

CHANGE NEW BEGINNINGS  
FAMILY SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
ACCOUNTABILITY FUTURE  
EMPLOYMENT PERSONAL  
GROWTH EVOLVE BREAK THE  
CYCLE REBUILD HEAL CHANGE  
NEW BEGINNINGS FAMILY S  
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PERSONAL GROWTH EVOLV  
BREAK THE CYCLE REBUILD  
HEAL CHANGE NEW BEGINN

**Annual Report**  
2010 - 2011



Established 1872

# Mission

VACRO's mission is to provide support and information for individuals charged with a criminal offence, offenders, prisoners and their families. VACRO also aims to provide leadership, education and training and contribute to research on the justice system for the community.

**VACRO acknowledges the traditional owners of Victoria and pays respect to the Aboriginal Elders, past and present. VACRO's head office is located on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and we welcome all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to our service.**

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# History & Governance

## History

VACRO was formed in 1872 when the Society for the Promotion of Morality called a meeting to discuss the provision of material assistance to prisoners deemed 'sincere and worthy'.

The original aim was to "*afford assistance to prisoners with a view to their restoration to a virtuous and honest mode of living*".

The organisation formed was called the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. In 1913 as the scope of work began to include families and public education, the name was changed to the Prison Association of Victoria. The Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders was adopted as the new name in 1975.

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## Governance

The Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) is an Australian Public Company, Limited by Guarantee. It is a Public Benevolent Institution, endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient.

Its Constitution outlines that the number of members of the company is unlimited and one class of membership exists – ordinary members.

Members elect nominating members as Councillors. The Councillors manage VACRO's business and the total Councillors shall not be less than five or more than 12.

# Council Members

## President

The Hon. Mr Justice David Harper AM

## Chairman

Matt O'Keefe

## Treasurer

David Finn

## Secretary

Murray Gerkens QC

## General Council Members

David Youssef

Sylvia Geddes

Julie Mundy

Barbara Rozenes

Judy Lazarus

VACRO Council members bring a broad range of expertise and business acumen to the organisation. As leaders in their chosen field, Council members are called upon to provide strategic direction, advice and guidance to VACRO's CEO and management team.

The Hon. Mr Justice David Harper, President of VACRO Council since 1995, is greatly respected as a senior member of the judiciary as well as for his work on law reform and his commitment to ensuring that support is provided for families and offenders.

The Chairman of the Council is a partner in KPMG's IT Advisory Practice. The Chairman brings a focus on good governance and financial security, providing management with strong leadership and advice.

Other Council members bring a range of experience across fields as diverse as business, government, philanthropic, benevolence and research. This collective expertise contributes to shaping and supporting the work necessary for VACRO to engage across the sector and provide essential, high quality programs for all our clients.

# FUTURE

*“When it comes to the future,  
there are three kinds of people:  
those who let it happen, those  
who make it happen, and those  
who wonder what happened.”*

John M. Richardson, Jr.

# President's Report

This is my last report, as I retire as President at the Annual General meeting. I retire with VACRO in excellent hands, and with the prospect that it will continue to deliver services of unparalleled excellence to prisoners and their families in ways which benefit the entire Victorian community.

My association with VACRO has been, for me, one of the most fulfilling of my life. I have watched from the sidelines with increasing admiration as, with dedicated and professional staff, and under the superb leadership of Judith Lazarus, Andrea Lott and Carol Nikakis, and the VACRO Council, VACRO has adapted to the changing needs of its clients and Corrections Victoria, and to changing community expectations.

Research has become a focus to an extent that it has not before, so that I now read as a matter of course excellent papers produced by VACRO into such important topics as its submission to the Sentencing Advisory Council entitled Parole: The rehabilitative sentence. Rehabilitation ought to be a primary object of Corrections Victoria, and one of its most fertile opportunities is presented by the prospect of parole when the offender's non-parole period has ended. Typically, Dr. Mary-Ann Robinson has prepared an outstanding submission on a most important subject. She is also writing a Framework for Children – *Next Generation on the Outside*, as the result of ten years' research and practice at VACRO, including 'Doing it Hard', and incorporates data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics together with proposals for 'harm prevention' in caring for children within the Correctional system. VACRO is better placed than any other organisation of which I am aware to combine the best of both practical knowledge obtained in the field and at the coalface, and then exploit that advantage to the

very great benefit of those to whom benefits come infrequently and hard – as well as to the rest of us who are also, though less directly, the beneficiaries of improvements in the sympathetic but hard-edged management of the correctional system.

