2015 and were pleased to find this in place when we returned to inspect the facility in 2018.

This situation continued into 2021. The MFCS continued to have a positive impact on mums and children. We heard from resident mums that the MFCS was dedicated, compassionate and a key partner in their parenting journey. They met with her monthly to discuss their options and to identify any gaps or needs they may have. She coordinated regular meetings of the local childcare committee to keep track of upcoming approvals for residential placement at the centre as well as monitoring progress of current mothers and resident children. The processes in place around this aspect of Boronia's operations were robust and comprehensive.

But the resource was stretched and not backfilled when on leave

We thought that the MFCS position was stretched. The position holder was responsible for tasks over and above the already challenging strategic and operational responsibilities of the role. She invested a lot of time and effort into fundraising initiatives to secure crucial funding for various programs, in particular parenting programs. This should be a core part of Boronia's budget as a pre-release centre, rather than something that needs to be separately funded from outside the Department.

There is a risk that comes with relying upon one person to deliver so much. And that played out during a period of planned personal leave when the MFCS position was not backfilled. Despite providing ample lead time to implement processes to find a temporary replacement, these were not successful, and the position remained empty for months.

Her absence was keenly felt by the mothers with resident children, as well as more generally by the women she was supporting on their parenting journeys. Women told us that things were 'hectic and overwhelming' in her absence. They missed her expertise and support. Residents who arrived at the facility during her absence reported gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the Boronia's opportunities as a pre-release centre, and felt isolated and vulnerable.

We acknowledge that some staff undertook some of the responsibilities of this position, and this was valuable. But there were too many gaps over an extended time. Childcare management committee meetings were impacted and leave and visit applications were not consistently processed. Women in contact with the Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support had to negotiate with their caseworkers without the support and advocacy of the MFCS, including attending safety planning and reunification meetings. These were not good outcomes for mothers and their children.

Recommendation 11

In future ensure key positions like the MFCS are appropriately backfilled over periods of planned leave.

6.2 MAINTAINING PARENTAL CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for mums to enjoy quality time with teenagers were lacking

It is not just mums and babies that need time together to grow their relationships with their children. Many women, including residents who had spent several years in prison, reported that their connections with their teenagers were not as strong as they hoped. The social visit sessions were not ideal opportunities to reconnect with teens – they did not afford the privacy needed to discuss sensitive, personal matters relevant for teenagers. Women said they needed one-on-one time with their adolescent children, which was not available at Boronia.

Teenagers are not eligible for day or overnight stays. The homework club had discontinued some time ago but was reported as an important time for women to contribute to their teenager's life. There had been a Big Kids Christmas party in 2020 and YMCA ran a one day per week vacation care program for older children, but these didn't cater for older teenagers.

The MFCS did mention some initiatives that were in train to increase opportunities for engagement and connection between teens and their mums in Boronia. One of these was the 'Family Together House', a place where mums and teens could spend time together in the afternoons and do activities together, like cooking and homework. Use of this facility depended on a few factors, the primary one being the reinstatement of the section 95 program.

There were gaps in the provision of parenting and related support programs

In 2018 we recommended that the Department 'restore funding to parenting and other related programs and services to enhance connection to children and families' (OICS, 2018, p. 33, Recommendation 6). We had found that, following a change in contract and service providers some programs had dropped out of the contracted services and parenting support programs at Bandyup and Boronia were among the casualties.

In 2021, we were told that the Department now funds some parenting and family support services through the Wungening led consortium. But the range of funded programs was limited, and several mums on site at the time of the inspection said they had already completed them before arriving at Boronia. This meant they weren't eligible to join in which was disappointing.

To fill these gaps, Boronia's MFCS has continued to build community partnerships to source alternative additional programs. YMCA is providing \$140,000 in kind support and runs a weekly playgroup and a Mums and Bubs yoga/nutrition group, in addition to school holiday activities. Communicare visit bi-monthly and deliver parenting life skills. Royal Life Saving WA has delivered a drowning prevention program and were scheduled to deliver a child resuscitation course in June 2021. Life Care Dental have also delivered several child dental health workshops.

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Mums provided strong praise for the quality of some programs, and identified how their participation would strengthen their parenting skills and resources. But we also heard that some of the content delivered wasn't necessarily what women wanted and needed. It is commendable that Boronia has tried to fill spaces and bring in programs. But we were concerned about the reliance on an ad hoc approach based on funding submissions by the MFCS and, to a degree, the goodwill of community agencies. A more robust, quality assured approach is needed.

Recommendation 12

Source and fund a suite of family/parenting programs suitable for the needs of Boronia's residents.

6.3 MAINTAINING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Mums and bubs have missed out on connecting with their communities.

Last inspection, we recommended an expansion of unsupervised section 95 opportunities to improve the reintegration benefits for mums and resident children. It was hoped this would allow mums to leave the centre without escort and to involve themselves with community-based activities such as attending their children's medical appointments, taking them for swimming lessons, taking them on social outings, and participating in mothers' groups.

We acknowledge that some progress was made in this area. After considerable effort on the part of Boronia's senior management, women and resident children were provided with opportunities to leave the centre for activities with their children, including swimming. Unfortunately, the pandemic put a stop to these initiatives in early 2020, and they are yet to recommence.

