

Employment Collaboration Project

Eleven ideas to create decent employment opportunities for women with lived experience of the criminal justice system using the power of finance, business and entrepreneurship.

Victorian Legal Services
BOARD + COMMISSIONER



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Foreword from the lived experience leadership team



Having work gives us roots in the community.

It gives us a reason to get out of bed in the morning. It gives us a sense of being a part of something. Maybe we will buy a house? An apartment? Now we have friends who are from work, not prison. A different culture. A different world. A future.

We are all formerly incarcerated girls. We will not be trying to sway anyone with fancy words. We don't need them. We have the truth from our hearts and our own lived experiences. Decades of prison between us. All different walks of life and situations.

This project has brought together people with lived experience of the system and of business. We put our heads together to try and give other girls coming out of custody a future as well. It was not just an afternoon of pipe dreaming. It was days and days of consultation — formerly incarcerated people talking to private and social enterprise, looking at the issues through their own lenses, and pointing out the barriers and benefits we saw in each suggestion.

The hope was to find ways to create real and meaningful employment for girls coming out of custody. Actual opportunities. We walked away hopeful and inspired. So many amazing people all united in one goal: a brighter future for those who society normally forgets.

The hope is that real and meaningful work opportunities come from this project, and that this report inspires people to make it a reality.

But this work cannot be undertaken by just one of us.

We need you. We need you to ask: How can I help? How can I lend a hand? Do I know anyone in my networks who can help? We need to do this work together.

We know it can be overwhelming, even we are overwhelmed by the task. But we need to just think, 'What little thing can we do?' As Teddy Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are". We really do believe if we can all come together, we can make this a reality.

**Written by the project's lived experience leadership team:
Stacey Stokes (author), Teegan Hartwick, Nina Storey,
Stacey Elvey, and Cathy Campesato.**



Executive summary

In 2024, Victorian Legal Service Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C) engaged The Difference incubator (TDi) to convene a collaborative co-design process to uncover opportunities for creating more decent work opportunities for justice affected women.

The project originated from a recognition that formerly incarcerated women face significant barriers to finding quality work post-release.

As the lived experience leadership team named in the foreword, employment has a profound impact on our lives. It provides purpose and belonging. It supports our sense of identity and value. It provides routine and social connection, as well as income. Steady employment can also be the difference between being able to regain custody of your children, or not.¹

Equally, being locked out of employment and being continuously knocked back from job opportunities, comes at a significant cost to individuals and society. Fundamentally, this experience of exclusion and rejection works against reintegration on every level.

We also miss out on the talents and life experience of those who have experienced incarceration. As peer advocate Cathy Campesato says, “When we leave the criminal justice system, most of us are determined to use our life experiences to drive community and personal growth. We are powerful agents of change. We are strong, we are resilient, and we have much to offer.”

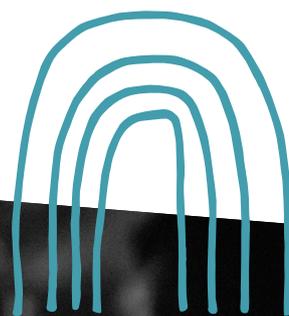
This project builds on decades of work by lived experience advocates and community sector organisations to imagine how we might use the power of finance, business and social entrepreneurship to create more decent work opportunities for women exiting the criminal justice system.

¹ https://www.sydneycommunityfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/KWOOP-PS-No-8-Employment_15Oct20.pdf

The project has fostered new relationships, trust, and momentum, and invited leadership from across the ecosystem. It has also surfaced eleven ideas for unlocking significant employment outcomes for women exiting the justice system. The ideas range from big, bold business and finance projects that will need to be built over the long term, to practical ideas that could be implemented in the next 18 months. Experienced individuals and organisations have put their hands up to lead the further development of these ideas, provided further funding is available.

The next stage requires focus and leadership. We are recommending that a collaborative 'backbone' be funded, to support 1-2 ideas to move to the next stage of development. This backbone would be primarily led by people with lived experience and include some team members with experience in running innovation processes and fundraising.

In the meantime, we hope this report energises your current efforts, inspires you to take bold new steps, and fosters deeper collaboration across the sector. We are just getting started.





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Project background

In early June 2024, Victorian Legal Service Board and Commissioner (VLSB+C) engaged The Difference incubator (TDi) to convene a collaborative co-design process to uncover opportunities for creating more decent work opportunities for justice affected women.

In recent years, VLSB+C has played an important role in convening and funding innovation and collaboration in the justice sector. In 2017, VLSB+C invested in a themed grant round focused on Keeping Women Out of the Justice System that saw funded organisations working together to reduce female incarceration. The work was strategic, operating both ‘on the ground’ and at a systems level, aiming to address conditions that were driving increased incarceration. The grant round delivered exceptional results and provided a benchmark in good collaboration and innovation.² This project represents another strategic investment by VLSB+C into women affected by the justice sector.

The project had four main stages pictured over the page. During the initial stage, we hired a lived experience advocate to join our team and consulted community sector leaders on the design of the Ideation Workshops. We also spoke with other social enterprise leaders and business leaders to understand what supports, opportunities and gaps existed in the Victorian ecosystem. Then we commissioned Women and Mentoring to prepare the “They Don’t Make It Easy” report. The paper provided a powerful insight into women’s employment aspirations, support needs and the barriers they might face in seeking employment.

The **They Don’t Make it Easy** report was formally launched on 28 October 2024 and shared with all the participants who attended the Ideation Workshops.

Following this, our team personally invited lived experience peer advocates, impact investment intermediaries, business leaders, social enterprise leaders and community sector leaders to take part in a series of Ideation Workshops, which were held on 11-13 November 2024. We describe these workshops in detail below. In the final stage, we held several meetings to debrief with the core team that emerged through the project, and we finalised this report.

² https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Keeping_Women_Out_of_the_Justice_System_final_report.pdf

Employment Collaboration Project: 4 stages

Building the conditions for collaboration

Build the core team
including women with
lived experience.

Build buy in amongst sector and
other potential partners and
participants.

Standing in her shoes

Current experiences
and aspirations

**'They don't make it easy'
report by Women and
Mentoring, documenting
current experiences and
aspirations:**

What is the journey to (or back to)
employment for formerly
incarcerated women?

