

# KEEPING US TOGETHER



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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**“I KNOW I WAS NOT TRULY  
EMOTIONALLY PRESENT  
MOST OF THE TIME. I AM  
AWARE OF THE EMOTIONAL  
DAMAGE THIS HAS CAUSED,  
AND I BELIEVE THAT THE  
'STOP, PAUSE, PLAY'  
MESSAGE WILL HELP ME  
AND MY KIDS.”**

**KEEPING US TOGETHER  
PROGRAM GRADUATE**



# FOREWORD

Women are at risk of losing custody of their children – formally or informally – when they are sent to prison, and a significant proportion (some reports suggest up to half) were already living apart prior to prison. Having an imprisoned parent is a pathway into the out-of-home care and youth justice systems in Australia; and families are more likely to disintegrate when mothers are sent to prison than fathers.

There are, then, many compelling reasons for the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (CYJMA) to target resources toward imprisoned mothers and their children. They are a relatively small but growing population (the rate of women's imprisonment in Queensland increased by 62% between 2008 and 2018) with multiple and often complex needs. Up to one-third are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, among whom there is an even higher prevalence of inter-generational trauma, out-of-home care experiences, and loss of child custody.

Research consistently shows that women in prison value parenting programs, and there is evidence that they may improve reflective functioning, interaction with infants, distress about visits, parenting stress levels, relationships with children's interim caregivers, maternal identity, and self-esteem.

However, parenting programs alone cannot keep families with an imprisoned mother together. They must be part of an accessible, connected service system for women exiting prison which addresses their holistic needs for social support, economic and housing security, freedom from violence and abuse, physical and mental wellbeing.

For this reason, one of the most important outcomes of the Keeping Us Together pilot program is the partnership between the key stakeholder organisations Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), CYJMA, and SHINE for Kids. With continued investment, this provides a foundation from which the continuity and connectedness of care and service delivery for women exiting prison, and their children, can begin to be improved.



# KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

## PROGRAM LANDSCAPE

The Program addresses a major gap in service provision for a high-need group of women and children.

- CYJMA had limited experience of commissioning services within a corrections context. This contract was viewed as a positive learning experience by the Department.
- QCS is responsible for providing support to women on remand. CYJMA has historically provided more generalised support services that may be accessed by this group too, but aren't specifically targeted to them.
- The impetus for the pilot was external and the funding source non-ongoing.
- CYJMA does not have direct contact with the program participants.
- CYJMA's focus is on preventive work, but many program participants already have statutory interventions.
- During the pilot phase, CYJMA's primary roles have been procurement, contract management, monitoring and evaluation.

## PROGRAM RESOURCES

Current resourcing does not meet Program demand<sup>1</sup>, enable post-release support and follow-up, or optimise care for participants and staff.

- The Program content is woman-centred and embraces a wide range of perspectives and experiences of parenting, family, and community. However, Indigenous women appear under-represented in the cohort relative to the female prisoner population.<sup>2</sup>
- Parenting programs address one of many needs for women in prison. However, to fully realise the Program aims and to achieve their parenting goals, women need holistic post-release support with child custody, health, economic, housing, employment, domestic and family violence issues.
- Ideally, sessions would be co-facilitated to provide increased support for participants given the sensitive nature of the Program content, and to provide practical and peer support for staff.

## WAYS OF WORKING

SHINE For Kids has led the partnership between stakeholder agencies, and established a strong network of contacts with referral agencies across Queensland.

- CYJMA and QCS have separately commissioned the Keeping Us Together program, and as a result it is now delivered across all women's correctional centres in Queensland.
- However, a robust partnership between CYJMA and QCS would be achieved through ongoing strategic and operational governance arrangements. At present, the partnership is an operational one led by SHINE for Kids.
- CYJMA and SHINE for Kids lack access to data on the eligible population, how participants are selected for each cohort, and whether program demand is being met. Although this information is available to QCS it is not systematically collated and shared with the other partners due to legal and privacy restrictions.
- Access and completion rates may be improved by delivering the program over a shorter time frame; however, participants need space to reflect and debrief on challenging content.

## LEARNINGS

Women reported significant, positive changes after completing the Program.

- Immediately following the program, women reported having a better understanding of their parenting approach and their children's behaviour, and where to get help when they needed it.
- Due to the lack of post-release follow-up, we don't know whether these benefits are sustained over time.
- To increase the likelihood of this and achieve the goals of reducing reincarceration and keeping families together, participants need clear pathways into existing community-based programs and services such as CYJMA's Intensive Family Support and Family and Child Connect.
- Parenting programs should be one aspect of an overall strategic partnership between commissioning agencies (CYJMA and QCS, among others) which places the needs and experiences of this cohort of women and children at its centre.

<sup>1</sup>As reported by QCS and SHINE staff. No formal data are available.

<sup>2</sup>Self-identification of Indigenous status is voluntary for program participants.

# FUTURE STATE RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of our process evaluation and limited data on Program outcomes, we recommend:

- CYJMA and QCS work under a more formal partnership arrangement to support the continued delivery of the Keeping Us Together Program across all Queensland women's correctional centres.
- CYJMA and QCS clearly identify shared and complementary goals (reducing re-offending, keeping families together and keeping children safe) and realistic short- and medium-term outcomes they are seeking from the program. Include program participants in defining what successful outcomes look like.
- Deciding whether or not it is desirable and/or feasible to identify and monitor longer-term outcomes, such as preventing statutory interventions, reuniting mothers and children, and preventing re-offending. If it is not desirable and/or feasible, then we also recommend renaming the program to better reflect the outcomes it *is* intended to achieve; since the current name suggests that the program could be influential in the custodianship of children.
- Developing an ongoing monitoring and evaluation plan which ensures that program data continues to align with desired outcomes, is systematically collected, accurately collated, and regularly used to understand where the program is working well and where changes are required. In particular, ensure that data collected on referral forms (participant characteristics) can be linked to pre- and post-program questionnaire data.
- Clearly articulating the target audience for the program. For example, targeting the program towards women with contact with Child Safety, determining whether sentenced women are suitable candidates, whether there is a target age group for children, and developing ways in which program graduates can participate in existing services and programs provided by CYJMA.
- Establish a standard for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community participation in procurement, service design, delivery, and evaluation.
- Take steps to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's participation in the Program and seek feedback from these women on Program content and delivery.
- Investigate reasons for lower graduation rates at Numinbah and Helana Jones.





# INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of an implementation evaluation of the Keeping Us Together program, funded at three women's correctional centres in Queensland by the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

The evaluation framework for this project included interviews with program graduates to gather their views on the program experience and how the program has impacted their relationships with their children. Due to restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland prisons, we were unable to complete our planned evaluation of medium-term program outcomes. The absence of the voices of women who have taken part in the program leaves a significant gap in our evaluation and in understanding the value that is being delivered.

Nevertheless, as the program enters its third year of delivery in Queensland, we are pleased to share what has been learned from the early stages of program procurement and implementation, in the hope that this informs an ongoing collaborative partnership between CYJMA, QCS, and SHINE for Kids, with women and children at its centre.

## NAVIGATING THE REPORT

The Keeping Us Together Program is not exclusively targeted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, but these women account for more than one third of Queensland's female prisoner population.

Ngaa-bi-nya is a practical framework for the evaluation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and social programs, developed by A/Prof Megan Williams (Williams 2018).<sup>1</sup> It provides us with a series of prompt questions and domains of inquiry to 'stimulate thinking about critical success factors in programs relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's lives'.

The evaluation framework for Keeping Us Together comprised a series of evaluation questions aligned to each of the Ngaa-bi-nya domains, that were designed to test the program theory. In this report, we answer these questions using the available data and evidence.

<sup>1</sup> Williams, M (2018). Ngaa-bi-nya Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluation framework. *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* 18(1):6-20.