The pandemic was responsible for more than just stopping swimming lessons. The restriction on movement in and out of the centre affected all movements, including the opportunity for resident mums to sign their children out to the nominated external carer to spend time with siblings, the other parent and grandparents in the community.

These concerns should be resolved as external movements restart. The MFCS had already identified a range of opportunities which mirror opportunities and responsibilities a mum has in the community. These included attending day care, trips to the hairdressers, participating in the YMCA community-based play group, trips to the zoo, as well as resuming swimming. Once a resident has completed 10 supervised activities, she can be risk assessed for unsupervised section 95 activities. At the earliest opportunity, mums should be supported to work through this process so that they have experiences to grow their self-esteem as a parent, to deepen their bond with their child and opportunities to form connections with their community networks.

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The MFCS had introduced an important post-release safety initiative

Boronia has partnered with the family violence team at a local police station, and introduced a 'Police Prison Release Initiative'. This is a pilot program that involves police visiting the facility to provide information sessions and meet with women who may be vulnerable to further domestic violence upon release. Some residents had experienced family violence at the hands of family they would be returning to. Some residents had Family Violence Restraining Orders out against family members who had been violent towards them. These residents were extremely concerned and anxious about their personal safety and that of their children when they move back into these communities. The police prison program aimed to manage this anxiety by offering information to residents prior to release, and sourcing supports for them following release. This was a valuable and potentially life-saving initiative.

Chapter 7

REHABILITATION AND REPARATION

7.1 CASE MANAGEMENT

Boronia was moving towards more meaningful case management

Case management refers to the relationship between a custodial officer and prisoner (resident at Boronia) that supports the resident through their prison sentence, making sure they achieve the obligations set out in their individual case management plans, and sets them up for successful reintegration. Officers are assigned a number of residents in their case management portfolio, and they need to maintain a level of contact with these residents, subject to the relevant Departmental policy requirements.

Boronia is a small site. This gives it some advantages over other facilities when it comes to case management. Boronia's staff have more interaction with and better knowledge of individual residents. Each custodial officer has a case load of three to four residents, and they are required to write a variety of assessment reports for those residents, a task that is completed at larger facilities by a team of assessment writers. As a result, custodial staff at Boronia tend to be more engaged in case management of residents.

Boronia was meeting contact reporting requirements as specified in the Department's case management policy. However, we have repeatedly stated that the Department's case management model offers limited value. Contact between the case officer and prisoner is too infrequent, meaning there is no real contribution to prisoner welfare or preparation for release.

In our 2015 inspection report, we recommended that the Department:

Pilot an integrated and individualised case management system at Boronia Pre-release Centre which is inclusive of all residents, commences on the resident's orientation to the centre, and engages re-entry providers at the earliest possible juncture (OICS, 2015, p. 45).

During our subsequent inspection of Boronia in 2018, we noted that the centre had still not implemented a more comprehensive case management model. We said this was a missed opportunity (OICS, 2018, pp. 25–27).

In 2021, we were pleased to find signs of progress towards more meaningful case management. Key to this progress was the appointment of a new Senior Officer Assessment and Case Management (SO ACM). She was recruited from outside the prison system in August 2018, and brought a fresh perspective on case management. She had driven a more holistic and integrated approach, including the creation of a multi-disciplinary team consisting of the SO ACM, Transitional Manager (TM), and Employment Coordinator (EC). These three staff members are co-located in one office which is now called the 'Transitional Hub'. Residents need to book appointments to meet with staff in the transitional hub. That said, they do have an open-door policy too, which has increased residents' access to these staff and services.

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Case conferences at Boronia involve all members of this team, an Assistant Superintendent and the resident. The involvement of the TM and EC is unique to Boronia and reflects the commitment to each resident's reintegration needs, which is ultimately Boronia's primary purpose.

Unstable staffing threatened progress in case management

The SO ACM was seconded into a Senior Project Officer role in head office in September 2020. This was initially a six-week secondment but she was into her eighth month in that role at the time of our inspection. The position had been backfilled and, while the acting SO ACM was doing a good job, progress had slowed without the vision and leadership provided by the substantive SO ACM.

The TM had played a key role in the multi-disciplinary team, supported the new initiatives of the SO ACM, and continued to drive these. However, during our inspection, the TM also transferred out of Boronia to cover a vacancy at another prison and her replacement was new to Boronia's unique philosophy. So the Transitional Hub was itself in a period of transition.

Ideally, processes in any area should be robust enough to survive a personnel change. However, we were concerned that processes around case management were not yet sufficiently formed to allow for this. Boronia's managers will need to monitor and support this area closely to maintain momentum and ensure continued progress.

7.2 EDUCATION

Unstable staffing and COVID-19 restrictions had impacted on education

Like many services at Boronia and across the prison system, delivery of education had been affected by COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 and again by the brief lockdown in April 2021. The restrictions had impacted on residents' access to the education centre, which had been fairly free in pre-COVID times. Further, movements into and out of the facility were restricted as per Departmental COVID-related policy and so external tutors and trainers could not attend Boronia to facilitate their courses. At the time of our inspection, services were returning to normal, but there were still some courses that were previously offered that had yet to be re-established.