What are women's employment
goals, skills, work experience,
workplace preferences and
support needs?

What supports and
opportunities exist and what
are the gaps?

Collaborative Ideation Workshops

Multi-day workshop
with community sector,
women with lived
experience, investors,
entrepreneurs and
intermediaries to uncover
opportunities and galvanise
ideas, relationships, trust,
momentum and leadership.

Sense- making & reporting

**Sense-making &
report writing**

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Collaborative ideation workshops

As a central part of the project, we ran three days of Ideation Workshops. The overriding question for the three days was:

“How might we use the power of business, finance and social entrepreneurship to create more decent employment opportunities for women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system?”

Each day was designed with a different thematic within the broader question:

Day 1: Using the power of Investment

Day 2: Using the power of small and large business

Day 3: Using the power of social entrepreneurship

Across the three days we had a core team in the room who attended all three days, and others who came specifically for the thematic. This core team was made up the TDi team, five women with lived experience of incarceration, one man with lived experience and another individual who leads a social enterprise supporting justice-affected people. Each day we invited representatives from community sector organisations that work with women who have had contact with the justice system, as well as people who have subject matter expertise in business, finance and social entrepreneurship. There was also representation from the VLSB+C on two of the three days. The design of the Ideation Workshops was split into two distinct parts:

Part one: Getting to know each other

Part two: Ideation

Part one: Getting to know each other

We intentionally designed Part One to help participants relax, build relationships, and establish trust quickly within the group. At the start of each day, we dedicated time to create a place where individuals could unwind, feel at ease, and connect through shared human experiences. This deliberate approach reflects the foundational principles of Theory U, emphasising the importance of cultivating an ‘open mind, open heart, and open will’. By fostering this openness, we create a fertile ground for creativity and genuine innovation. This early stage of the workshop is pivotal, as it sets the tone for collaborative exploration and the emergence of ideas.

To do this, we ran several exercises that became rituals over the three days. It was interesting to watch the core team who were in the room for all three days, take these rituals and own them for themselves. We held five key rules of engagement over the three days:

- **Be Curious – You are not them**
- **No Capes – You are not your job title**
- **Be Present – The right people are here**
- **Go Slow – It’s like a dinner party with friends**
- **Share Courageously – We’re agreeing to Chatham House Rules**

“I came away from the three-day workshops feeling like my cup had been filled. The Difference Incubator – Annie and Anna – run a well-supported, safe, respectful space before, across, and after the three days. I felt valued, and my thoughts were deeply considered. Not only am I super excited for what’s to come, I know I’ve made some long lasting friendships.”

– Nina Storey, Director FIGJAM
and Lived Experience Advocate

We also discussed how language can unintentionally ‘box’ people. We actively collaborated to establish guidelines on the language we would and would not use. For example, we collectively decided to avoid terms like ‘prisoner’ and ‘ex-offender’, as they carry stigmatising or reductive connotations. By using language mindfully, we contribute to creating a more inclusive and empathetic narrative.

We then moved into story telling. The women with lived experience each shared their story and experiences. This was powerful and held in a respectful container. We then ran a conversation on each day with two or three of the people with subject matter expertise in innovative finance, business and social entrepreneurship.

Part two: Ideation

Part Two of the process focused on balancing individual reflection, group input, discussion, and idea refinement. We strategically designed this phase to ensure that lived experience and subject-matter expertise held equal importance and were equally valued. By creating this intentional balance, we fostered an environment where diverse perspectives could contribute meaningfully to the development and enrichment of ideas.

Outcomes

The format of the workshops worked remarkably well. Trust and relationship have been built, creativity and ideas have been unearthed and given the possibility of life, and momentum and leadership have been created.

Over the three days it was intriguing to watch the core group enter as individuals but leave as a team with a shared experience. They had shared stories and rituals, and were bound by a code of how we’d agreed to work together. This has continued in subsequent online video calls, where there has been a sense of camaraderie, common purpose, and trust.

“I walked away from the intensive brainstorming hopeful and inspired. So many amazing people all united in one goal. That goal, a brighter future for those society forgets.”

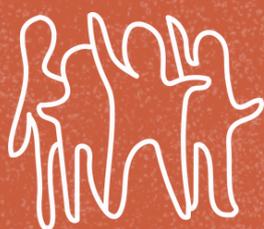
– Stacey Stokes, Lived Experience Advocate

Similarly, those without lived experience of incarceration were deeply affected by the process. The workshops sparked in them, a desire to use their power to create change.

“I had the privilege yesterday of joining the first of three days curated to explore solutions to the systemic disadvantage of women with lived experience of Australia's criminal justice system. Vitally, the process centred women with that lived experience in these explorations and the workshops. I heard five stories yesterday, in awe of their courage and resilience as they have navigated and are still navigating such an appalling, brutal experience. I'm eager to see how myself and the Red Hat Impact team can serve and collaborate.”

– Cameron Neil, Director Red Hat

For others that are familiar with the justice system, and are leading social enterprises or community sector organisations, the workshops helped to expand their horizons of what is possible.



“For three days we listened, ideated, and sat in the messiness of the innovation process to uncover multiple “ways forward” for justice-affected women’s financial empowerment. My vision of what is possible has expanded significantly.”