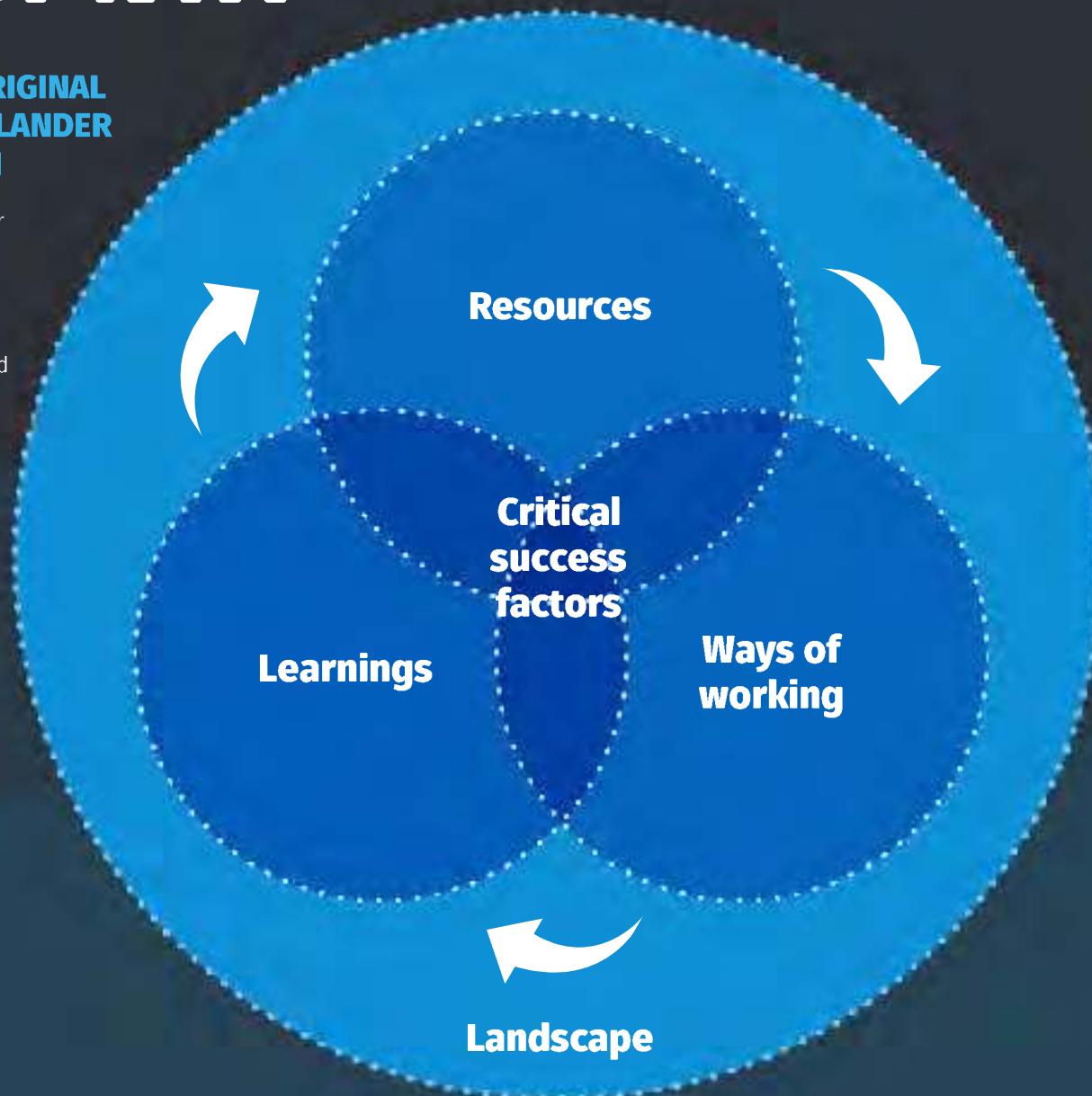


# NGAA-BI-NYA

## FRAMEWORK FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PROGRAM EVALUATION

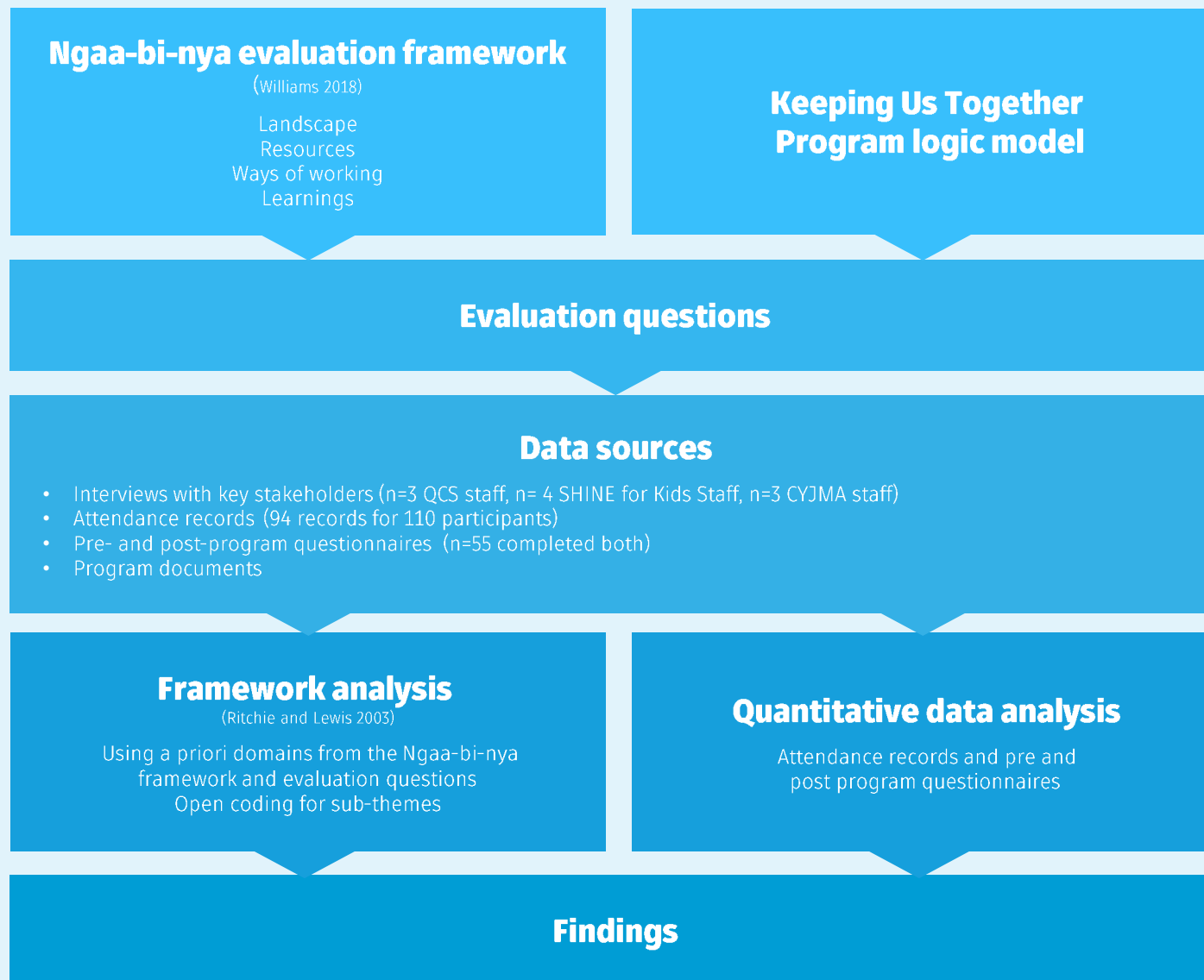
The sections in the Findings chapter of this report are aligned to the Ngaa-bi-nya domains (see right) (Williams, 2018). The domains and sub-domains formed the basis for our framework analysis, as described in Appendix 2.

Each of the evaluation questions is aligned one of these domains.





# METHODOLOGY



## WHAT IS THE KEEPING US TOGETHER PROGRAM?

Keeping Us Together is a six-week program targeted towards women on remand in Queensland correctional centres, who are parents. The program, which is adapted from the Australian Childhood Foundation's Bringing Up Great Kids, uses reflective practice and focuses on how parents and children communicate with one another. The core program is delivered in a group setting, across six two-hour sessions. Individuals receive support from the program facilitator and volunteers to re-establish or maintain contact with their children and identify sources of support for parenting once they are released from prison.

CYJMA funds the program to be delivered in three women's correctional centres in Queensland: Brisbane Women's, Helana Jones, and Numinbah. The program is delivered by SHINE for Kids, a not-for-profit organisation founded in NSW and working across NSW, Victoria, the ACT and Queensland to support children, young people and families with relatives in the criminal justice system. SHINE for Kids also delivers the program at other Queensland correctional centres under a separate contract with Queensland Corrective Services. These instances are outside the scope of this evaluation.

The detailed program theory is described in the logic model in Appendix 1 (page 34).

**\$300k funding across 3 years from DCYJMA**

### SHINE for Kids

Extensive experience in support and service provision for imprisoned parents and their children  
Cultural competence  
Trained and experienced program facilitators

### Bringing Up Great Kids

(Australian Childhood Foundation)

'Open source' program  
Evaluated and evidence-based  
Six modules, adapted for prison  
context by SHINE for Kids

### Queensland Corrective Services

Identify and refer participants  
Allocate physical spaces for  
program delivery

### Participants

Women in prison who are  
experiencing difficulties in their  
relationships with, or in  
maintaining contact with their  
child(ren), with a focus on  
women on remand

### A 12-hour parenting program delivered in six sessions

- 1 Brain development
  - 2 Parents' family of origin and messages about parenting
  - 3 Communication styles
  - 4 Emotional needs and behaviour
  - 5 Emotional development, individual and cultural differences
  - 6 Responding to the ongoing challenges of parenting
- Information about post-release parenting supports
  - Arts and crafts activities during prison visits
  - Observation of interaction, individual support and reflective feedback where possible

# FINDINGS





# PROGRAM LANDSCAPE

## HISTORY

### WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM'S DEVELOPMENT IN QUEENSLAND?

A total of \$300K funding over three years came from a successful joint bid to the Queensland Cabinet Budget Review Committee (CBRC) by the Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (CYJMA), and Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), for the Keeping Us Together pilot. This one-off stream allocated funds to 'justice reinvestment' themed projects to address rapidly increasing numbers of women being incarcerated in Queensland, as well as findings by the Queensland Ombudsman and a review of the Queensland Parole System.

CYJMA was asked to scope six initiatives, including one targeting women on remand and their connections with their children. The intention was to bring a broader preventive and community lens to a population and a set of issues that have historically been the domain of Corrective Services and to 'trial a package of initiatives to assist with prison demand management' (Significant Procurement Plan, CYJMA).

At the time, CYJMA had limited experience of working with this population, and with the specific issues faced by imprisoned mothers and their children.

Research shows that when prisoners' relationships and family connections are maintained and strengthened, they are less likely to return to prison. The aims of keeping families together (CYJMA) and reducing re-offending (QCS) are complementary, and underpin the partnership between the two agencies.

Many women in prison are also in contact with the Child Safety system, and children may be at increased risk of engaging with tertiary child safety systems such as out of home care, when their mothers are sent to prison. Through consultation with QCS and internally within CYJMA, the need for an evidence-based parenting program to be delivered to women on remand – who often miss out on mainstream correctional programming – was identified.



“I think that we really wanted organisations who really understood the complexities of working in prisons, because I mean that's continued to unfold for us. It's just a different cohort, so we wanted an organization that understood and had skills and networks and experience... and we wanted organisations who had a strong evidence base with the work that they were able to do, and understood what they were trying to achieve, and how they were going to achieve that.”

A core team within CYJMA identified program requirements and established a procurement panel with QCS providing input on the existing programs landscape for mothers in prison.

The successful tender was submitted by SHINE For Kids, a national not-for-profit organisation which provides services for children, young people and families affected by imprisonment, both in prison settings and in the community (<https://shineforkids.org.au/>).

As an organisation, SHINE for Kids' overall service offering includes help with getting to prison to visit a parent or family member; Child and Family Centres which support children and their carers before and after prison visits; in-prison activities for children and families; casework and educational support for children; Indigenous community outreach and in-reach; and a supportive network for the carers of children and young people whose parents are in prison. SHINE For Kids was assessed as being an innovative, evidence-based and highly experienced organisation with a track record of delivering the desired outcomes in other Australian States and Territories.

Keeping Us Together was adapted by SHINE For Kids from the Australian Childhood Foundation's 'Bringing Up Great Kids', an 'open source' parenting program which uses reflective practice to focus on how parents and children communicate with one another. The model was chosen for its strong evidence base, which includes an evaluation of its effectiveness with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and refugees, and its ability to embrace all participants' experiences of parenting and being parented.

## POLICY

### TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM ALIGNED WITH OTHER QUEENSLAND POLICY AND LEGISLATION THAT RELATE TO THE ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE PROGRAM?