The education centre at Boronia had also been affected by high staff turnover since mid-2020. This had clearly impacted on the centre's capacity to recover quickly from the instability generated by COVID-19 restrictions. There are only two permanent education positions at Boronia – Campus Manager and Prison Education Coordinator (PEC). Both had been vacated and filled by a succession of acting appointments over the preceding 12 months. The education centre also employed five casual tutors, and staff from external training organisations attended regularly to teach certain courses. The centre relies heavily on the two permanent positions to coordinate services delivered by the tutors and external service providers.

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The lack of consistent permanent staffing had been challenging and frustrating for service providers, and for residents. The frequent staff turnover meant that a lot of corporate knowledge was lost, and getting courses back up and running was difficult. Residents and service providers felt that the temporary, short-term staff had less knowledge of, and were less committed to, the students.

Positively, this period of instability was coming to an end. A permanent Campus Manager had been appointed one month before our inspection, and the PEC position had an appointment pending. We were confident that this would bring an opportunity to consolidate and build on an education program that was still strong despite the challenges.

Resident engagement in education and training remained high

Sixty-one out of 84 women (72%) were enrolled in some form of education. This included 15 out of 19 Aboriginal women (79%). These figures were slightly lower than 2018 levels when 77 out of 92 (84%) were in education, including 15 out of 18 Aboriginal women (83%). However, the numbers were still high, particularly considering the difficult staffing and COVID-related challenges the education centre had experienced in the preceding 12 to 18 months.

There remained strong links between education and industries, reflected in a consistently high number of traineeships being completed. At the time of the inspection, there were 11 trainees spread across work sites in horticulture, cleaning, the kitchen and the supermarket. Another 17 women at Boronia had already completed a total of 28 traineeships. There is more on this in the section on employment below.

Education services at Boronia had done well to maintain good engagement levels. This was a product of both residents' appetite for education, and the Centre's commitment to rehabilitation. Education must continue to develop its rich and stimulating education program that provide meaningful pathways for successful reintegration.

Lack of internet access hindered tertiary education

The one area where numbers were significantly down was in tertiary education. In 2018, there were 15 tertiary students at Boronia, which was very high and difficult to sustain. In 2021, there were only two tertiary students. Servicing tertiary students in a custodial facility is very resource-intensive, and at Boronia is heavily dependent on the permanent staff, particularly the PEC. With the turnover in these positions, it was not surprising that tertiary student numbers had decreased.

One of the ongoing challenges for education in prison, and particularly tertiary education, is the prohibition on internet access for prisoners. University enrolments, course work, and materials are generally online now. This means that prison education staff are required to manage online enrolments, download course materials, and even conduct online research on behalf of students. This generates a significant workload for education staff and does not provide students with a realistic experience of tertiary study.

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The issue of access to online services and information extends beyond the needs of prisoners wanting to engage in tertiary study or course. The Department has an obligation to ensure that persons in its care have opportunities to develop digital literacy skills. Otherwise all the messages about commitment to rehabilitation are diminished. All of the essential services that prisoners have to rely on for successful reintegration (medical, social, welfare, financial) are now primarily available online, through the Australian government's myGov portal. Without access to this, and knowledge of how it works, people re-entering society are at a significant disadvantage. This is a barrier to successful reintegration.

There are many options for providing internet access to people in custody in a limited and controlled way. The Department's continuing reluctance to facilitate internet access for people in custody means that prisons are lagging further and further behind the community, making reintegration more difficult. Boronia is one of the lowest risk sites in the state. It houses a minimum-security population, most of whom have been assessed as such low-risk that they can work and participate in community activities. We think that this positions Boronia as an optimal site at which to pilot a system for prisoners to access relevant and appropriate online content in a secure and controlled way.

Recommendation 13

Pilot a system of controlled online access for people in custody at Boronia.

7.3 EMPLOYMENT

Meaningful employment levels remained strong

All residents have a job at Boronia, unless they have just arrived, or are restricted from working due to health concerns. Seventy-eight per cent of residents who completed our pre-inspection survey said their time is spent doing useful activities. And since work is one of the main activities residents engage in, we can infer from this that residents think the work they do at Boronia is useful. This is important in reintegration terms. Finding work in the community that is meaningful to them makes it more likely that they will stay engaged in the work, which increases the prospect of a successful reintegration journey.

The kitchen (29) and the gardens (17) employed the most residents, with smaller groups for cleaning (11) and maintenance (5). There were also eight residents engaged in full-time education.

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Table 2: Number of Boronia residents in each employment area (24 May 2021)

Work Location	Number of residents employed
Kitchen	29
Garden Party	17
Cleaning Party	11
Full-Time Education	8
Mothers with Residential Children	6
Maintenance	5
Not working	5
Library	1
Laundry	1
Miscellaneous	1
TOTAL	84

In our previous inspection report, we observed that the average gratuity paid to residents at Boronia is relatively high (OICS, 2018, pp. 47–48). This remained the case in 2021. Almost three-quarters of residents received Level 1 or 2 gratuities. This is a higher proportion than suggested in the relevant policy (DCS, 2007, p. 4). We regard this as appropriate recognition of the fact that Boronia residents generally carry out more meaningful work, with a higher level of responsibility. Aboriginal residents, who made up 23 per cent of the total population, were adequately represented at the higher pay levels.