I do not intend to say farewell to VACRO and will retain a keen interest in all it does. I owe VACRO much. It has been a privilege to be associated with it, with its volunteers, its staff and its Council. I have made life-long friendships, and have learned much that otherwise would have remained unfortunately undiscovered. It has been an inspiring journey, and I am very grateful.

My especial thanks are due not only to the three CEO's who have done such an outstanding job during my time as President, but also to the Council, led with passionate devotion by a succession of Chairs: Matt O'Keefe (current), Roger Dench, John Griffin, Leon Hill and John Sayers. Their friendship and assistance has been, and remains a highlight of my professional and personal life.

**The Hon. Mr Justice David Harper**  
**President**

# Chairman's Report

VACRO continued to consolidate in 2010-11 and at the culmination of a three year period of major organisational change, we are now well placed to grow within a sustainable and realistic framework. The ANZ Trustees generously contributed towards the progression of our research and development focus over this time.

In a year of change, there has also been movement within our management team, under the leadership of a new CEO and CFO.

It is a pleasure to report that during the year, VACRO entered a Strategic Planning process, with final sign off and implementation expected to commence in 2012. The Council has begun exploring our direction over the next three years, with consideration being given to possible expansion of service delivery and relevant areas for research and development. Further to sign off, a Communications Strategy will be developed, boosting our profile within the Criminal Justice system and the broader community.

We will also seek to contribute our expertise to Corrections Victoria and other Government bodies as they consider high-level policy and program development. Our ultimate aim is to support clients to successfully transition into the broader community. This generally requires reconnection with family, finding a stable and safe home, developing education and employment opportunities, as well as feeling valued and able to contribute to society.

VACRO has finished the 2010-11 year with a small financial surplus, which is a further sign of our consolidation. My thanks to the Treasurer and CFO for their invaluable contribution

towards financial stability for the organisation. All VACRO Council members provide expertise and passion, whilst supporting the CEO and senior management to achieve organisational goals.

I also note that VACRO has seen the retirement of a number of Council members over the past year and our esteemed President, The Hon. Justice Harper AM has announced his intention to retire from the position at the 2011 AGM. He has provided expert guidance to the VACRO Council and has shown genuine care and respect, when considering the outcomes of our work, during his tenure. The Council, management team, staff and clients have all benefited from the contribution of The Hon. Justice Harper. We thank him sincerely for his legacy of inspired leadership, shown through intellectual rigour and care for our clients and their families during his 16 years as our President.

**Matt O'Keefe**  
**Chairman**



# CEO's Report

As I reflect on the past year, it is indeed a pleasure to report that VACRO is building on the work undertaken by our Research and Development team. In the past year, Dr Mary-Ann Robinson along with her team, has identified and researched issues relating to the successful transition of our clients, as well as children and families involved in the Justice system. We will continue to enhance current service delivery, as well as developing new projects, when funding becomes available. VACRO has tendered for Link Out, our men's transitional program, funded by Corrections Victoria.

The election of a new Victorian Government, with a law and order reform agenda has created both challenges and interesting conversations within the sector. As we move forward, VACRO will continue to contribute submissions to the various Committees investigating law and order reform and we are committed to sustaining a safe community, within an arena that is fair and just for everyone concerned.

VACRO management strives to work successfully and respectfully in partnership with the Government and Corrections Victoria, as our ultimate aim is to provide much needed services on the ground to support clients who are incarcerated, as well as providing support to the many families who eagerly await their release from prison. We appreciate the generosity of the management and staff at Corrections Victoria, who not only manage our contracts, but also take the time to provide us with good advice.

As we seek to develop new opportunities, we rely heavily on financial backing from Philanthropic Trusts for seed funding and continued support of new programs. A number of Philanthropic Trusts, including ANZ Trustees, Inner North Community

Foundation, Helen McPherson Smith Trust, Lord Mayor's Foundation, William Angliss Charitable Trust and R.E. Ross Trust, have all contributed to VACRO's ability to improve our standards and develop new programs.