**Strategic goal:** In response to Queensland Parole System Review (QPSR) recommendation 17, to increase the number and diversity of rehabilitation programs, and training and education opportunities, available to prisoners in custody, including short-term programs.

**Program aim:** Strengthen family interactions and provide an opportunity for women to develop new skills and increase their understanding of sensitive and empathic parenting during incarceration to facilitate the re-entry of women into a mothering role upon release from custody.

From the perspective of CYJMA, the target audience of women in prison had not previously been a focus of the department. Rather, the aim was to build the capacity of the family while simultaneously contributing towards a 'whole of government approach' to reforming the criminal justice system.

Since implementing the program, Machinery of Government changes have brought Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs into the Department.

## SELF-DETERMINATION

### HOW HAVE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES INFLUENCED THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL?

The six initiatives CYJMA was asked to scope as part of the QBRC funding stream included the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Rehabilitation and Healing Program (\$2.3 million), which was targeted to Indigenous community-controlled supplier organisations, per the Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy. This program was to be delivered at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre and was intended as a 'culturally sound, trauma-informed rehabilitation program' that would be co-designed with local Indigenous peoples.

CYJMA's procurement strategy was based on the understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women 'generally face the same social and economic disadvantages experienced by non-Indigenous women, but at higher rates', and that 'an estimated 60% of female inmates in Queensland are parents of dependent children'. The demand and market analysis identified a requirement for Indigenous-specific programming but also for a parenting program that was accessible to women of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

CYJMA staff who participated in this analysis acknowledged that this was a learning point for them personally, and for their Department:

**"As an individual myself now I know that any program in prison you really do have to build in that focus and require the provider to deliver accordingly. I believe this Department has taken on board that in-prison programs really, are programs that must be tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in order for them to effectively reach the prison populace."**

As part of the procurement process an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff member evaluated the tender submissions, but Indigenous women on remand, community-controlled organisations, and peak bodies were not involved in identifying the need for a parenting program or evaluating the tender responses. Since this time, CYJMA has focused on improving its formal mechanisms for reviewing the cultural appropriateness of responses to requests for tender. Input to this process from community-controlled organisations or peak bodies would need to be restricted to those who were not potential suppliers.

CYJMA staff report that the cultural competence of SHINE for Kids was a factor in their successful response to tender. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men are represented at senior levels within the SHINE staff although the current program facilitators under the CYJMA contract do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The organisation has extensive experience of delivering co-designed services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Program facilitators report that the program design is flexible and open enough to encourage and enable the full participation of all women regardless of their cultural background. Separately, SHINE has

co-designed an intensive 45-hour program, 'Keeping Us Strong', with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for delivery at in Townsville Correctional Centre. This Program is fully informed by Indigenous understandings of parenting and family and incorporates the Keeping Us Together program content.

Whilst confident in the ability of SHINE for Kids to design and deliver a culturally safe and appropriate program, CYJMA staff acknowledge that in future corrections-based programming, cultural safety requirements could and should be identified at the early stages of program requirements gathering, procurement, and supplier engagement. CYJMA staff also acknowledged the diversity of Indigenous communities within Queensland and the need to respectfully engage with the different needs of communities in Far North and South-East Queensland.

CYJMA staff report that these learnings will inform subsequent procurement processes, in which community controlled organisations and those with a strong track record of working with Indigenous families, will be considered as a priority.



## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

### WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE THREE SITES AT WHICH THE PROGRAM IS DELIVERED?

Under the contract with CYJMA, SHINE for Kids delivers the Keeping Us Together program at three women's correctional centres.

The three centres differ widely in terms of their level of security and consequently the freedom of movement which women have, their physical environment and 'family friendliness', population size, routines and prison industries (the work that prisoners are engaged in).

The Keeping Us Together Program is also delivered at South Queensland Correctional Centre, and Keeping Us Strong, a 45-hour program co-designed with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which includes the Keeping Us Together content, is delivered at Townsville Correctional Centre by SHINE for Kids under separate contracts with Queensland Corrective Services. These implementations are outside the scope of the current evaluation.

#### Helana Jones Correctional Centre (HJCC)

A low security, community corrections centre with a focus on rehabilitation and pre-release preparation located in Albion, north of the river in Brisbane's metropolitan area. The centre has built cell capacity for 29 women.

HJCC

BWCC

#### Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC)

A high security reception, assessment and placement prison located within the large correctional complex at Wacol, about 30 minutes south-west of Brisbane by car. The centre has built cell capacity for 267 women. A 2016 Ombudsman's report into overcrowding at BWCC found that the centre had been operating at 120-160% capacity during the preceding three years.

#### Numinbah Correctional Centre (NCC)

A low security centre located in the Numinbah Valley, around 45 minutes south-west of the Gold Coast by car. The centre has built cell capacity for 119 women.

NCC



## WERE THERE CHALLENGES WITH IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM FUNDED BY CYJMA IN A CUSTODIAL SETTING?

A key challenge has been identifying and monitoring program deliverables to ensure that these are aligned with the broader strategic goals of the department. SHINE for Kids developed a clear program logic based on the desired outcomes CYJMA had identified. CYJMA regularly monitors program outputs based on quarterly reports from SHINE for Kids; however, there is no data on program outcomes. One reason for this is that CYJMA does not contract for outcomes targets:

“...it's generally how the Department engages with suppliers, that is probably more of the issue. We don't track outcomes as much as we would like to, but we're moving towards that. So you know when it comes to this group, what are the outcomes? They could be better, and that's on this Department. It's not on this supplier, we're the ones who need to make sure we're capturing what we actually want to measure from the services on the ground.”

There are also practical limitations to monitoring program outcomes. There is currently no mechanism for following up program participants once they are released from prison, and legislation restricts the sharing of routine data on the department's child safety clients including at the intra-departmental level.

The impact of COVID-19 restrictions upon the prisoner population and subsequently the program evaluation has further constrained the department's

ability to understand what participants gain from the program over the longer term.

## WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING BETWEEN CYJMA AND QCS WITH MOTHERS ON REMAND?

At the strategic level, after engaging the supplier, CYJMA's role shifted to program management, with SHINE for Kids assuming responsibility for liaising between agencies.

Prior to commissioning the program, CYJMA had little experience of working with prisoner populations, and limited knowledge of the specific issues faced by imprisoned mothers and their children. CYJMA staff reported that the benefits of the pilot for their department included building this knowledge and developing a positive mutual working relationship with QCS:

“Everything that we've done with QCS – I think they valued our perspective and our input. I think that there's a respectful two-way relationship there, so that's a good thing. I think that there's grounds to continue to develop and work on that.”

At the operational level, a steering committee with membership from the three key stakeholder agencies (CYJMA, QCS, and SHINE) met monthly during the first six months of the Program to address implementation challenges. Membership included General Managers and key contact people from the participating correctional centres, program facilitators, and the CYJMA Contract Officer. The core function of the group was to identify and overcome any practical challenges to ensure the smooth set-up and delivery of the program, including:

- how to reach the target population of women on remand,
- how to minimise program drop-out, and
- informing corrections staff about the program.

The operational challenges with implementing the program have been similar to other programs in correctional settings; for example:

- the impacts of prisoner movement and competing scheduling (programs, work, medical and legal visits, court appearances) on program recruitment, attendance and completion,
- setting up appropriate group dynamics when identifying participants, and
- providing appropriate follow-up support when needed in the context of challenging program content.

Steering committee meetings ceased to be held when Program delivery was suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Steering Committee did not have a strategic remit to investigate how member agencies might work together more broadly to meet the needs of imprisoned women and their families, or how the Keeping Us Together Program might be integrated into existing multi-agency partnerships in Queensland. There is an opportunity to take a more strategic and long-term approach to the partnership, which would have the potential to benefit the program's target population of women on remand, after they are released from prison.



## **DOES THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN CYJMA AND QCS REDUCE COMPLEXITY AND LEAD TO BETTER COORDINATION OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL WOMEN AND CASE WORKERS?**

SHINE for Kids has taken the initiative to build its network and partnerships with other services and agencies in Queensland beyond the program, to reduce complexity and benefit individual women and case workers. As they are currently not funded to provide post-release support to KUT program participants, SHINE provides each program graduate with an information and referral pack containing details of other relevant service providers in their local area. The pack is also provided to women's external support people, with their permission.

SHINE has also developed an information pack for new parents with advice and support for a range of common concerns.

To increase program referral rates and engage front-line corrections staff, SHINE has developed a brief information sheet on the program for correctional officers. Coupled with program facilitators' ongoing relationship building with staff at each centre where the program is delivered, this should inform corrections staff about the value of parenting programs for women in prison, especially where facilitators have encountered some resistance and scepticism.

In a separate funding arrangement, QCS has commissioned SHINE to deliver the Program at the remaining women's correctional centres in Queensland. As a result, the Program is now offered at all centres in Queensland. This has significant benefits for individual women as it can reduce the impact of prisoner transfers and movement upon

program completion, as women can complete a program commenced in one centre, at another centre. SHINE for Kids facilitators report that they will take all possible steps to accommodate this. The main constraints are program start and end dates, and any other required correctional programming which may overlap.

*"We've been getting good reports about SHINE. We feel like everything that we've done with them has been very professional and they've been very proactive."*

## **WHAT WILL BE THE BARRIERS/ENABLERS OF ACCESS TO SUCH SERVICES FOR WOMEN ONCE THEY ARE RELEASED?**

As noted above, the funding SHINE for Kids receives covers the cost of delivering the Program within women's correctional centres. It does not support post-release follow-up or the development of holistic post-release planning, although as noted earlier, SHINE for Kids does provide women with targeted information about services. However, many factors can prevent women from proactively accessing these community-based services, including:

- psychological barriers such as individual motivation, help-seeking behaviours, perception of need;
- practical barriers such as transport and childcare availability;
- economic barriers such as cost of transport and any fees for participation; and
- health and social barriers including mobility, social support, mental health and wellbeing.

Providing post-release support to women on remand can also be challenging due to the transient nature of this population. For example, women can be released directly from court, or unexpectedly at times when SHINE for Kids facilitators are not present at the centre. For all of these reasons, extending the program to include a robust post-release follow-up component would require a realistic assessment of costs and benefits.