Strong links between education, employment and training

Boronia continued to pursue good practice in industries. The centre had an Industries Action Plan 2020–2021, which identified objectives, outcomes, and targets for all resident employment areas.

Industries were strongly linked with education and training, with an impressive range of traineeships available including:

- Gardens – Certificate II and III in Horticulture.
- Kitchen – Certificate II in Kitchen Operations.
- Laundry – Certificate II and III in Laundry Operations.
- Cleaning – Certificate II in Cleaning and Certificate III in Cleaning Operations.
- Supermarket – Certificate II in Retail Services.
- Stores – Certificate II in Warehousing Operations.
- Maintenance – Certificate II in Construction Pathways.

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Photo 31: Most residents have worked in the kitchen at some point



Photo 32: The cafe area

REHABILITATION AND REPARATION

There were 11 residents undertaking traineeships during the inspection. We spoke with several residents who had plans to use the skills and experience they had gained when they were released into the community. Some had already lined up employment in the community with assistance from the Employment Coordinator. This clearly illustrated the value of meaningful employment and vocational training in preparing residents for release.

Our Code of Inspection Standards includes measures around employment that specify that prisoners should engage in work that is purposeful and increases employability on release (OICS, 2020, p. 44). Prisoner employment at Boronia was certainly achieving this standard.

Staff vacancies impacted on the capacity of some industries

Industries are staffed by Vocational and Support Officers (VSOs). Because Boronia is a small facility, the VSO group is also small. There are only seven VSO positions in the various resident employment areas – two Kitchen Officer positions, two Horticultural Officer positions, one Vocational Skills Officer (also known as the Maintenance Officer), one Community Activities Officer (job-shared by two officers), and one Relief Officer. However, one of the Horticultural Officers had applied to become a prison officer and been through the entry-level training program. His position could not be filled until he had completed his training and probationary period. With only one Horticultural Officer left in the centre, there were fewer women working in the gardens.

The Relief Officer also was off work for an indefinite period. As a result, there was limited capacity to cover absences. If a VSO was on leave or redeployed to other duties, it often meant that some residents did not get to work that day. This was frustrating for both staff and residents.

REHABILITATION AND REPARATION

7.4 THE PRISONER EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (PEP)

PEP impacted by COVID-19 and slow approval processes

The Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) allows approved prisoners to engage in paid employment, job seeking activities, or education and training in the six months prior to their release. While this is certainly a worthy objective, we have previously criticised restrictive eligibility criteria and lengthy approvals processes that limit the program. PEP was interrupted throughout 2020 by COVID-19, and the pandemic continued to affect job availability in 2021.

At the time of our inspection, there were four women approved for PEP – two for paid employment, and two for job seeking. However, the paid employment positions that had been lined up fell through because of the economic climate. The employers in question simply could not afford to pay for the positions. There were another 15 applications pending, and the head office approval process continued to be slow.

Residents expressed frustration at a perceived lack of assistance provided to help them find a PEP job. They complained that they were expected to find a job for themselves, which was naturally difficult from inside prison, particularly with no access to online resources. They felt that Boronia should be finding jobs for them.

Boronia does have strong relationships with several large employers, which provide PEP opportunities for some. But if there is no job available within this network, or the work is not suitable for a particular resident, the PEP policy does not make it easy to find a specific job for a specific resident. And the long approval process is a barrier for most employers.

None of this should reflect negatively on Boronia itself and the staff who work in the transitional services area. The problems with PEP are system-wide and require Departmental intervention. Indeed, we found that the Employment Coordinator at Boronia has successfully placed a number of women in employment on release, outside of the PEP program. The Employment Coordinator also provides support to Boronia residents to assist job readiness, including facilitating career guidance services, and help with resume writing.

Chapter 8

PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

8.1 THE TRANSITIONAL SERVICES' TEAM

Strong local systems were in place to support women's pre-release journey

For many women, Boronia is the last stop on the journey to freedom. As a pre-release centre, it has an important role in readying women for their re-entry to the community. To make sure women are prepared for this important last step, systems, programs and opportunities should be available, integrated and differentiated to meet the needs of all women at Boronia. We spoke with staff who contribute to the reintegration journey and we met women whose release was imminent. We learned that Boronia has worked hard to ready women for the transition back to the community and think there are opportunities to do this work even better.

The Transitional Manager (TM) had a central role in identifying and providing tailored supports to each resident. The TM contributed to an integrated case management approach which brought together a range of personnel, each of whom had a discrete contribution to reintegration and pre-release planning. These personnel included the Assistant Superintendent Offender Services (ASOS), the Assistant Superintendent Operations and Security (ASO&S), the Employment Coordinator (EC), the Senior Officer Assessments and Case Management (SO ACM) as well as individual case officers. This is something we have raised previously, and we recommended such in our 2015 inspection report (OICS, 2015, p. 53, Recommendation 6):

Pilot an integrated and individualised case management system at Boronia Pre-release Centre which is inclusive of all residents, commences on the resident's orientation to the centre and engages re-entry providers at the earliest possible juncture.

This is important progress and should be recognised as an example of good practice across the prison estate. Eighty-one per cent of staff respondents to our pre-inspection survey thought case management was acceptable.

