



## New(town) Beginnings #14

Dear Neighbour,

As a staff member at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre I often encounter people sleeping rough or couch surfing who are ex-prisoners. This isn't because people who are experiencing homelessness are more likely to commit a crime but rather, that those who have committed a crime often don't have any place to go once they are released.

Whatever the reason for their imprisonment, one common thread is that there is virtually no support for inmates who have been released. Once you're out, you're practically on your own after the two night's (maximum) temporary accommodation that's arranged for you.

Without a roof over your head, finding work is almost impossible. The knock-on effect is inevitable and the challenge of reintegration can feel insurmountable. Without support networks or guidance in navigating the complexity of bureaucratic systems, reoffending becomes overwhelmingly likely.

Reintegration and rehabilitation back into the community should be an integral component of our criminal justice system, but sadly, that's not the case, therefore community services such as our close partner Community Restorative Centre (CRC) are left to take on this role.

Since 2013, Newtown Neighbourhood Centre has been working in partnership with CRC, providing funding for a full-time staff member to be based at NNC as part of the Boarding House Outreach Service.

Brooke\*, our current CRC team member, engages with people exiting prison three months prior to their release date. This allows time to build a trusting relationship and establish clear goals post release. At the end of this time, Brooke's clients can walk out into the world well prepared, and reassured that they are not going to be handling it alone. Brooke's clients will receive the same ongoing professional support as our other Boarding House clients.

"Relief is clearly visible when you say you are available to pick them up on release day" says Brooke. "They are so appreciative that I am able to spend the day with them setting up bank accounts, visiting Centrelink, organising a mobile, Opal card and most importantly helping them begin the process of finding a place to live".

To kickstart all of these necessary costs of living, Brooke\* and her client will have organised for Newstart support to begin on the day of their release. However, no matter how far in advance the application for Newstart begins, the first payment is a crisis payment of only \$280 for the first fortnight and may be the only income they receive for the first month. The shock at the high prices of travel, accommodation, and the cost of living is a reminder that this is not an easy society to step into, with a plethora of demands being made at every turn.

So what is the benefit of having Brooke work with Newtown Neighbourhood Centre? By being a part of our team, she has the benefit of having access to resources and networks available to secure Boarding House accommodation that few other services or organisations in Sydney may have.

As a member of both organisations, Brooke is able to attend multifaceted training and make connections from both services, and is able to integrate these learnings to the best possible benefit of her clients, while our own team have the opportunity to engage with an identified vulnerable group prior to their release, which we wouldn't be able to do otherwise.

Here at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre we want to achieve the best outcome for those most vulnerable in our community and for this to happen it's essential for us to build and continue these relationships with other organisations to create change.

Kiri  
**Boarding House Outreach Team**

\*Not her real name

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