## **WHAT STRUCTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCED THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM?**

During the program pilot period, the most significant structural impacts have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions implemented by QCS to reduce the likelihood of an outbreak within the prison estate. Program provision was suspended for three months during 2020, meaning that some participants were unable to complete the program. Women were also unable to receive in-person visits from children, family and friends.



# PROGRAM RESOURCES

## FINANCIAL, HUMAN, AND MATERIAL RESOURCES

### WERE REQUIRED RESOURCES IN PLACE AND SUFFICIENT?

CYJMA invested a total of \$300k over three years to fund the delivery of the Keeping Us Together program at three women's correctional centres in Queensland. The investment funds two program facilitators to work across the three centres, for a total of 26 hours per week. This workload includes planning and delivering the program, recruiting and debriefing participants, networking, creating post-release referral packs, and collecting and collating program monitoring data.

From the perspective of CYJMA staff who participated in this evaluation, the allocated resources have been sufficient for SHINE for Kids to meet expectations of them as a supplier, and monitoring data indicates that they have been able to deliver positive short-term impacts for women.

Program facilitators and QCS staff expressed different views about the program resources.

Program facilitators who participated in this evaluation expressed the view that program delivery and quality would be significantly improved by having a co-facilitator at each workshop session. Co-facilitators could:

- assist with content delivery, providing variety of experience and different perspectives during sessions, and allowing the facilitators to alternate roles such as speaking, writing, listening, and reflecting;
- work one-on-one with women who needed extra help with writing or individual tasks; and
- provide support for individuals who found program content difficult or confronting.



Rather than seeking increased funding for two facilitators for each program cohort, SHINE for Kids opted to implement a volunteer-based support model. Eleven volunteers have been recruited to support the program facilitators during some sessions.

**“This year I had a volunteer helping me facilitate and it was really good to have a volunteer this year. If someone was struggling to read and write as we're going through a worksheet, I'd get the volunteer to sit down with that particular mum and just work through the worksheet with her and help her read through the questions. And if I was posing a question and she didn't quite understand, the volunteer would be there with that mum.”**

Volunteers have provided practical support, which has been positively received by program facilitators and participants. However, their role is limited as they do not possess the necessary skills and experience to co-deliver the program content and are not paid to do so; and they do not attend all sessions. Program facilitators mentor, supervise, and train volunteers, which requires an investment of their limited time and effort. As with all volunteering arrangements, there is a risk of drop out, which increased whilst program delivery was suspended due to COVID-19 restrictions.

A compelling case for additional facilitators exists because QCS staff indicate that demand for the program outstrips capacity. However, data that could

be used to confirm this is not available outside QCS. Currently each program cohort is delivered in six weekly two-hour sessions, which tends to create a backlog of potential participants:

**“So there's a lot of women who are on the waitlist to do the program and obviously during COVID we could get seven on at a time – normally it's twelve to fourteen – so there is a demand there to do it... I think that they probably are a little understaffed to cope with the demand that we have here, in the program being six weeks in length and that it's six weeks in length, everywhere.”**

One proposed solution was to condense the program into three bi-weekly sessions, or a full-day session, to reduce program attrition and increase the total number of cohorts that could be completed during a twelve-month period. Program facilitators did not reject these ideas but did stress that taking part in the program can be emotionally exhausting and challenging for many participants, and there is a need for adequate time for reflection and debriefing in between sessions.

Following the establishment of the Keeping Us Together pilot program, QCS independently commissioned SHINE for Kids to deliver the program in other Queensland women's correctional centres, and to deliver playgroup and arts and crafts activities during prison visits. CYJMA was not involved in these processes.

SHINE facilitators report that these additional services and programs add value to the Keeping Us Together pilot as they are able to expand the work they do with some individuals, to identify potential participants for the program, and to observe some participants interacting with their children, thereby reinforcing the learnings from Keeping Us Together.

However, the lack of strategic coordination of the overall offering between QCS and CYJMA means that this added value is not visible to CYJMA, and could potentially be lost if QCS funding is withdrawn.

# WAYS OF WORKING

## CAREGIVING PRINCIPLES

### **DOES THE PROGRAM TAKE A HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF WELLBEING?**

As noted above, the program is not specifically built around Indigenous concepts of social and emotional wellbeing, nor does it have a spiritual component. However, program content is woman-centred and embraces a wide range of perspectives and experiences of parenting, family, and community. Facilitators report that the current program design is flexible and open enough to create opportunities for more holistic discussions of women's wellbeing and self-care in the prison environment. The reflective nature of the program content means that each session adapts to the needs and experiences of the group.

“I always say to them that there are no happy kids with an unhappy mother. So, looking at more holistic ways, them feeling better about themselves... So I think it's pretty much pulling it together in a more holistic way where you know they can see all this side of child development, parenting and everything; plus the idea of themselves. You know, change their life in a sense, to be able to provide it.”

The source material for Keeping Us Together, the Australian Childhood Foundation's 'Bringing Up Great Kids' program, differs significantly from other widely available parenting programs which use cognitive-behavioural or social learning approaches. Instead, Bringing Up Great Kids 'draws from the evidence base about the importance of attachment narratives and the increasing recognition of the role of mindful practices in positive mental health and wellbeing outcomes' (Bringing Up Great Kids Evaluation).





## **IS THE PROGRAM CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND SAFE? DOES IT MEET THE NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN WHO ARE IN PRISON AND THEIR FAMILIES?**

Formal evaluation of the source program (BUGK) noted cultural concerns regarding the suitability of certain aspects of the program for Indigenous families. SHINE for Kids has taken steps to adapt the program manual for both an Indigenous and corrections audience; for example, by:

- using the language and practices of storytelling and the oral tradition;
- substituting writing activities with artistic ones;
- ensuring that language and discussions are inclusive of the full range of cultural backgrounds, family structures and parenting experiences;
- acknowledging that some participants are working towards re-establishing their relationships with their children; and
- establishing clear protocols for group safety and confidentiality.

During the program set-up phase, SHINE for Kids met with Cultural Liaison Officers and Service Delivery Support staff within QCS, to discuss the program's cultural safety and ensure they did not duplicate existing program provision.

SHINE for Kids is aware that the current iteration of Keeping Us Together has not been specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. SHINE would like to have the opportunity to co-design versions of the program with local Indigenous communities, as it has done at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre. The current level of funding and resourcing provided by DCYJMA (\$300k over three years) is not sufficient to support this work.

## **IF INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCED DISTRESS OR DISCOMFORT AS A RESULT OF PROGRAM MATERIALS OR DISCUSSION POINTS, WHAT ADDITIONAL IMMEDIATE AND FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT WAS AVAILABLE TO THEM?**

Given that participants are separated from their children by nature of being in prison, it is inevitable that the subject matter of the Keeping Us Together program gives rise to distress in some participants. Given to the reflective, mindfulness-based style of the program, discomfort might be an indicator of engagement. Participants themselves commented:

**“The program is very eye-opening, comes with a lot of self-reflected sadness but well worth it.” – Participant**

**“Worth the tears.” – Participant**

Program facilitators highlighted two chapters – (1) messages from the past and (3) giving and receiving messages – that raise difficult material for women in prison, many of whom have experienced childhood trauma, poor parenting, abuse and neglect, and out-of-home care. They highlighted the voluntary and therapeutic nature of participating in these conversations:

**“It's not uncommon that they feel very upset sometimes, and you know they cry and they feel... a lot of emotions happening there. I'm very supportive of them... It's not easy to talk about themselves, and they can leave the room, they are free to cry. I offer all my support during the program so they can feel safe in there.”**

In the event that a woman is particularly distressed during a session, chooses to leave, or gives cause for concern, program facilitators will communicate with their contacts within the centre to make sure that she receives follow-up support. They may communicate with their liaison person from QCS, a psychologist or counsellor, or a corrective services officer.

The current program facilitators primarily have a background and skills in working with children, whilst none has had prior experience of working in a prison environment or of providing counselling services to adults. Whilst this has not been a requirement, nor a barrier to providing the program (facilitators draw upon their wide range of experience, skills and knowledge) some did not feel as prepared as they would have liked to be for managing group work in prisons:

**“I really might have felt very overwhelmed by it, but because I had some of that knowledge and I did a domestic violence workshop, that helped. But if I was purely coming from working with children... stepping into this role of facilitating with women with trauma? Yeah, I don't know about that.”**

## PROCESS

### **HOW ARE ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED (WHAT FORMAL AND/OR INFORMAL CRITERIA ARE USED)? WHAT PROPORTION OF THOSE ELIGIBLE ARE (I) REFERRED TO, (II) ENROL IN, AND (III) GRADUATE FROM THE PROGRAM?**

QCS staff in each participating centre are responsible for managing Program waitlists, recruitment, and nominating participants into each cohort. Women can self-refer to a waitlist, be referred by another member of staff, psychologist, parole board, or be referred by a program facilitator who may have contact with them through other services and programs provided by SHINE such as playgroup.

QCS staff report that in addition to practicalities they would consider individual and group dynamics, and their personal perception of 'who needs it the most'.

There are valid practical reasons for QCS staff to manage this process. Access to identifiable information about individual prisoners, including their legal and parental status, is restricted to QCS staff. Movement of prisoners, especially those on remand, is a frequent occurrence and can happen at short notice. Furthermore, only QCS staff are in a position to consider the full suite of programs on offer to women in the context of their individual needs, priorities, and case plan.

However, of concern is that neither the evaluation team, the program facilitators, nor CYJMA have access to any aggregated data or information on:

- the overall population of women who would be eligible to take part in the Program at each centre;
- the size of the program waitlist;
- the criteria (formal or informal) used to either refer women to the waitlist or to prioritise them into a program cohort;
- the legal status (sentenced or unsentenced) of participants or those on a waitlist;

- the characteristics of women who are referred/not referred, and who graduate/do not graduate; and
- reasons why individuals may be excluded from participating.

As a result, there is no objective basis upon which to assess whether service provision is sufficient to meet program demand, whether access to the program is restricted for any other reasons, or whether specific groups (e.g. Indigenous women) are disadvantaged in terms of access or completion.

Program facilitators reported that some past participants had been serving long sentences or had not been in contact with their children for many years. In the facilitators' view, the program should be available to all women in prison who are mothers, regardless of their legal status or current relationship with their children.

They felt that the program offered a potential therapeutic benefit for all of these women, as well as practical reflective and communication skills that would benefit all women's relationships with their children. However, it was noted that some content was more suited to those with children aged 0-12 years than to older children. Expanding the program's target audience in this way may require revisiting the program objectives to reflect this therapeutic benefit and any other benefits of the program from the perspective of past participants.