The TM role was busy, and she offered an open-door policy. She met new residents upon their arrival and again six months prior to their release. She referred all women to re-entry services and encouraged them to stay connected, even if at the time of referral, they couldn't identify any unmet needs. Staff and residents told us that the TM's commitment and dedication to the women was a highlight of the pre-release process. She also completed a range of tasks for residents as they reached pre-release milestones which included:

- opening bank accounts to create financial independence;
- sourcing identification documents such as Medicare cards and birth certificates;
- arranging driving lessons; and
- referring to support services like drug and alcohol programs and financial counselling.

Instability in the TM role was of concern

At the time of the inspection we heard that the TM was being moved to another site to cover a vacancy there. We were concerned about the instability this may cause for the residents at Boronia. The TM had developed trust and rapport with the residents which supports trauma informed working. Her transfer was a loss for the women at Boronia.

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We understand that the position was in a state of flux during the inspection. We were told the replacement TM would be part-time at Boronia, a shared resource with another prison. Then we were told that the position would in fact be full-time, but still temporarily filled, until the substantive recruitment process was completed. We hope that the interim measures in place will be effective and we will continue to monitor Boronia's resourcing for this key pre-release function.

8.2 CONTRACTED RE-ENTRY SERVICES

Contracted re-entry services were well-engaged, but there were still some gaps

In 2018, the re-entry support contract for metropolitan prisons passed from Outcare to the ReSet consortium, comprising Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, Centrecare, St Bartholomew's House, and the Wirrpanda Foundation. It was too early in the transition phase at the last inspection to make conclusive findings about how the new service was working.

Three years on, we found that re-entry programs were much more entrenched at Boronia. ReSet case workers offered re-entry support to women six months from release and up to 12 months after release. Outcare ran two re-entry programs. The St John of God Women's program was available to all women six months before release and for 12 months after, and the Aboriginal throughcare program was for Aboriginal women in the final three months of their sentence and continued for 12 months post release.

We were told of high levels of collaboration and communication and strong working relationships between Boronia and the re-entry providers. ReSet caseworkers provided weekly updates to Boronia management, giving an overview of the supports they were providing, and women told us they had regular support from experienced and dedicated caseworkers. Women generally felt that they could make choices and lead their reintegration journey.

We did find some gaps in re-entry opportunities though. ReSet services were metro-based, and we learned that there weren't always regional service providers to which residents could be referred if they were returning to communities outside of the metro area. This was a risk to these residents' successful reintegration.

Accommodation was a real worry for many women pre-release. While some residents had families to return to, other women didn't and looked to ReSet to find them safe and stable housing. We have heard from ReSet at several facilities that there are not enough properties to meet the demand. Securing accommodation on release is a requirement for parole approval. The uncertainty about finding a stable place to live on release exacerbated residents' anxiety, and threatened to derail their prospects of successful reintegration.

Recommendation 14

The Department of Justice establish partnerships with relevant agencies to increase the range of accommodation options for people leaving prison.

PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

Programs addressing basic life skills were not included within the suite of re-entry services provided. Some residents needed more support than others in this area to feel empowered and confident upon release. Some residents may struggle to manage skills many of us take for granted like hygiene, meal planning and preparation, budgeting and so on. Boronia presents a valuable opportunity to teach these skills to those residents in need, before they are released. This should be an integral pre-release service. A dedicated life skills officer position would fill this gap, and we have made a recommendation about this in Chapter 5.

8.3 THE SECTION 95 PROGRAM

Expansion of community activities had been limited by COVID-19

Section 95 of the *Prisons Act 1981* (WA) provides for prisoners to participate in activities in the community. This is typically used in minimum-security prisons to allow prisoners to engage in community activities such as sport, employment, and education that increase their readiness to reintegrate into the community.

This should be a key feature of a pre-release centre like Boronia. However, in multiple previous inspection reports we have identified this as a missed opportunity at Boronia and made recommendations to expand section 95 activities (OICS, 2009, p. 25, Recommendation 4) (OICS, 2012, p. 3, Recommendation 10) (OICS, 2015, p. 18, Recommendation 2).

In our 2018 inspection, we again found that there were too few residents involved in community activities, and the range of activities was too limited. In particular, we saw scope for more residents to take part in unsupervised section 95 activities, and we made a recommendation to '[i]ncrease resident participation in unsupervised community work and other activities' (OICS, 2018, p. 7, Recommendation 1). We also made a separate recommendation to '[a]pprove mothers with resident children at Boronia for unsupervised section 95 activities' (OICS, 2018, p. 32, Recommendation 5).

In the three years since the 2018 inspection, there were signs of an appetite to increase section 95 activities at Boronia, including unsupervised activities. For example, mothers were approved to take their residential children to swimming lessons and day care in the community. However, progress in this area was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all section 95 activities ceased from April 2020 based on risk assessments of each activity. It was not until March 2021 that the section 95 team returned to work one day a week at not-for-profit organisations in the community. And it was not until mid-May 2021, during our inspection, that Boronia received clearance from head office to restart the full range of section 95 activities. Even then, all sites and activities needed to be reviewed before final approval to resume.