– Jobe MacShane Co Founder, Re-boot

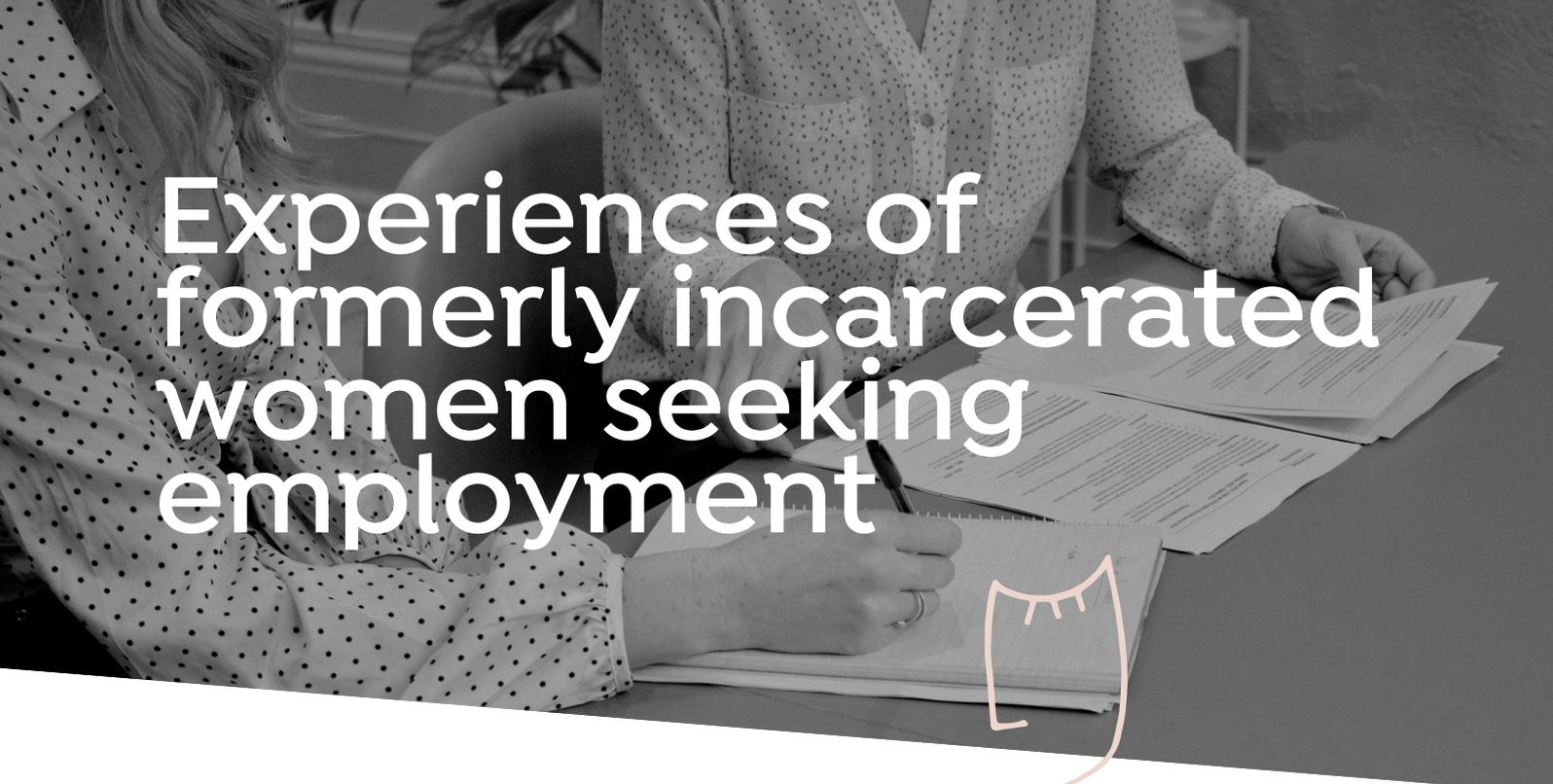
“Blown away! What a rewarding and worthwhile experience to be part of a think tank these past three days – unearthing employment ideas and solutions for women’s reintegration.... Friendships made, barriers broken down, and solution-focused planning in place. Lets go! Thanks TDi, I felt relevant and heard. The justice system has many players, both voluntary and compulsory; I was the latter. To be involved in a forum where solutions are being considered from those with lived experience of incarceration was rejuvenating and progressive.”

– Stu Holmes, CEO Green Collar



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Experiences of formerly incarcerated women seeking employment

Women and Mentoring's report [They Don't Make it Easy](#), commissioned as part of this project, speaks to the profound impact of general community stigma on formerly incarcerated women, seeking employment.

Even when women do not face direct discrimination in seeking employment, they fear the possibility. This is a significant issue working against the capacity of women to reach their full employment potential.

“I feel like women are coming out with a lot of shame and guilt of ourselves, we don't think we are even worthy of a job, but we need to support ourselves or build ourselves back up”

- Julie*

The [They Don't Make it Easy](#) report identifies that the rise in pre-employment checks has made it difficult for formerly incarcerated people to secure work, as past charges often appear in police record checks, even for entry-level positions. Additionally, barriers persist in securing jobs unrelated to previous offences or in fields requiring specific checks, such as working with children or NDIS screening, despite the original offences not involving vulnerable groups.

The report confirms that employment could be particularly transformative for formerly incarcerated women who struggle to survive on Centrelink payments, with 70% of Women and Mentoring participants receiving some form of Centrelink payment. The highest forms of primary payment types being Jobseeker (59%) and Disability Support Pensions (24%). The report identified that such poverty actively works against women's goals to improve their health and mental health, to connect with community and to strengthen or rebuild relationships with family. The potentially profound change that employment can offer cannot be overestimated.

* Name changed for privacy.

The report also identified four main opportunities for creating change, which fed into the Collaborative Ideation Workshops. Most of the ideas identified in the following section align with the first opportunity area, 'more judgement free workplaces'. This makes sense, given the project's focus on the role of business, finance and social entrepreneurship. However, we include all four opportunity areas here, as they are all critical to getting better outcomes for formerly incarcerated women.

The four opportunities for change included:

1. More judgement-free workplaces that do not reinforce shame or stigma.

The study found that formerly incarcerated women have a broad range of career ambitions and workplace preferences. As a result, Women and Mentoring recommended looking at ways to influence various employers across multiple sectors to hire participants with a criminal record. They recommended that these partnerships be based on employers' understanding of the unique experiences of women in the justice system and a commitment to providing employment opportunities without judgment. Alternatively, the study suggested that there may also be opportunities for expanding, or creating new justice focused social enterprises, that hire for a range of job roles and explicitly accommodate the needs of participants exiting the criminal justice system.