### **ARE PARTICIPATION RATES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN IN THE PROGRAM REFLECTIVE OF THEIR OVER-REPRESENTATION IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM?**

Given that over one-third of women in Queensland prisons are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women, this is an important question but one we are unable to answer due to current data collection practices. We were unable to link data on participant characteristics, with program attendance or evaluation data. Since there are no available data on the overall population

that is eligible for the program at each centre (see left), we are also unable to comment on either referral or participation rates for Indigenous women and it is likely that both numbers will vary between the different centres.

**"I can't say that exact number right now. I know that I have a few Indigenous women in the group, but I think the majority are not Aboriginal – the bigger majority."**

Given that at present limited additional steps have been taken to tailor the program to the needs of Indigenous women or to increase their participation, in our view and that of most participants in this evaluation, it is likely that participation rates are not reflective of Indigenous women's over-representation in the justice system.

### **WAS THE PROGRAM ABLE TO ENGAGE WITH AND INVOLVE CHILDREN'S INTERIM CAREGIVERS, WHERE APPROPRIATE?**

It was intended that children and their interim caregivers would be invited to attend participants' graduation ceremonies in the closing session of the program. There are some practical challenges to this because visitors cannot access the spaces in which programs are delivered; and there are security and staffing implications to holding the ceremonies in prison visits areas which outsiders can access. Further, at Brisbane Women's CC in particular many women either choose not to receive visits from their children because of the intimidating nature of the prison environment or are unable to do so because of difficulties accessing the prison location.

**"What became very clear was that kids weren't turning up for visits, so whilst we were getting women coming through the parenting program and really good feedback... the kids weren't coming to visit. So that was a real challenge."**

## **WHAT ARE THE PARTICULAR CHALLENGES FOR DELIVERING THIS PROGRAM TO WOMEN ON REMAND?**

The main constraints for involving women on remand in the Keeping Us Together are:

- They may be moved to other centres when they are sentenced;
- They may be released directly from a court appearance and not return to the centre;
- The early remand period is particularly unstable: women may be uncertain of their children's whereabouts, or pre-occupied with ensuring that their immediate needs for safety and care are being met; they may have untreated mental health and/or drug and alcohol problems; and
- Women on remand do not know if or when they will be released from prison and experience a high level of uncertainty.

## **WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO WOMEN ACCESSING OR USING THE SERVICE?**

All women on remand in Queensland are initially placed at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre. It was the perception of QCS staff that running the program in six-week blocks at this centre was a barrier to completing the program and increasing participation:

"We are a remand centre and find it quite difficult to keep a hold of the women because we are remand. So they do like to transfer them to the other Correctional Centres. I believe the waitlist is probably quite lengthy, and again, that comes down to the program, I believe, just going too long. You know, women sometimes can't wait six weeks or longer to be put on the next available program. Within that six weeks they may have moved on to another centre, and although that doesn't really matter because they could then do the program at another centre, we don't know where they're at in the way of programs at other centres."



## QUALITY CAREGIVING IN PRACTICE

### ARE SERVICES ABLE TO MAINTAIN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WOMEN FOR THE DURATION OF THEIR PROGRAM? WHAT ARE THE KEY BARRIERS? WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT RATES?

Program monitoring data shows that overall, of the women for whom a full attendance record is available, around 60% of enrolled participants go on to graduate from the program. At Brisbane Women's CC the graduation rate is 67%. The main reasons for non-completion of the Program are women being transferred to another centre, being released, or being unable to attend 4/6 sessions due to concurrent correctional program commitments, medical, legal, or other visits. Experience at Numinbah CC has shown that attendance and completion rates are improved by holding the program on weekdays. Women are more likely to receive visits from their children or other friends and family at weekends, and this is also their 'down' time from work and other centre routines.

As noted, the main barriers to access include the duration of the program in relation to women's time on remand or at a given centre, and the number of available program cohorts each year.

"Three women are apparently gonna be released before the end of the program. And I feel like for some of them, if they know that they won't complete it, it makes it you know, lose a little bit of the purpose of it."

### HOW WAS ENGAGEMENT PROMOTED AND ACHIEVED?

QCS staff have taken the lead role in identifying potential participants and managing the program waitlist. Women had the opportunity to be waitlisted for the program during their initial interview upon reception, during which suitable programs are identified with the help of the corrections psychologist.

SHINE for Kids has taken additional steps to promote engagement:

- Sharing written information about the program with correctional officers, to increase referrals,
- Displaying promotional posters in high traffic areas within the centres,
- Networking and building relationships with QCS staff, and
- Promoting the program during other interactions with women, such as playgroup.

Positive word of mouth among past and potential participants is another important avenue for increasing engagement.

"So I think the posters that we provide around the centre advertising the program helps to promote it. I think, ensuring that when you go through and you're looking at who's going to participate – are the dynamics suitable? And so that will help to keep them all engaged and wanting to attend. And we also try and do this program as consistent as possible so we don't have big breaks in between to make sure that will keep the momentum going."

### WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS VALUE MOST ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

All participants for whom post-program monitoring data were available, reported that they got what they were hoping for out of the program. A cross-section of responses to the open-ended question, *what will you take from the program and continue to reflect upon?* in post-program monitoring data are included here:

- "How I communicate, evaluate and provide a better life, relationship, and understanding while loving them unconditionally."
- "The positive messages I share with my children."
- "The acceptance of the placement of my kids."
- "I'll take being a better parent to my son. Everything I've learnt has helped me think about how I'll parent in the future."
- "I have a better understanding of my child's brain and the messages we give out and messages my kids are giving out to us."



## STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

### ARE PROGRAM DELIVERY STAFF ABLE TO BE FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO THE NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS?

Program facilitators report that one of the major strengths of the program is its ability to adapt to suit the needs of participants in each cohort:

“All the programs – when you’re running the program it’s different you know, because the group is different, they connect in different ways. You might come across situations in doing, running the workshop in different places where you need to be flexible... but I think what’s good about the program is it gives this flexibility as well.”

Facilitators also report having the ability to bring aspects of their own experience to group discussions, which helps them to build trust with the group and relate in a more authentic way to participants.

“You have to leave everything at the door. Be a bare blank canvas, walk in every day like that, you know. And the women would be totally different from one session to the next. So if I took something in there from the session before, they’ve left that behind. So I had to learn that every day is a blank canvas and let them paint it the way we’re gonna be for that session – for those two hours.”

### DO STAFF’S VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES INFORM ONGOING PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT?

SHINE for Kids program facilitators reported feeling well supported within their organisation, able to share ideas and contribute to the program’s ongoing development. Their suggestions for future staff and program development include:

- Assertiveness training;
- Training on trauma informed practice, domestic violence, drug and alcohol;
- Group facilitation and group dynamics;

- Working in prisons;
- Updating the order of some program content so that the first chapter focuses on group dynamics, getting to know one another, and building a safe space for reflection.

### HOW ARE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS CELEBRATED AND REWARDED?

The achievements of program participants are celebrated at the end of the program graduation ceremony and the presentation of a certificate.



## SUSTAINABILITY

### IS THE PROGRAM SUPPORTED BY AN ONGOING COLLABORATIVE MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH?

At a strategic level, a close collaborative partnership between CYJMA and QCS was formed during the early stages of requirements gathering and procurement. Subsequently, this strategic relationship was not sustained through any formal mechanisms. Following the procurement process, an operational steering committee was established to assist with the initial set-up of the program at each location. Now that the program is well established in each centre, this committee no longer has a clear role to play and meetings have ceased.

“[it was a] very collaborative relationship in the beginning, and very collaborative in terms of on the panel to get their expertise on making the decision. But I have to say, after that point... we used to just get regular updates... So really it was just, for us, making sure that once we commissioned it that it was up and running and it was actually happening, and then I guess the next stage for us was to pass it over to SHINE for Kids to work with my colleagues... So yeah, we are pretty high level in terms of our involvement – not so much the nuts and bolts.”

As noted earlier, SHINE for Kids has become the de facto lead agency in the partnership, liaising with QCS at an operational level and with CYJMA to provide monitoring data and fulfil contractual requirements. The program governance arrangements reduced once the program implementation was achieved, but both CYJMA and QCS continue to separately fund SHINE for Kids to deliver the program at women's correctional centres in Queensland.

### HOW DOES THE KEEPING US TOGETHER PROGRAM INTERACT/INTERFACE WITH OTHER SERVICES THAT ARE PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THE TARGET GROUP?

At present, SHINE for Kids provides information about community services in their area of residence, to women and their nominated support people outside prison.

The current funding model does not enable the program to work with participants once they are released into the community.

There may be an opportunity to integrate program participation with existing CYJMA services in the community, such as Family and Child Connect and Intensive Family Support. Local Level Alliances should also be made aware that the program is available in Queensland women's prisons.

In creating pathways between in-prison and community services, CYJMA would need to adhere to information sharing restrictions imposed by departmental policies and Queensland Privacy Law. These prohibit sharing of information internally.

More broadly speaking, as in other Australian states and territories, the service system with which women leaving prison have had to interact is complex, with many entry points and is service-centred, rather than client- or family-centred.

### HOW CAN SUCCESS BE REPLICATED?

The critical success factors in the implementation phase of Keeping Us Together that were identified in this evaluation are:

- Early strategic partnership between CYJMA and QCS with input from local Universities to the demand and market analysis;
- Identification of a program supplier with extensive experience in delivering services to families affected by imprisonment;
- The supplier's (SHINE for Kids') proactive approach and commitment to building relationships with the partner agencies and growing a broader network with other service provider agencies in the regions;
- SHINE for Kids' team's commitment to establishing both this program and the organisation's broader offering in Queensland; and to overcoming the disruptions of COVID-19 exceeding expectations to help women complete the program;
- Program facilitators' flexibility and adaptability to meet the needs of each unique program cohort and building safe, trusting environments in which women can talk about issues they rarely have had the opportunity to share whilst in prison; and
- SHINE for Kids' ability to leverage their separate contracts for Keeping Us Together and playgroup activities, to conceptualise an overall offering, increase opportunities for participation, and reinforce program learning.