Given that community living was close to normal much earlier than this, we found it difficult to understand why it had taken so long for the section 95 community-based program to resume at Boronia. We understand that the community agencies that residents attend as part of the section 95 work program had their own COVID restrictions in place that prevented the women from returning to these workplaces. But we don't understand

PREPARATION FOR RELEASE

why activities like the community walking program had not recommenced for so long. This program allowed approved residents to leave the centre, with the Recreation Officer, for early morning (and, in the past, late afternoon) walks through the surrounding suburbs. These walks were low risk in terms of COVID-19 and could easily meet the social distancing guidelines required.

We were pleased when approval came through, during our inspection, for the section 95 program to recommence. But we do think that the lack of access to community activities had hindered reintegration efforts significantly during that time.

8.4 THE 'REINTEGRATION THROUGH VOLUNTEERING' PROGRAM

An inward-looking program that needs to look outwards

In 2018 we found that the reintegration through volunteering strategy was innovative and unique to Boronia (OICS, 2018). It aimed to connect women with volunteer opportunities at the facility and to link residents with community organisations where they could volunteer upon release. It could help women move beyond their trauma in forging new connections and learning new skills, growing self-esteem and confidence. This approach was thought to have strong reintegration potential.

The program was coordinated by the Volunteer Coordinator, a position that was funded for three days a week. Residents chose to volunteer for on-site activities or to make craft items to sell or to donate to charitable causes, for example, beanies for the homeless and jackets for babies in hospital. Boronia's trademark, annual gala day, was a key event in the volunteering program. The voluntary participation of most of the residents in this event was not only crucial for its success, it also provided valuable opportunities for the residents to make connections with external agencies, which could be useful on release. It was an important restorative justice initiative.

The volunteer program at Boronia mirrored community-based volunteering programs. Residents signed job descriptions and logged their volunteering hours. In February 2021, 24 residents completed 300 hours of volunteering, and in March, 23 residents completed 228 hours. This is a significant contribution of time and effort by the residents.

With the resumption of section 95 opportunities, an outward looking approach is now required to connect women with community organisations. Having residents leave the facility, take public transport and volunteer within and for their community, could have strong reintegrative benefits and should be a focus going forward.

Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

ABBREVIATIONS

AVS	Aboriginal Visitor Scheme
ARMS	At-risk Management System
ASOS	Assistant Superintendent Offender Services
ASO&S	Assistant Superintendent Operations and Security
CNM	Clinical Nurse Manager
COPP	Commissioner's Operating Policies and Procedures
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DOJ	Department of Justice
EC	Employment Coordinator
GP	General Practitioner
MFCS	Manager, Family and Community Services
NEP	National Empowerment Program
OICS	Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services
PEC	Prison Education Coordinator
PEP	Prisoner Employment Program
PO	Principal Officer
PHS	Psychological Health Services
PRAG	Prisoner Risk Assessment Group
SO	Senior Officer
SO ACM	Senior Officer Assessment and Case Management
TM	Transitional Manager
VSO	Vocational Support Officer

Appendix 3

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RESPONSE



Response to OICS Draft Report:

2021 Inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women

November 2021

Version 1.2

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE RESPONSE

Response to OICS Draft Report:
2021 Inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women

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Response Overview

Introduction

On 18 January 2021, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) announced its inspection of Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women (Boronia) scheduled to occur from 23 to 27 May 2021. This was the sixth inspection of Boronia with inspections occurring every three years since 2006.

To facilitate the inspection, the Department of Justice (the Department) provided a wide range of documentation, access to systems, policies, processes, the facility, staff and prisoners. Contractors were also made available to OICS upon request for the purpose of the inspection.

On 7 October 2021, the Department received a draft report of the inspection from OICS for review and comment. The draft report has highlighted key findings and made 14 recommendations. The Department has reviewed the draft report and provides further context, comments, and responses to the recommendations as below.

Appendix A contains further comments linked to sections in the report for the Inspector's attention and consideration when finalising the report.

Review Comments

The Department is appreciative of the opportunity to respond to the key findings within the 2021 Inspection of Boronia.

It is pleasing to note the comments made by staff and residents at Boronia reflects the Department's view that Boronia provides a safe environment for the women and that staff and residents 'mostly' or 'always' felt safe. The proactive engagement and mutually respectful relationships between staff and residents have resulted in residents stating that they would approach uniformed staff if they needed help or support which is encouraging.

Boronia is a unique facility that operates on the principles of personal, family and community responsibilities building respect and integrity when preparing women for reintegration into their communities. Boronia thrives on community engagement and reintegration services provided by community service providers.

The Inspector acknowledged the good work undertaken at Boronia's mothers and babies' accommodation, a place the mothers and babies can call home at Boronia through accommodation in the form of three houses. Currently, six mothers, two per house, care for and parent their child whilst in the Department's care. A further house has been identified for an additional five mothers / pregnant women and residential children. The mums have access to a variety of items for the children and receive childcare entitlements as they would in the community.

The Inspector noted that, over the last two years, COVID-19 has had a bigger impact on program and service delivery at Boronia compared to the rest of the custodial estate due to its community engagement model and the requirement for community service providers to visit the facility. With the easing of restrictions, visits have been restored and some services resumed. Planning and assessment of further services to re-commence is underway.