2. Job readiness education

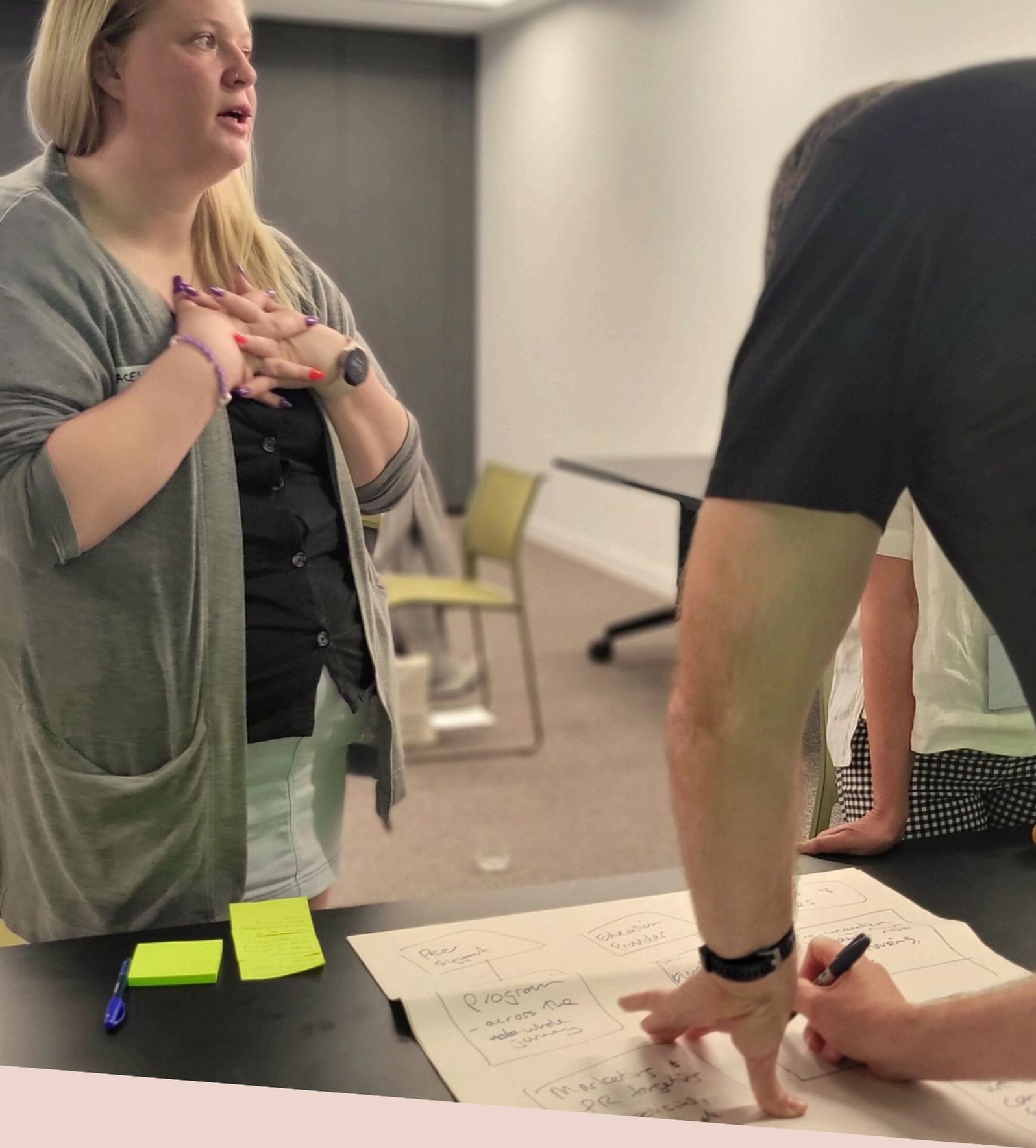
Women and Mentoring participants also emphasised the importance of employment readiness support, recommending enhanced education in prison to boost confidence and job-seeking skills upon release. They highlighted the need for assistance with resume and cover letter writing, interview preparation, appropriate clothing for interviews, and guidance in identifying suitable job roles. Additionally, job readiness education should focus on building self-esteem and confidence, as many participants struggle with low self-worth and feelings of being undeserving of meaningful careers.

3. Long term support

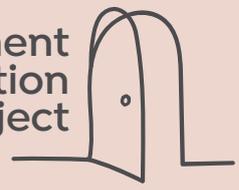
Women and Mentoring participants often face multiple challenges with limited support during their employment journey, with secure housing being a particularly pressing concern. Expanding long-term, consistent support to prioritise assistance in securing stable accommodation, alongside mentoring and access to other essential services, would greatly alleviate stress. Secure and safe housing is crucial, as it provides the foundation for stability, enabling participants to better advocate for themselves and pursue their employment goals with confidence.

4. Justice obligations

Justice obligations such as reporting for randomised urine testing, can create considerable stress as individuals must navigate these requirements alongside the challenge of finding and keeping work. Although outside of the scope of this report and project, re-designing justice obligations is sorely needed, if the goal of reintegration and employment is to be taken seriously.



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Eleven ideas

to create more decent employment opportunities for women with lived experience of the justice system



Over the course of the three Ideation Workshops, we identified and ‘worked up’ eleven ideas that use the power of business, finance and social entrepreneurship to create more decent employment opportunities for women with lived experience.

The ideas were identified through collective brainstorming, followed by a process of voting. They range from big, bold projects that will need to be built over the long term, to practical ideas that could be implemented in the next 18 months.

The 11 ideas in brief:

1. Ten million dollar Investment Facility
2. Housing through Payment by Outcomes (PBO) model
3. An employment aligned Connectivity Hub
4. Second Chance Employment Network
5. Commercial laundry
6. Commercial nursery
7. Expand existing Container Deposit Schemes
8. Lived experience consultancy
9. Aged care service for currently incarcerated people
10. Property development business
11. Builders clean business.

In the following section we discuss each of these ideas in turn. The information provided represents an initial sketch of each idea, based on conversations during the workshop. The workshop participants had considerable lived experience and/or business experience. Resourcing requirements have been included to give the reader a sense of the scale of the development work, but these numbers should be treated as a ‘best guess’.



Idea 1

\$10m Investment Facility, focused on acquisitions that generate employment opportunities

The Idea

A \$10m Investment facility that buys businesses, being sold by retiring baby boomers⁴, to focus on employing formerly incarcerated women. Purchased businesses could be held in a holding company and owned by a trust. Women with lived experience would play a key role in governing the trust.

What success looks like

Large number of job opportunities created, seamless and speedy transition into employment post incarceration, judgement-free workplace cultures, a diversity of job roles (job seniority and type), and commitment to exploring how women with lived experience can benefit beyond employment, e.g. through ownership; profitable business performance and returns to investors.