# PROGRAM LEARNINGS

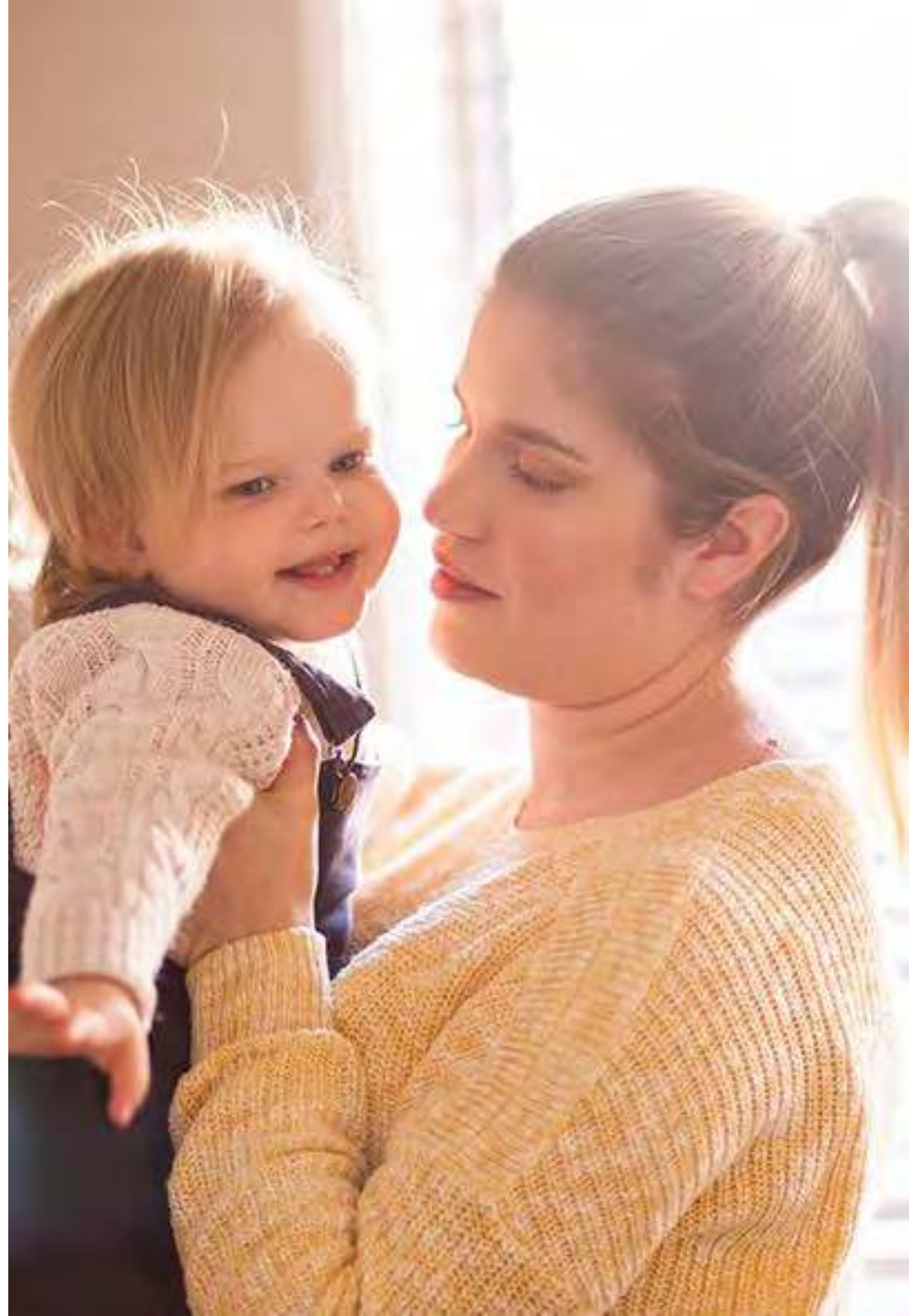
## EVIDENCE-BASED CARE

### **TO WHAT EXTENT IS APPROPRIATE MONITORING DATA USED TO INFORM THE ONGOING DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM?**

SHINE for Kids provides monthly and quarterly reports to CYJMA per its contractual arrangements and this information is used by CYJMA to monitor program deliverables. The reports include aggregated program throughput (enrolment and graduation) statistics and a narrative summary of program experiences and participant feedback from the reporting period.

SHINE for Kids collects structured pre- and post-program questionnaire data from all participants, findings from which are presented in this section of the evaluation report. Prior to this evaluation, the raw data was not entered into a database or used to systematically inform the development of the program. Questionnaire data are collected anonymously and there is no mechanism to link the data with the detailed information collected on participant referral forms. Whilst this protects participant privacy, it prevents us from analysing whether participants with different characteristics experience the program differently or have different outcomes. This creates a significant gap, particularly in our understanding of Indigenous women's experiences, and limits the value of the data that women are providing.

Reasons for these limitations include technology and staff capacity for managing the data. SHINE for Kids has experienced some challenges in using CYJMA's standard reporting portal, and in turn lacks its own database system which all facilitators can access regardless of location, to create an aggregated data set for the entire program. SHINE for Kids indicated that it is investigating purchasing customer relationship management software system (e.g. Salesforce) for this purpose. In the interim, the use of any low-cost database management system would help to unlock the value of the existing data. Data from all Keeping Us Together program cohorts and locations, regardless of which agency commissions them, should be aggregated. This will require SHINE to allocate roles and responsibilities for data entry, analysis and reporting in a way that does not create additional burdens for program facilitators.



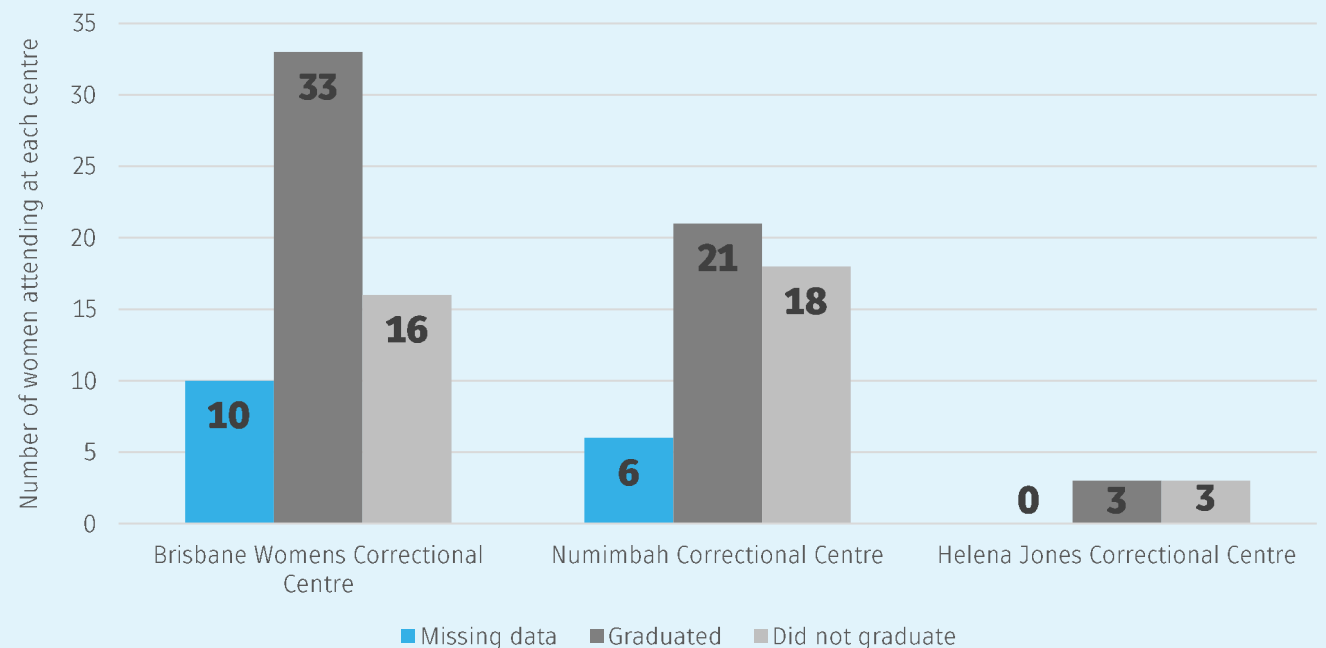
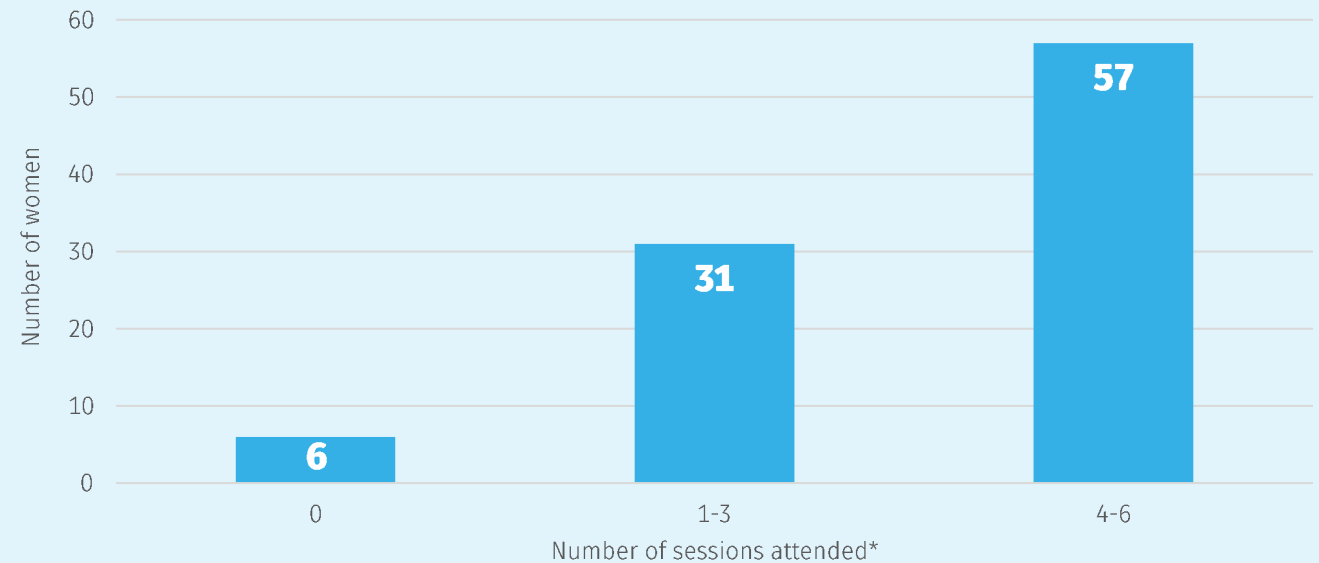


## ENROLMENT AND ATTENDANCE AUGUST 2019 – OCTOBER 2020

One hundred and ten women were enrolled in the program. Attendance data was available for 94 women. Of these, six women attended no sessions and 57 (61%) attended four or more of the six sessions, to successfully graduate.