Although there have been some changes in the senior management team, the Department is proud to be able to provide existing staff the opportunities to act up and lead through succession planning. The substantive Superintendent had been in the

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position from August 2018 to January 2020 and the Assistant Superintendent Operations and Security (ASO&S) has been acting in the role since January 2020.

As a collective, the senior positions at Boronia are currently occupied by experienced members of the Boronia team who are providing stable leadership for the facility, together with improved supports and communication strategies.

Regarding accommodation upon release, the Department works with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) engaged by service agreements to provide State-wide reintegration services to prisoners. Referrals to reintegration service providers are made on a risk and need basis, and all individuals, including those on remand and short sentences, are eligible for these services. Prisoner engagement with these service providers is entirely voluntary, recognising that not all prisoners want or need referral to reintegration services.

These services are primarily focused on planning for re-entry into the community. Services generally commence while a prisoner is in custody for a period of up to six months and can continue for up to 12 months post release. Service providers deliver tailored, culturally competent reintegration services to prisoners including, but not limited to, re-entry support services, transport, transitional and sustainable housing services, parenting advice and family support services.

The Department's Adult Community Corrections section assists prisoners who are under consideration by the Prisoner's Review Board (PRB) to prepare a parole plan, which includes suitable accommodation. The requirement for the prisoner to have suitable accommodation upon release is a primary consideration of the PRB in determining suitability for release to parole.

Homelessness and housing availability are complex issues affecting many people in the community. The Department's clients do not have priority access to accommodation over other vulnerable cohorts. Despite the Department's best endeavours, some former prisoners will return to their previous lifestyles putting them at higher risk of disfunction and harm.

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Response to Recommendations

1 Ensure senior management positions are substantively filled.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: Completed

Response:

At the time of the inspection, the substantive Superintendent had been in the position from August 2018 to January 2020. The ASOS has been acting in the role since January 2020 providing stable leadership for over 20 months.

The Department will continue to ensure consistent, stable leadership at Boronia and all other facilities.

2 The Department should explore options to improve the security and detection systems for the external fence at Boronia.

Level of Acceptance: Not Supported
Responsible Division: Corporate Services
Responsible Directorate: Procurement, Infrastructure and Contracts
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

Boronia's security detection systems are considered adequate. Regular testing is performed by staff and all faults are logged for repair with Programmed Facility Management (PFM).

As a minimum-security pre-release facility located in an urban area, there are occasional incidents involving visitors or members of the public in relation to the fence, none of which presented any risks to staff or residents. At most times these were accidental.

The external fence at Boronia is routinely monitored and controls implemented as required.

3 Create an additional position to be assigned to reception.

Level of Acceptance: Not Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

Additional supports are deployed to assist during peak periods.

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4 Ensure cell sharing risk assessments are done for each resident required to share a cell.

Level of Acceptance: Supported
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: Completed

Response:

Boronia residents do not share cells. They have a room and access to usual household facilities in a share house on the Boronia site.

'COPP 5.1: Prisoner Accommodation' has been implemented and details clear requirements for prison officers to complete the 'Multiple Cell Occupancy – Risk Assessment Checklist' on TOMS upon a prisoner's initial reception into prison.

Boronia has established its Standing Order 5.1: Prisoner Accommodation to compliment COPP 5.1. The standing order sets out the requirements that a shared cell/room risk assessment and cell/house placement will be completed by the Unit Manager during the orientation process as soon as practicable on arrival to Boronia.

5 Introduce programs addressing grief, abuse, and trauma.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: 31 December 2022

Response:

Boronia residents currently receive individual counselling to address issues that include grief, abuse and trauma. Individual counselling includes discussions about group interventions, and residents' willingness to participate in group interventions on site.

The capacity to run group programs throughout 2020/2021 was impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. The Department is assessing the re-commencement of group programs at Boronia. Success of any interventions is dependent on the residents' willingness to participate in a group.

6 The Department should contract services to fix the maintenance issues at Boronia.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corporate Services
Responsible Directorate: Procurement, Infrastructure and Contracts
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

The Department maintains a 24/7 breakdown response and repair service provided by PFM at all prison sites in WA, including Boronia.

In addition, Boronia also has its own maintenance team which undertakes minor repairs.

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7 Increase resources and supports for health services at Boronia to engage more health promotion activities.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

Boronia provides Health promotion resources and has a dedicated display of brochures and information available to the residents.

Boronia has held Wellness days where external providers operate stalls for the residents to visit and discuss their health issues e.g. Breast screening, Quit smoking, Asthma awareness, Cervical cancer screening, mental health and cancer awareness.

In addition, the residents are also taken to Breast Screen clinics as required. Boronia has scheduled Breast Screen to visit in 2022.

All residents in custody have a 'Well Women Care Plan' which identifies their health need and any health requirements.

8 Establish a part-time Aboriginal health worker position.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

The Department notes the importance of Aboriginal Health Workers (AHW) as part of health care team. The establishment of an additional 17 AHW positions across the prison estate was approved in September 2020.

A submission for funding of the AHWs was made to the Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) as part of the 2021/2022 budget process. The Department will make a further submission to secure funding under the 2022/2023 budget process.