Strengths of this idea

Puts women with lived experience in the driver's seat. Provides an avenue for creating a large number of judgement-free workplaces quickly, compared to the slower, but equally important task of influencing mainstream employers to change their practices. Multiple businesses provide a diversity of roles. Has a commitment to exploring how women with lived experience can benefit beyond employment, e.g. through ownership.

Related example

New Majority Capital fund is a private equity micro-buyout fund focused on the acquisitions of profitable, cash flow generating small businesses from retiring baby boomer owners. New Majority Capital acquire businesses on behalf of underrepresented business owners and support them (via their Foundation) through an accelerator program, to run the business profitably and eventually buy-out the Fund. They focus on businesses that have an EBITDA of \$500k - \$2m. These businesses are too small for traditional private equity interest and are sold at lower multiples than larger businesses. Therefore, there are strong opportunities for growth and improvement in cash flows relatively quickly. To date they have mobilised USD\$76m and completed 12 acquisitions. People with a criminal record are eligible to be business owners.

Whilst New Majority Capital focuses principally on business ownership as the leverage point for impact (and our idea focuses on employment, with potential for ownership at a later date), it provides a good example of how the power of impact investing could be used to create significant impact, whilst also generating returns.

Key to making the idea work

An anchor investor, other investors are interested, and the businesses acquired deliver on the success elements described above.

⁴ <https://acumentis.com.au/news/the-impact-of-the-silver-tsunami-on-sme-valuations>

Leadership

Red Hat Impact, one of Australia's leading innovative finance organisations, is interested in leading this work in partnership with women with lived experience, if funding can be sourced. **Social Enterprise Finance Australia** is also interested to support.

Resourcing required

- Feasibility Research into investor appetite, and search for examples of businesses for sale that meet the needs of investors, and the employment preferences of women with lived experience - \$100k
- Design and development of the Facility - \$300k
- Initial capital raise - % of capital raised.

An alternative approach is to acquire one business, and then create the fund; however Red Hat Impact would prefer to raise the capital for the fund, as it's more economical overall.

Next steps

- 1-2 pager describing the opportunity and the funding needed – Responsible: Red Hat Impact
- Feasibility Study
- Source anchor investor
- Design and develop the Facility
- Capital raise for the Facility





Idea 2

Providing housing through a Payment by Outcomes (PBO) model

The Idea

Housing for formerly incarcerated women, through a PBO, that also provides employment opportunities throughout the construction.

The situation today

Currently in Australia, more than half of people leaving prison face homelessness on release. People are also being held in prison longer than needed, because they do not have a fixed address. This is costing the Victorian Government much more than it would otherwise.

What success looks like

Women who have been incarcerated have a job and stable income; women have housing; cost savings to the government; returns to investors.

Strengths of this idea

Goes some way to addressing the urgent housing issues faced by formerly incarcerated women. Recently announced Social Impact Bond focused on justice affected people (described below) could be leveraged and adapted, for this project.

Related example

Social Ventures Australia (SVA), Vacro, the Victorian Government and housing providers have formed a first-of-its-kind partnership, the [Arc Social Impact Bond \(SIB\)](#), to better support people leaving prison and reduce reoffending and homelessness. The new \$9 million Arc Social Impact Bond (SIB) aims to disrupt this cycle, which comes at a significant social and financial cost for the community, with a program that is unique in both the solution it offers and how that solution is financed. The Arc program will be the Victorian Government's fifth Partnerships Addressing Disadvantage initiative and draws on Vacro's innovative reintegration framework and a housing-first approach. This evidence-based program provides people leaving prison (primarily men) with at least three months of pre-release support, two years of intensive case management support post-release and access to stable housing, providing a base to create a new narrative arc for their life. Vacro will deliver the Arc program in partnership with a number of experienced housing providers, including Housing Choices Australia, Beyond Housing, Haven Home Safe, Women's Property Initiatives, Uniting Vic. Tas and Aboriginal Housing Victoria. The Arc SIB will measure participants' reductions in the justice, health and homelessness services. These measured reductions become the basis of outcomes-based payments by the Government, which ultimately provide a return to investors.

Different models considered

Different locations provide for different cohorts. Two variations were explored: 1) a regional Victorian tiny house development with communal gardens and 2) a suburban block, with multiple units.

Key to making this idea work

Securing government and investor support; securing delivery partners; having land.

Leadership

Lived experience advocates Nina Storey and Stacey Stokes, provided funding is available. SEFA can support with connections to individuals and organisation who are skilled in the development of PBOs.

Next steps

- Identify partners
- Test Victorian Government interest.





Idea 3

An employment aligned connectivity hub

The Idea

An employment aligned connectivity space that brings business, those who have experience of the criminal justice system, and core support services together in a single physical location.

What success looks like

Business sees the hub as a viable employment pathway to support social procurement objectives, community and business have less stigma around those with lived experience, folks actively engage with the hub and are not returning to prison, people with lived experience are influencing and collaborating on the direction and decision making in the hub.

Strengths of this idea

Provides a powerful avenue for collaboration between disparate sectors, as well as coordinated service delivery. Proven model in Multiplex's Connectivity Centre, described below. Could be linked to an upcoming major infrastructure project, such as the Suburban Rail project.

Related example

The Footscray Connectivity Centre, supporting the New Footscray Hospital Build in Victoria, was a [Multiplex initiative](#) that ran between 2022–2024. The concept is the result of many years of collaboration and research to determine how Multiplex can best deliver genuine and long-term outcomes for people who are normally locked out of employment. The Footscray Connectivity Centre was a physical site where agencies working on employment could come together and provide services.

Key to making this idea work

Several businesses buy into the idea and provide funding and expertise, the lead organisation(s) is able to 'speak business', women with lived experience have control and influence in the design of the hub.

Different models considered

- Referrer model: limited staff, small physical space, acts as a connector to already established services at other locations
- Hybrid model: same services operate a 'pop up' space, constant staff presence, case management provided within the service; holds events and workshops.
- Co-location model: services co-located for employment, including financial support, legal services, health services and training services; outreach services or training into prisons.

The Suburban Rail project was named as one upcoming opportunity, which could benefit from having a Connectivity Hub. Consideration was also given as to whether, such a hub would need to cater to women and men, as well as other groups that are typically locked out of employment.

Leadership

Open to an individual or organisation that wants to lead this.