A highlight of the year was the 10 year celebration of the VACRO Women's Mentoring Program in May. The Minister for Corrections, The Hon. Andrew McIntosh MP was the keynote speaker and his support was greatly appreciated by everyone who attended to celebrate such a momentous occasion. We were in awe as a VACRO client very excitedly spoke about her relationship with her mentor and all that she had achieved in a short space of time. Everyone in the room understood the positive impact that a mentor can have, especially when clients are struggling with loneliness and the need to fit into society, following imprisonment.

Whilst we have limited funding, we do have a lot of passion and as a small organisation within the sector, we are all acutely aware of the need to work well with Government, so that we can support each other to achieve good outcomes for our clients. The management and staff team are exceptional in their dedication and provide a professional and caring service to all VACRO clients, as they work through a myriad of both pre and post release issues. Many clients struggle to imagine life on the 'outside' after long periods of incarceration and programs such as WISP, Link Out and CSP are designed to assist with transition. We have seen a number of staffing changes at VACRO in the past year and I look forward to settling in with new team members in the coming year.

A huge 'thank you' is also due to the VACRO Council and in particular, the Chairman for his excellent advice and support.

# CEO's Report (cont.)

We are indeed fortunate to have such an exceptional group steering our organisation as we move towards the next Strategic Plan. It is with sadness that we will farewell The Hon. Justice Harper AM from his role as President at the AGM in November. His grace, wisdom and advice has been greatly appreciated by everyone at VACRO over many years.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the clients who use VACRO services. It is not an easy journey to move in and out of prison and the effect on families can be catastrophic, especially in the longer term. The choices our clients make are often blurred by trauma, alcohol and drug dependence, poor mental health and homelessness, which can lead to a 'revolving door' of chaos and incarceration. Changing behaviours by providing appropriate and supportive programs and services is essential to good outcomes. VACRO is at the forefront, assisting clients to learn a new, positive way of being so that life with family, friends and the broader community can be a stable and productive experience.

Carol Nikakis

**CEO**

BREAK  
THE  
CYCLE

# Research & Development

Over the past five years, VACRO has gradually integrated Research and Development into all areas of our work. The Research and Development team works closely with each of our client services teams, supporting their work to ensure that it is informed by evidence and can report effectively on the results produced. This relationship also ensures that VACRO's involvement in research, policy commentary or development of new programs remains grounded in our service experience, working closely with clients. We 'road test' all of our ideas with VACRO service teams and include their insights to be sure that we maintain a focus on the purpose of our work: VACRO's research, policy and program development work ultimately aims to produce better outcomes for our clients and the communities in which we live.

This involves the whole agency in a continuous cycle of learning and reflection that ensures our practice remains flexible and innovative, constantly developing in response to new challenges and always informed by evidence. Equally, our policy and commentary are informed by practical experience and remain grounded in our client services and work with communities.

## Research

VACRO continues to participate in research projects, bringing our experience as a service provider and our direct contact with clients. Working with academics and Government agencies, we value the opportunity of participating in research that complements our service experience and provides a forum for us to share our applied knowledge. VACRO is currently involved in the following research projects:

- » The impact of incarceration on children's care: a strategic framework for good care planning (Monash University)
- » Ageing in prison: a strategic framework for the management of ageing offenders in the Australian justice system (Monash University)
- » Living Down the Past: Criminal Record Checks and Access to Employment for Ex-Offenders (Monash University)

VACRO is strongly committed to supporting research by participating at many levels. We engage with a wide range of research projects as participants or in an advisory capacity. Many of our client support workers participate in interviews and contribute to focus groups to share their experience. We facilitate ethical contact with clients and support their involvement in, and contribution to research. VACRO has also conducted small research projects for Government, building on our reputation as a trusted provider of services to criminal justice clients.

Future research interests include exploration of policy frameworks that can produce better outcomes for vulnerable families in contact with criminal justice systems. We are also interested in system responses to Victoria's increasingly diverse population through the criminal justice pathway and working to contribute to community legal education, especially for the prison population.