A large proportion of those enrolled at Numinbah (40%) and Helana Jones (50%) did not graduate the program.

Reasons for not attending or graduating included attending medical or legal appointments, other programs or education, being transferred to another centre, or being released.



\*Data missing for 16/110 participants

## SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

The program has a positive impact on women's perception of their parenting and communication with their children, according to our analysis of questionnaire data collected by SHINE for Kids program facilitators from all program participants. Women are asked to rate their responses to a series of eight statements, on a scale of one to four where 1 = uncertain; 2 = a little uncertain; 3 = certain; and 4 = very certain:

1. I understand why I parent in the way I do
2. I understand the meaning of the messages I give to and receive from my children
3. My child/children and I communicate well with each other
4. I understand why my child behaves the way he/she does
5. I know where to go for help or support when I need it
6. I'm happy with the way that I parent
7. I often feel overwhelmed as parent
8. I know how to calm myself down when I feel overwhelmed in my parenting role

The eight statements are aligned with the short-term outcomes specified in the Program Logic Model (page 35).

The questionnaire is completed twice, to allow for the comparison of scores before and after the program. Using this data, we found that by the end of the program, a greater proportion of women agreed that they understood child behaviour (71% vs 92%), understood why they parented the way they did (67% vs 90%), knew where to get help (53% vs 96%) and knew how to calm themselves (82% vs 97%).

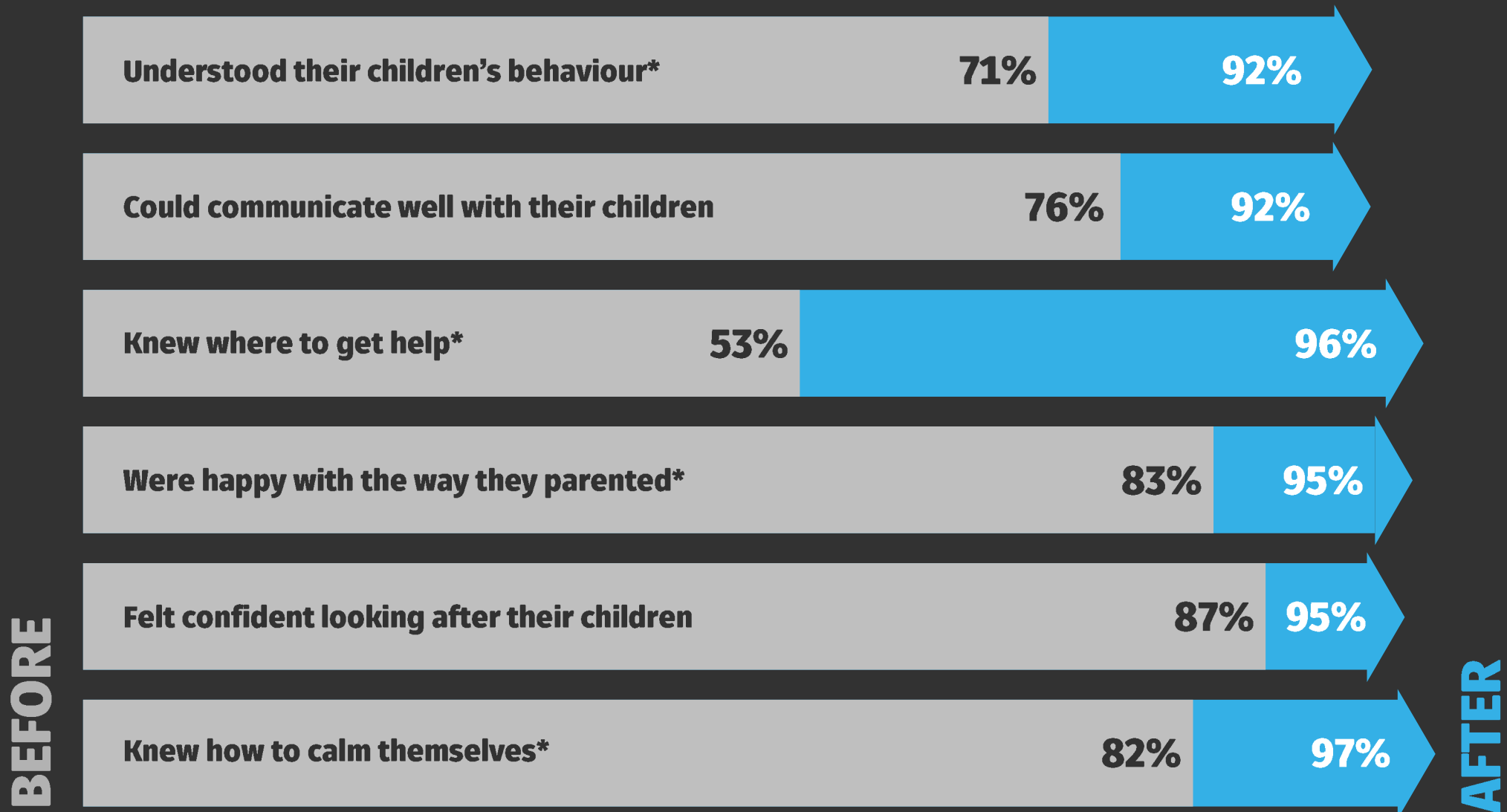
More women also agreed that they could communicate with their children (76% vs 92%), were happy with the way they parented (83% vs 95%), and felt confident looking after their children (87% vs 95%), and fewer women reported feeling overwhelmed (26% vs 22%); but these changes were not statistically significant.

Anecdotally, both SHINE for Kids and QCS staff report that they have seen changes in some women following the Program in relation to their determination to reconnect with their children. One QCS staff member reported that the Program gives some women 'a bit of confidence to try to reconnect with their children', for example, by asking to write letters, make phone contact or organise a visit.

Many women, especially those at Brisbane Women's CC, do not receive visits from their children and therefore do not immediately have the opportunity to put what they have learned into practice.

The greatest positive impacts were seen in women's understanding of where they can get help, and understanding their children's behaviour.

# AFTER THE PROGRAM, MORE THAN 90% OF WOMEN...



\* Change was statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ )



# CONCLUSIONS



# WE FOUND THAT KEEPING US TOGETHER...

- Fills an important gap for women who would like to improve their relationships with their children;
- Provides women with knowledge and skills related to managing their own stress, seeking help, and understanding their child's behaviour;
- Could be completed by more women, if the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and Queensland Corrective Services work more closely together to identify the target cohort, clarify their shared strategic goals, and fund the program;
- Focuses on the experiences of women and includes a wide range of parenting styles and communities. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are not as well-represented among the course participants as they could be.

Women also need practical support after release to ensure they can retain custody of their children. This includes social support, economic and housing support, freedom from violence and abuse, and physical and mental well-being.

There is benefit to strengthening of the partnership between Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), CYJMA, and SHINE for Kids as they deliver the program in all women's correctional centres. This has the potential to increase program completion rates, provide the benefits of the current program as well as linking women and their children with other services provided by SHINE for Kids and CYJMA. This will provide the foundation for improved continuity and connectedness of care and service delivery for women exiting prison and their children.