Next steps

- Broader consultation with people with lived experience to test and validate if a hub is needed. Ideally co-design of this model with women with lived experience
- An established organisation would need to prioritise this action and coordinate the progress (e.g. Women and Mentoring, Flat Out or Prison Network)
- Idea testing with established partners and funders



Idea 4

Second Chance Employment Network

The Idea

A Community of Practice for employers, businesses, lived experience advocates and employment and re-integration services, designed to help people connect, build trust and identify opportunities for collaboration and improve employment practices.

What success looks like

Buy in from all actors, regular gatherings, sustainable employment opportunities flowing, new businesses joining, businesses improving their employment practices, consistency of practice across actors, increasing visibility of lived experience.

Strengths of this idea

Low-cost way to build momentum, relationships, belonging and get 'quick wins'. Could also provide a platform for lived experience advocates to influence change.

Key to making this idea work

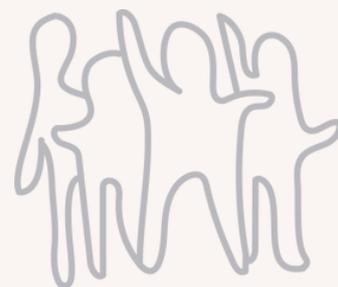
leadership, funding and visibility (in the justice system, in business and in government), clarity of outcomes and effective reporting.

Leadership

Stuart Holmes from Green Collar is interested in leading this with women with lived experience.

Next steps

- Test the value proposition of the Network with potential actors/members
- Develop 1-2 pager
- Find funding





Idea 5

Commercial Laundry

The Idea

Buy or start a commercial laundry that employs formerly incarcerated women.

What success looks like

Business is profitable and providing employment on a large scale.

Customers

Focused on larger scale contracts with aged care, hospitals, accommodation (AirBnB) and hotels.

Strengths of this idea

Can provide a large number of jobs (i.e. 150-200 jobs), strengthens educational outcomes and great for entry-level jobs — no or low skills required for the role, can scale up quickly to meet demand (i.e. one single 8hr shift, to 16 hour double shift), proven model (now around 8-10 social enterprise laundries around Australia), Whitebox Enterprises are experienced in establishing and running commercial laundries.

Related example

Beacon Laundry is a jobs-focused social enterprise commercial laundry first founded in Bangalow, NSW. It was incubated by (and is owned by) Whitebox Enterprises. Less than one year in, Beacon Laundry has created 70+ jobs, 80% of these are for people who have previously been shut out from work. A second Beacon Laundry has just opened in Adelaide.

Key to making this idea work

Anchor customers, upfront capital, and Whitebox Enterprises' expertise.

Start-up capital

\$10-\$15m – combination of grants and impact investment, with a goal to break even by end of Year 1.

Leadership

Whitebox Enterprises is interested in leading this idea if funding was available.

Next steps

- Business Case development - \$500k
- Testing with investors - \$100k
- Capital raise - \$400k



Idea 6

Commercial Nursery

The Idea

A multi-faceted facility that hosts a nursery and horticulture training facility. It would have a strong focus on engaging First Nations people and growing Australian native flora. The business would focus on large government and commercial contracts.

What success looks like

Creation of 22 employment opportunities (but total employment over 5 years could benefit ~80 people, assuming most Nursery crew role would be for 1-2 years), support transition from custody and beyond, and the business is profitable.

Strengths of this idea

A well-known, reliable business model and a reasonably high-volume employer; training programs in prison on horticulture, so reduced cost of training. Only potential risk is that there are now three social enterprise nurseries in Victoria, so a rapid market assessment will be important.

Customers

Government (schools, roads and National Parks) and commercial (construction companies, Bunnings, Aged Care).

Partners

Work with First Nations groups to acquire native flora, TAFEs for further education and training, community farms to leverage existing infrastructure.

Key to making this idea work

Finding several anchor customers who want to meet their social procurement targets. Philanthropic funding for start-up costs.

Leadership

Open to an individual or organisation that wants to lead this.

Resources needed

- Rapid market assessment of current and projected demand - \$30k
- Business case development & testing with prospective customers - \$80k
- Start-up funding required to purchase equipment, a vehicle and working capital.

Next steps

- Rapid market assessment
- Business case development
- Secure 1-2 anchor customers
- Fundraise philanthropic funding



Idea 7

Expand existing Container Deposit Schemes

The Idea

Acquire an existing Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) facility, commercialise it, expand its offering and hire formerly incarcerated women.

What success looks like

The business is employing women with lived experience of the criminal justice system and is owned by women with lived experience. Opportunity to expand product lines to cardboard collection and recycling.

Strengths of this idea

The CDS business model is profitable, Fruit To Work/Recycle for Change prepared to provide expertise and networks to help the idea get off the ground, provides employment opportunities at all levels (~15 people), provides ownership opportunity for a women with lived experience, relatively low investment to buy an existing CDS facility.

Key to making this idea work

support from Fruit To Work/Recycle for Change, funding to buy the CDS facility, female entrepreneur with lived experience to lead the business.

Leadership

Nina Storey and Teegan Hartwick with support from Rob Brown Fruit To Work/Recycle for Change.

Resources needed

- \$150k to buy the CDS facility
- \$150k for first year of operating

Next steps

- Research sites
- Understand feasibility and viability from existing sites
- Raise small amounts of capital



Idea 8

Lived experience consultancy

The Idea

Establish a justice-focused lived experience consultancy that provides a range of services to lived experience advocates, community sector organisations, and businesses.

This could include:

- An Employee Assistance Program and supervision for lived experience advocates – by and for women with lived experience.
- Providing training and advice to businesses (and HR bodies like Australia HR Institution) who want to change their HR practices and hire more women who have lived experience of the criminal justice system.
- Supporting the inclusion of, and monitoring of, business practice, in partnership with other certification bodies, such as Social Traders Social Enterprise Certification.
- Making visible stories of formerly incarcerated women in employment.
- Engaging with researchers wanting to conduct research with women who have lived experience of incarceration.

What success looks like

Businesses engaging services/training offered, businesses are motivated to be 'accredited' for their open hiring practices, women feel safe and valued sharing their story and are paid for it, more skilled employment pathways are created for women with lived experience, better quality research.

Strengths of this idea

Provides several avenues for ensuring lived experience is centred in reforming practice, including in business and in the community sector. People with lived experience are also valued and paid well for their expertise. The business has low start-up costs.