*Through participation in research, we seek to contribute to new knowledge but always with a focus on broadening our expertise so that we can produce better outcomes for clients and communities.*

# Events, Information & Public Comment

## Information

VACRO provides information on all aspects of the criminal justice system. This information is directed at a range of audiences and is carefully developed with this in mind. As we move towards increased use of electronic communication platforms, VACRO has gradually adapted our resources so that they are available on our website. Information tailored to meet the needs of children and young people is increasingly accessed in this form, although we are committed to making printed material available to ensure that access to information is not restricted.

## Getting Started

Towards the end of 2010, *Getting Started* was printed and began making its way into the prisons and on to VACRO's website. *Getting Started* is the result of a Corrections Victoria funded project that undertook a major reworking of *Getting Out: and How to Survive It*, a book developed by VACRO ten years ago. The new series uses a plain language style and easy to read font to walk prisoners through some of the key challenges they face on release.

*Getting Out* has been a valuable resource for thousands of prisoners over the years and has been taken up interstate as a model for pre-release preparation. It was the first systematic approach to providing prisoners with information on what to expect upon release and how to navigate a complex service system.

While pre-release planning continues to mature, the leap from custody to the community presents as many challenges for our

clients today, as it did when the *Getting Out* resource was first released a decade ago.

The modular format is designed to increase accessibility, by breaking the information down into smaller, more contained segments of information that are relevant to each person. The Vietnamese translation will also expand the resource's reach, but many prisoners remain in need of assistance simply to read the information.

VACRO sees the *Getting Started* series as a vital tool in the reintegration kit.

## Pasifika projects in the Southern Metropolitan Region

Through our work with the Department of Justice and Pasifika communities in the Southern Metropolitan Region, VACRO worked in partnership with Te Waka One Ocean to develop and deliver a cultural training package in May 2011 for all Department of Justice staff in the region.

Building on the partnership with Te Waka One Ocean, VACRO was then funded by the Victorian Law Foundation to develop information leaflets for Pasifika communities in English, Cook Islander, Maori, Samoan and Tongan languages. These leaflets provide direct links to websites offering information on a range of legal issues that were identified as points of concern within these communities through our joint work with the community and the Department of Justice.

# Events, Information & Public Comment (cont.)

## Law Week 2011

In partnership with the Department of Justice (Southern Region), VACRO facilitated a community forum, Pasifika Community & the Law as part of Law Week in May.

Te Waka One Ocean provided information on the current issues facing the Pasifika community and their involvement with Police, Courts and the Community Correctional System.

The Department of Justice ran a range of educational sessions including coverage of issues that emerge in the Sheriff's Department and Consumer Affairs.

SOCIAL  
development

# Community Projects

## Te Waka One Ocean

VACRO worked in partnership with Southern Health to project manage Te Waka One Ocean. With funding from the Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund and the Alfred Felton Bequest managed by ANZ Trustees, this culturally specific project worked with Pacific Islander youth and their families in the Greater Dandenong region. The work focussed on those young people who were deemed at risk through their contact, direct or indirect, with the criminal justice system. Referrals came from project supporters at Victoria Police, Dandenong and Moorabbin Courts, local community agencies and the Pasifika community. The project aimed to strengthen connections to culturally relevant community groups and mentor young participants through programs and interventions focused on choosing positive life options.

## ATSI Family Links

VACRO is working in partnership with Gurwidj Neighbourhood House, auspiced by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Service Association (VACSAL). This new local partnership initiative is working to build links that will develop a local family information and support response for the families of Indigenous people in contact with Darebin Police. ATSI Family Links has been funded by the William Buckland Foundation, managed by ANZ Trustees, to enable the development of strong collaboration processes between police and local ATSI communities.

**Melanie Field-Pimm**  
**Senior Project Officer**

VACRO welcomes the opportunity of working in collaboration with Department of Justice Regions on identification and responses to local issues for individuals, families and communities as they are affected by involvement with the criminal justice system. VACRO is committed to further development of exciting initiatives and future partnerships with local communities.

## Second Chance Cycles

Second Chance Cycles is a community bike workshop, providing a safe space for clients to seek advice about bicycle mechanics, participate in training, help people who need bicycles or simply take advantage of free tools. Second Chance Cycles has had a big second year. After moving into the art and community space at the Collingwood Public Housing Estate, we continue to train people in bicycle mechanics, help out local residents with repairs, and spread the word about cycling and recycling. We work with local police, accepting lost or stolen bikes to ensure they can be reused. Most importantly we have continued to donate bicycles, helping people on low incomes get around and stay active. The program is building a profile in the community and the social service sector and has attracted regular active participants, seeking to learn new skills.