9 Create and fill a Life Skills Officer (VSO) position to provide structured support and education in basic life skills including nutrition, food preparation and budgeting.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

The creation of a Life Skills Officer will be considered as part of the next Service Level Agreement for Boronia.

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10 Implement programs to engage Aboriginal women and which reflect the diversity of the Aboriginal women residing at Boronia

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: Completed

Response:

Boronia continues to provide programs and supports to a diverse range of Aboriginal women. Over the past two years, Boronia has offered the following programs:

Language Program in Prisons – pilot ran in 2020 for 15 residents, including Aboriginal women from the regions. This program has been funded for a further 3 years and currently running in Quarter 4 of 2021.

National Empowerment Program (NEP) facilitated by the Langford Aboriginal Association (LAA), who sourced grant funds to run the first program at Boronia. This program was delivered to 13 residents, 5 of these women transferred to Boronia from regional prisons to undertake the program. LAA and Boronia are working together to source ongoing funding for this program.

Prison to Work program funded through the National Indigenous Australians Agency is a hospitality program run through a training kitchen at the Corrective Services Training Academy for two years. The program is offered to Aboriginal women who are interested in work or training in the hospitality industry. Currently there are eight women enrolled in the program, only one is not of Noongar origin.

All Aboriginal women not from the metropolitan region are supported through e-visits, elder visits, welcome to country and transfers to regional prisons for reconnection with family and country.

The Aboriginal women are also supported through Aboriginal staff in the roles of Aboriginal Education Officer, Aboriginal Employment Coordinator, Aboriginal Chaplain and Peer Support Officer. Ongoing provision of programs and supports to the Aboriginal women at Boronia, including those from out of country, is monitored regularly by the Aboriginal Services Committee.

11 In future ensure key positions like the MFCS are appropriately backfilled over periods of planned leave.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Women and Young People
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

Key positions with known periods of leave undergo an Expressions of Interest process to recruit suitable applicants for backfilling. In the event suitable applicants are not identified, the EOI process may be repeated.

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12 Source and fund a suite of family/parenting programs suitable for the needs of Boronia's residents.

Level of Acceptance: Supported in Principle
Responsible Division: Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate: Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date: 31 December 2022

Response:

The current contract with Wungening Corporation for Metropolitan Women's Parenting and Family Support services was extended to 30 June 2022 in line with the WA Government COVID-19 recovery plan.

The Department plans to undertake a co-design process to procure new services to replace the current reintegration service agreements. Services out of scope for the current service agreements may be considered as part of the co-design process, subject to approval. This co-design process will be managed by WACSAR.

13 Pilot a system of controlled online access for people in custody at Boronia.

Level of Acceptance: Noted
Responsible Division: Corporate Services
Responsible Directorate: Knowledge, Information and Technology
Proposed Completion Date: N/A

Response:

The Department has developed a Long-Term Custodial Technology Strategy (LTCTS) to assess the benefits and efficiencies of modern Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the custodial estate, including mobile technologies and increased access to digital services for prisoners.

Submissions have been made to the State's established Digital Capability Fund to procure funding to deliver foundational ICT infrastructure upgrades at custodial facilities, particularly those in the regions. This will provide the base ICT infrastructure to unlock future benefits, such as increased mobility and services to prisoners.

Submissions for seed funding have also been made to enable the implementation of the next components of the LTCTS.

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14 The Department of Justice establish partnerships with relevant agencies to increase the range of accommodation options for people leaving prison.

Level of Acceptance:	Noted
Responsible Division:	Corrective Services
Responsible Directorate:	Offender Services
Proposed Completion Date:	N/A

Response:

The Department has existing reintegration services agreements with multiple NGO service providers who provide public housing properties that are used to accommodate released prisoners, under a leasing arrangement with the Housing Authority (Department of Communities). These properties are used as transitional housing for periods up to six months for each tenancy, subject to availability.

In the event housing is not available under the leasing arrangement, the reintegration services agreements also require the service providers to partner with other appropriately qualified organisations to facilitate access to additional housing stock and to assist prisoners to access alternative housing, including in the private rental market.

Rental accommodation state-wide is at capacity in both the social and private rental markets, limiting the service providers' access to additional housing. Rental agencies also have long waitlists for access to rental properties, and some are not accepting new referrals for accommodation.

Housing availability and homelessness are complex issues affecting many people in the community, and prisoners do not have priority access to accommodation over other vulnerable cohorts.

The Department will continue its efforts to secure further accommodation options. It should be noted that housing availability is outside the Department's control.

Appendix 4

INSPECTION DETAILS

PREVIOUS INSPECTION

23 – 29 May 2018

ACTIVITY SINCE PREVIOUS INSPECTION

Liaison visits 9
Independent Visitor visits 30

SURVEYS

Resident survey 22 April 2021 65 responses (76%)
Staff survey (online) 31 March – 27 April 2021 36 responses (77%)

INSPECTION TEAM

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KEY DATES

Inspection announced 18 January 2021
Start of on-site inspection 23 May 2021
Completion of on-site inspection 27 May 2021
Presentation of preliminary findings 14 June 2021
Draft report sent to Department of Justice 7 October 2021
Declaration of prepared report 29 November 2021

*Inspection of prisons, court custody centres, prescribed lock-ups,
juvenile detention centres, and review of custodial services in Western Australia*



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