Key to making this idea work

Sufficient customers and willingness to pay, skilled lived experience advocates wanting to lead/build a consulting business, support in how to run a consulting business.

Leadership

At this stage no one with lived experience involved through this project has put their hand up to lead this. Currently FIGJAM Collective acts as an informal aggregator of justice-focused lived experience consulting opportunities.

Next steps

- Identify leadership
- Consult Social Traders
- Market research



Idea 9

Aged care service for currently incarcerated people

The Idea

Establish or buy an aged care facility, that serves people who are currently incarcerated and aging. The facility would be staffed by people with lived experience of incarceration.

What success looks like

The facility would provide high quality, safe and secure care to residents; provide large employment and reduce the costs to government.

NB: This project would require policy change, as currently people with a criminal record are excluded from working with aged care residents, as elderly people are categorised as 'vulnerable people'. However, policy change is likely in the aged care sector, due to skills shortages. It would also require the support of the Department of Justice and Corrective Services.

Strengths of this idea

Provides a win-win in terms of service quality, reduced cost to government and employment outcomes for formerly incarcerated people.

Relevant example

Whitebox Enterprises explored this opportunity with a well-known community aged care provider. The model seemed to be feasible, but the organisation had other priorities at the time.

Key to making this idea work

Fair price and viable business model, local area improvement, savings for government, start-up funds of \$15m, or \$3k per bed, interest from people with lived experience in this industry.

Leadership

Whitebox Enterprises is interested in leading this idea if funding was available.

Next steps

- Discuss with Commissioner and others to test interest
- Discuss idea with Victorian Government staff
- Identify aged care partner
- Develop scoping document



Idea 10

Property development business

The Idea

Establish a property development business, which buys and renovates unused or undercapitalised houses, with a goal of creating employment for formerly incarcerated women. Where the owner has a desire to sell, the property development business would sell the house to existing social housing providers to provide affordable rentals to formerly incarcerated women.

What success looks like

Within 12 months, we have five houses that have been renovated by formerly incarcerated people and have been sold to social housing providers.

Strengths of this idea

Provides avenues for employment and housing, could be fairly profitable with the right partners and expertise.

Key to making this idea work

Finding cheap houses to buy (could include deceased estates, abandoned homes, or homes owned by people who are in prison, and require support to sell or renovate), people are convinced of the businesses credibility, property development expertise, funding.

Leadership

Reboot Australia are really interested in this opportunity. Support from Rob Brown (Fruit to Work and Recycle for Change).

Resources needed

- Funding for start-up costs: estimate of \$2.5m
- Source suppliers – e.g. Bunnings, recyclable goods
- Renovators/tradies

Next steps

- Consult potential supporters/advocates
- Research geographical regions optimal for property development of this kind
- Speak to potential partners – e.g. Habitat, Bunnings, J G King, Metricon, Better Homes and Gardens, The Block
- Understand tax advantages for home owners
- Develop Business Case
- Raise funding from philanthropy





Idea 11

Builders cleaning business

The Idea

A social enterprise builders cleaning company providing post-construction cleaning services to the building industry, with a mission to create employment opportunities for women affected by the justice system. The company would cater to residential, commercial, and government projects, focusing on delivering high-quality services while promoting social reintegration and financial independence for justice-affected women.

What success looks like

The creation of ~10 employment opportunities within the first year, with potential to benefit ~100 women over five years as participants transition into long-term employment. Linkage with in-prison services to provide a clear pathway through reintegration via the social enterprise. A transitional business model designed to up-skill employees and encourage growth through the company. Large scale social procurement mandated contracts.

Strengths of this idea

- Builders cleaning is a growing industry with consistent demand, especially with ongoing residential and commercial construction projects.
- The business aligns with social procurement policies, appealing to construction companies seeking to fulfil diversity and inclusion commitments.
- Women affected by the justice system gain access to meaningful employment, skill development, and pathways to economic independence.
- Social procurement opportunities due to a gap in the market for a high quality social enterprise builders cleaning business.

Customers

- Short term: Residential, Private developers and commercial builders
- Long term: Social Procurement managers of Tier 1 and 2 companies due to the Social Procurement mandates throughout Victoria.
- Government projects (e.g., schools, community housing, public works)

Partners

- Work closely with the Department of Justice and Corrective Services to establish a pathway.
- Female focused and culturally sensitive RTO to provide cleaning certification
- Women's support groups and NGOs for candidate referrals.

Key to making this idea work

Securing anchor clients in the construction industry to ensure consistent demand, establishing a strong training and onboarding program to up-skill participants quickly, high quality cleaning business first (building a reputation for high-quality cleaning services, leveraging testimonials and repeat business), justice affected women lead.

Leadership

Justice affected women in partnership with Reboot Australia.

Resources needed

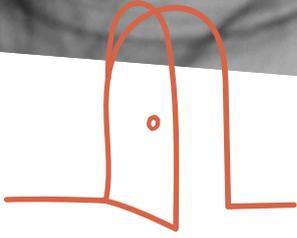
- Start-Up Costs: Approximately \$275k
 - Equipment: \$30k (cleaning tools, PPE, vehicles)
 - Office and storage space: \$3k
 - Labour: \$200k (initial staffing and management)
 - Training: \$20k
 - Marketing and business admin: \$20k
- Funding Sources:
 - Philanthropic grants
 - Social enterprise loans
 - Government start-up funds (social procurement and employment programs)

Next steps

- Market Research: Conduct a rapid assessment of demand for builders cleaning services in targeted regions. (~\$2k)
- Business Case Development: Build a detailed business case and test it with prospective customers. (~\$10k)
- Fundraising: Pursue funding to cover start-up costs and secure initial working capital.
- Pilot Program: Launch a small-scale operation to refine processes and gather customer feedback.



Way forward



This project has built a ground swell of relationships, trust and ideas. The task now is to harness this energy and ensure it is focused.

“What a brave and stunning group of people. It’s true what they say your VIBE attracts your TRIBE... I’m happy to help in any way I can...We have a saying at [our organisation] - ideas, without execution, remain dreams!”