# APPENDICES



# APPENDIX 1 KEEPING US TOGETHER PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

LANDSCAPE					
NEEDS/GAPS	CONTRIBUTING POLICIES & STRATEGIES	OTHER PROGRAMS	EXTERNAL FACTORS & CONSTRAINTS		
Overcrowding in the Queensland women's prison system, coupled with insufficient programs and barriers to access for women on remand.	\$4.87m investment over three years by DCSYW and QCS, of which \$300k is allocated to Keeping Us Together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SHINE for Kids playgroup sessions at BWCC and HJCC, TWCC</li> <li>SHINE runs an extended Keeping us Together Program called Keeping Us Strong, an Indigenous specific program providing 45 hours of in-custody support Sisters Inside delivers the Building on Women's Strengths (BOWS) program at Brisbane Women's and Townsville CCs and Child and Parenting Support (CAPS) at Brisbane CC. The BOWS program offers intensive 1:1 post-release planning and support and is funded by DCSYW to July 2022.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Currently no service is available to facilitate prison visits for children in Queensland. This is particularly problematic for women at BWCC and NCC which are not easily reached via public transport.</li> <li>Women may choose not to receive visits from their children, or children's interim carers may be unable or unwilling to facilitate them.</li> <li>During the COVID-19 pandemic, all prison visits and all programming were suspended.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The increase in the number of women on remand is a function of community policing and court processes which are outside the control of DCSYW and QCS. The unpredictability of these women's length of stay in prison will influence the number of participants who are able to graduate from the program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cumulative disadvantages and current problems will influence the extent to which participants are motivated and able to engage with the program material, e.g. issues with domestic abuse and family violence, drug and alcohol addiction, ongoing child custody problems.</li> </ul>
RESOURCES	WAYS OF WORKING		LEARNINGS		
INPUTS	ACTIVITIES (required to deliver outputs)	OUTPUTS (what is delivered)	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES (1-8 weeks post-program)	MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES (8 weeks post-program)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>\$300k funding from CYJMA over three years</li> <li>Service delivery agency (SHINE for Kids) with extensive experience in support and service provision for imprisoned parents and their children</li> <li>Corrective Services staff at 3 Correctional Centres co-ordinate with the program facilitator</li> <li>Physical spaces for program delivery in Queensland Correctional Centres (e.g. education areas)</li> <li>Australian Childhood Foundation's Bringing Up Great Kids (BUGK) program</li> <li>Network of 11 volunteers to assist in program delivery</li> <li>Experienced and trained program facilitators (26 hours/week in total)</li> <li>Network of community service providers to receive referrals for post-release support</li> <li>Program Steering Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interagency collaboration between individuals and via the Program steering group</li> <li>Corrective Services staff identify and refer women who are experiencing difficulties in their relationships with, or in maintaining contact with their child(ren), with a focus on women on remand</li> <li>Facilitators establish trusting relationships with program participants</li> <li>Facilitators model reflective practice and mindfulness</li> <li>Facilitators practise self-reflection before each workshop</li> <li>'Stop... Pause... Play' strategy is used in each session to reinforce the importance of mindfulness</li> <li>Creation of a safe, non-judgmental space in which to share and reflect on experiences of parenting and being parented</li> <li>Facilitators adapt 'Bringing Up Great Kids' content for the correctional setting and cultural appropriateness</li> </ul>	<p>A 12-hour evidence-based parenting program run across six sessions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Education about brain development</li> <li>2 Exploration of parents' family of origin and messages about parenting</li> <li>3 Education about communication styles</li> <li>4 Exploration of the link between children's emotional needs and their behaviour</li> <li>5 Education about emotional development, individual and cultural differences.</li> <li>6 Exploration of parents' responses to the ongoing challenges of parenting.</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women are linked to parenting supports upon release from prison (referrals and contacts).</li> <li>Arts and crafts activities are provided during prison visits.</li> <li>Program facilitator observes women interacting with their children and provide individual support and reflective feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents understand the dynamics of healthy, respectful relationships with their children.</li> <li>Parents build their knowledge and understanding of why children behave the way they do through learning about brain development.</li> <li>Parents learn more about the origins of their own parenting style and how it can be more effective.</li> <li>Parents identify the important messages they want to convey to their children and how to achieve this.</li> <li>Parents understand the messages that children communicate to their parents and how.</li> <li>Parents reflect on the many other factors which influence our relationships with our children such as place in family, gender and their unique personalities.</li> <li>Parents understand that parenting is culturally determined.</li> <li>Parents recognise stressful situations, sources of support, and use strategies for stress reduction.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents will discover how to overcome some of the obstacles that are getting in the way of being the kind of parent they would like to be.</li> <li>Parents discover ways to take care of themselves and to find support when they need it.</li> <li>Parents develop strategies to manage their parenting approach despite the mounting pressures on their time and role.</li> <li>Women are aware of sources of support in the community and are given help to navigate these systems.</li> <li>Women put the skills learned in the parenting program, into practice.</li> <li>Visits are more child-friendly and enjoyable for mothers and children.</li> <li>Mothers and children participate in a shared experience through which they continue getting to know one another and building their relationship.</li> <li>Women receive positive reinforcement and feedback to support their own reflective process.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mothers, post-release, are able to interact with their children and provide and meet their children's basic needs on a daily basis.</li> <li>Parents respond more mindfully to children's emotions and behaviour and are better able to manage stressful situations.</li> <li>Mothers develop and apply help-seeking behaviours when parenting becomes difficult.</li> <li>Mothers feel empowered to navigate systems.</li> <li>Increased confidence and competence in parenting skills.</li> <li>More mothers are having visits with their children.</li> </ul>
ASSUMPTIONS					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants believe they will benefit from the program and are motivated to acquire new knowledge and skills and put them into practice.</li> <li>Participants will have contact with and/or access to their children, during and after prison.</li> <li>Corrective Services Officers will identify all eligible program participants, and women will have the opportunity to self-select to participate.</li> <li>Participants complete all six sessions of the parenting program in order to fully realise the benefits.</li> </ul>					

This mixed-methods evaluation used a combination of data routinely collected by the program provider, and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders.

Due to a combination of state border closures, measures enacted to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland prisons, and insufficient technology and privacy provisions within the prisons, we were regrettably unable to interview women who took part in the program as originally planned. This leaves a significant gap in our understanding of women's experiences and how they may have used the knowledge and skills gained in the program.

### QUANTITATIVE DATA

Program participants complete a 9-item self-rating questionnaire at two time points: pre- and post-program. The questionnaire is administered with the help of the program facilitator. The evaluation team received de-identified individual-level data in the form of a spreadsheet for analysis of the whole cohort. We conducted paired T-tests to check for statistically significant differences in the whole cohort's questionnaire responses to each item, pre- and post-program.

The following four items in the questionnaire are coded as “strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, don't know”:

- I'm happy with the way that I parent
- I often feel overwhelmed as a parent
- I feel confident in looking after my child(ren)
- I know how to calm myself down when I feel overwhelmed in my parenting role

For the purposes of our analysis of these items, we treated 'don't know' as missing data. An alternative approach would be to equate 'don't know' to 'neither agree nor disagree' (i.e. in the middle of a 5-response Likert scale). However, we chose to treat these values as missing because we 'don't know' what the value meant to individual respondents.

For example, we theorised that 'don't know' could be the response of a woman who has not had contact with her children, has not had the opportunity to put what she has learned into practice, or lacks insight into her own feelings or experiences.

We were unable to examine the effects of participant characteristics because there is currently no mechanism to link this data, which is collected on the participant referral form, to the questionnaire data.

### QUALITATIVE DATA

Data was collected from a representative group of program stakeholders (n=3 QCS staff, n= 4 SHINE for Kids staff, n=3 CYJMA staff), using semi-structured interviews. These were conducted via Zoom and MS Teams, audio recorded, and transcribed by the research team. Questions varied depending upon the stakeholder's perspective and the nature of their involvement with the program. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours.

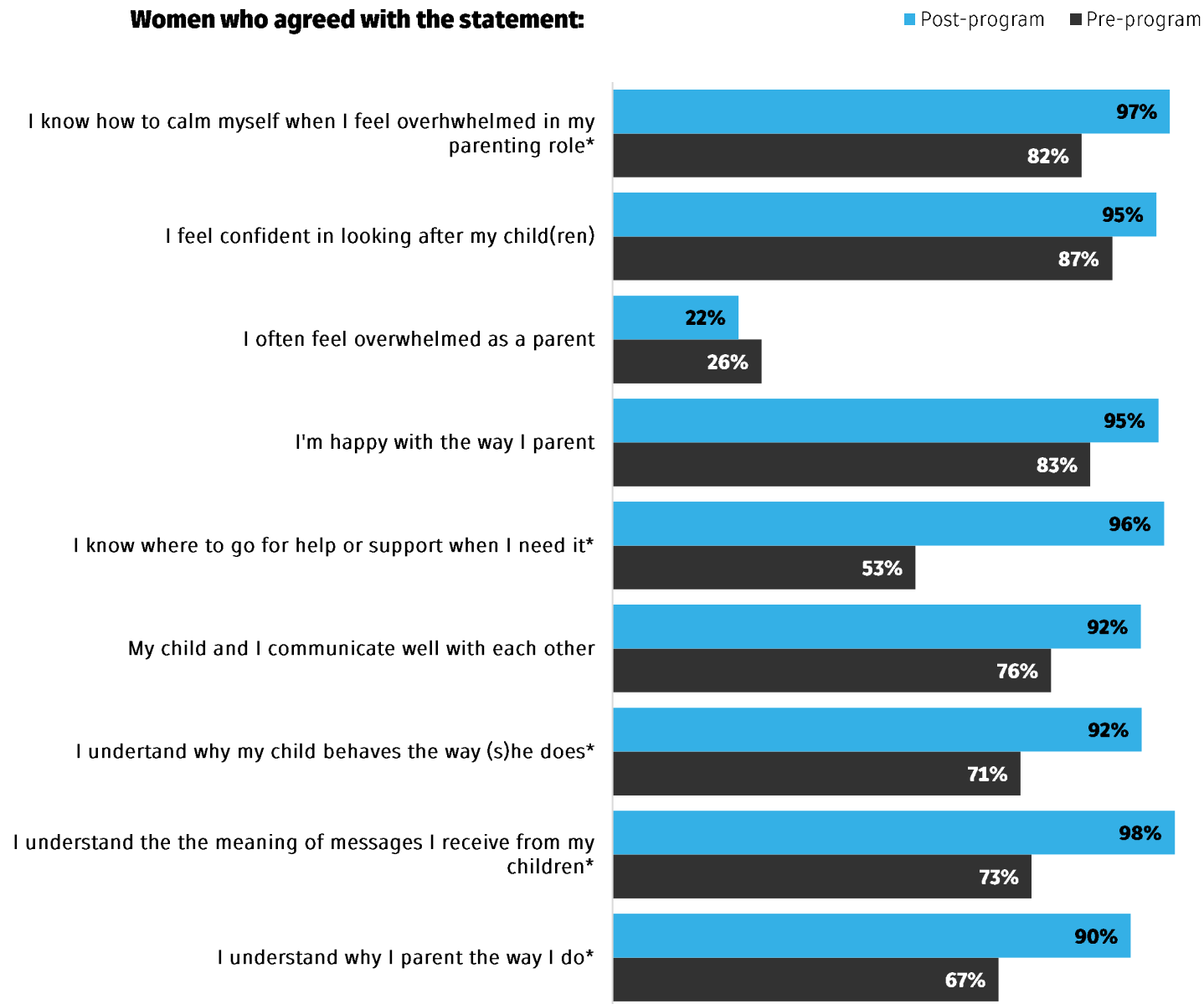
Identifying information (e.g. names, locations) was removed from interview transcripts and the documents were managed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

We used a modified version of Framework Analysis<sup>1</sup>-a systematic method of qualitative data analysis used in applied policy research. Framework Analysis is a five-stage process:

(1) To immerse ourselves in the interview data, we re-read the transcripts and notes, and as a research team we discussed key ideas and interpretations, and instances in the data. (2) We identified a thematic framework for our analysis which involved the a priori application of the Ngaa-bi-nya evaluation framework to our data. (3) Using the Ngaa-bi-nya domains (program landscape, ways of working, learning, and program resources) we broke down the data into manageable 'chunks', which we then indexed using the sub-categories of each domain, as well as categories arising from the data itself. (4) We used NVivo's in-built functionality to query and 'chart' the data with reference to our evaluation questions. (5) We interpreted the data with reference to the evaluation questions, making comparisons between subjects and instances in the data to test our emerging understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L., 2002. Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 187-208). Routledge.

## APPENDIX 3 SHORT TERM PROGRAM OUTCOMES



\* Denotes significant change in proportion pre and post intervention; don't know was treated as missing



# THANK YOU

Women who participated in the Keeping Us Together Program

Staff of the Queensland Dept. of Children, Youth Justice and  
Multicultural Affairs; Queensland Corrective Services; and  
SHINE for Kids

Dr. Erica Breuer  
Assoc. Professor Megan Williams  
Dr. Marc Remond  
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