- Rob Brown, Founder and CEO, Fruit to Work/Recycle for Change

In the debrief meetings following the Ideation Workshops, the core team — made up of women and men with lived experience of incarceration, TDi team and one leading social enterprise — agreed that it makes most sense to focus on one to two ideas that have the greatest chance of impact and success.

For almost all the ideas named, funding needs to be sought for further market testing or feasibility analysis. It was agreed that the next stage of the project should focus on securing funding for the further development of one idea that could be more quickly implemented, to maintain momentum, whilst the group continues to work on another idea, which may take time to build, but which has the potential to change the game for formerly incarcerated women.

There was strong agreement that the eleven ideas needed to be tested with funders before a decision was made on which ideas would receive focused support from the core team. For those with lived experience, the most promising ideas include:

- \$10m investment facility, focused on acquisitions – because whilst it would take time to establish, the impact would be significant
- Second chance employment network – because it could help to harness the current momentum in the short term
- Expand existing Container Deposit Scheme – because it is a feasible opportunity that could leverage Fruit to Work/Recycle For Changes existing skills and networks, for the benefit of justice affected women
- Property development business – because housing is such a significant issue for formerly incarcerated women
- Commercial laundry – because it has the potential for high employment numbers, there are several successful precedents around Australia and an experienced intermediary is willing to lead if funding is available.

The next stage requires focus and leadership.

As a result, we are recommending that a collaborative 'backbone' be funded over 24 months, to support 1-2 ideas to move to the next stage of development. This backbone would include the members of the core team, including the women and men with lived experience who played a leadership role throughout this project, as well as Reboot, and Anthea Smits and Anna Moegerlein from TDi.

This group would be responsible for supporting lead organisations/individuals to develop the 1-2 ideas further and to support with fundraising.



Back row: Anna Moegerlein, Stacey Elvey, Teegan Hartwick, Annie Smits, Cathy Campesato, Cameron Neil, Stu Holmes

Front row: Hanna Ebelling, Stacey Stokes, Nina Storey, Jobe McShane

Appendices

Appendix A: Other ideas identified



Stream 1, Investment: Long list

- Influence asset managers (such as superannuation funds) to ask for investment opportunities that have open hiring practices, and women with lived experience in their company and/or screen out investment opportunities that don't use open hiring practices
- Create a Cooperative that provides services into prison – e.g. Telecommunication services, which are currently under review because providers are over-charging.
- Establish an ~\$50m Investment Fund (similar to 'Trade for Good') which invests for financial returns, but a % of the profits go to projects and initiatives that support women with experience of the criminal justice system
- Influence existing impact businesses and social enterprises, to focus on justice affected women
- Pre-incarceration services, that reduce incarceration and utilise a Payment by Outcomes model
- Abandoned House Search fund, capitalising on large number of abandoned houses in Victoria, and turning them around to either make a profit for women with lived experience, and/or provide employment

Stream 2, Business: Long list

- Employee Assistance Program and Supervision program – for and by women with lived experience. This idea was explored under the Lived Experience Consultancy.
- Registered Training Organisation that is linked to employer demand, and delivers job readiness and training, and reintegration readiness in prison
- Establish a Union for incarcerated people to challenge unfair work conditions and pay. Currently, if a prison presents a petition whilst in prison it is classed as a 'intent to cause a riot' and can have serious consequences. The formal establishment of a union, would ensure individuals have formal avenues to advocate for their employment rights in prison.

Stream 3, Social entrepreneurship: Long list

- Tag and test business
- Creative digital & brand agency
- Ethical hacking business
- Barber/hairdresser
- Dog grooming business – Prison Network is currently developing a Business Case for a new dog grooming business
- Personal care business
- Ecommerce market place for creative products

- Things to Work – dry cleaning pick ups, etc.
- Hotel
- Gardening service
- Brewery
- Removalist business
- Festival/events organising
- Home-based food products
- After school and holiday programs
- Coffee van and food truck
- Labour hire business
- Merchandise business

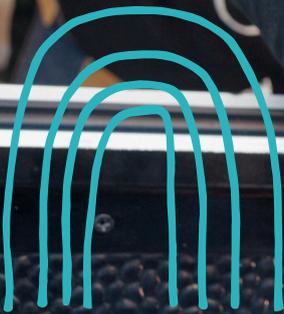
Other ideas identified

Several other ideas surfaced post the workshop. They include:

- Platform linking researchers, universities, people with lived experience, government bodies, and employers for meaningful consultation opportunities.
- Micro-loan product for formerly incarcerated women wanting to start a business

These ideas are being initiated by Antoinette Saliba, and several women with lived experience have put their hands up to help out.

One further consultation with The Torch, also surfaced a new pilot program – BLAC Workshops – which provides business training to formerly incarcerated men and women who are practicing artists. The program requires funding to establish it more formally. It is being delivered in partnership with Kinaway, The Torch, Many Rivers, Killara Foundation and Dardi Munwurro.



Appendix B: Ideation workshop participants

Investment stream

Cam Neill, Red Hat impact
Hanna Ebeling, SEFA

Business stream

Greg Rafferty, John Holland
Pai Rittichai, WIRE
Laura Brown, Multiplex VIC/SA
Melanie Field Pimm, VACRO
Sasha Courvelle, Bank Aus/NAB
Tina Eastman, Fredon Group
Noni Sproule, VLSBC

Social entrepreneurship stream

Antoinette, RMIT
Corinne Proske, Former Jobbank CEO, TDi Chair
Elena Pappas, LACW
Gemma Lloyd, Sacred Country
Joanna Serra, STREAT
Jobe McShane, Reboot Australia
Karen Fletcher, Flat Out
Kate Barelle, STREAT
Kathy Prior, Opportunity Lab
Kirsty Morrisey, Into Work Australia
Mark Daniels, Whitebox
Renne Martin, SEFA
Rob Brown, Fruit to Work
Katrina Webster, VLSBC

All streams

Tricia Ciampa, Women and Mentoring (WAM)
Anna Moegerlein, TDi
Annie Smits, TDi
Cathy Campesato, WAM, Lived Experience Advocate
Nina Storey, Lived Experience Advocate, Flat Out
Stacey Stokes, Lived Experience Advocate, VACRO
Stacey Elvey, Lived Experience Advocate, Forensicare
Teegan Hartwick, Lived Experience Advocate, Reboot Australia
Stu Holmes, Green Collar
Jobe McShane, Reboot Australia



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