## Green Wheels and Justice

In May, Second Chance Cycles began work with the Department of Justice (North West Region) on a Green Wheels project. This project recycles lost, stolen or donated bicycles and provides an opportunity for Community Work placements that include opportunities to develop useful skills and produce a concrete result: bicycles will be donated to the Brimbank broader community with most recipients being recently arrived refugees. Each donated bike will come with a helmet, a lock and lights.

**Paul Atkinson**  
**Senior Project Officer**

*To come forth gradually  
into being.*

evolve



# Transitional Services

Whilst VACRO's role and services continue to evolve, the transitional needs of men and women leaving prison remains the mainstay of VACRO services. Transition is a critical time for people and supporting this process remains fundamental to the reintegration process.

## Community Support Program

The Community Support Program (CSP) is a state-wide service, providing intensive support for serious and persistent offenders. The CSP aims to support safe and appropriate transition to community living.

In 2010-11, the CSP has continued to assist offenders with living skills and their transition back to the community, and has sustained a close working relationship with specialist case managers from Corrections Victoria.

CSP has continued working within the case-managed support model, which delivers a planned, graduated transition from prison. This support model has a focus on skills development. This includes recreation, social integration, and basic living skill support as well as developing clients interests. An example of this has been a Horticulture Program, set up with clients of CSP. This program has proven to be a great success, with some 2000 trees being propagated from seeds, and donated to local community organisations in regional Victoria.

Fiona Rogers

**Program Manager**

## Link Out

The past year has been one of anticipation for the Link Out Program. The Program was due to come to an end in March 2011 and was extended for a further six month period. During that time Department of Justice Corrections Victoria released the Intensive Transitional Support Program grants (2011 – 2014) and VACRO submitted a tender.

The Link Out team has continued to work hard to support men being released from prison into the community with their transitional needs. Some of the needs that the men present with include homelessness, substance abuse issues, mental health issues, acquired brain injuries, disabilities, fractured relationships with family members and difficulty with obtaining training and employment opportunities.

Many of the men that the Link Out team support have been incarcerated for long periods of time. They often experience high anxiety, uncertainty and concern about what awaits when they leave a highly ordered and structured environment like prison. Some of the participants have no housing, no family supports in the community, have been in prison for 10 or more years and therefore are unfamiliar with day to day processes that many of us take for granted, for instance using a mobile phone and using public transport.

I have had the privilege of many participants telling me directly and/or acknowledging in writing that the support of their Link Out worker has made a significant difference to their capacity to cope when released.

# Transitional Services (cont.)

There have been some major achievements for many Link Out participants, which have been facilitated with the support of the Link Out team members. These include:

- » Obtaining transitional housing properties, so that they have been able to be accommodated in their own property directly on the day of release
- » Obtaining employment soon after release from prison
- » Staying out in the community for longer time periods than in the past
- » Increased contact with their children
- » Increased linkages with community agencies and supports

This year we have also piloted a joint initiative with Doutra Galla Health Services. We have run health and social based information groups for men at VACRO. Topics have included: podiatry, vein care, mental health wellbeing, employment options and healthy eating on a budget. The groups have been well attended and lively discussion has occurred. We envisage that these groups will continue over the next year.

I wish to recognize the professionalism and commitment of the Link Out team over the past year, who have worked relentlessly towards achieving positive outcomes for Link Out participants in a climate of uncertainty and change. Their dedication has been inspiring.

Carmel Cataldo  
**Program Manager**

rebuild

# Link Out

*A reminder to you that all you have done for this man has given his soul warmth again. Thank you.*

Mick, 46 years

*Thank you for all you have done. For you it may just seem your job, but for someone like me you have helped me out just so much. I will always remember it as you are so kind.*

Jason, 37 years

*Thank you for all your support. You have given me an amazing opportunity to live and participate in life, in the way I'd only imagined.*

Dan, 41 years

# Women's Support Services

The Women's Support Services Programs provide social and practical support, including material aid to assist women on mandated orders and those transitioning from prison to the community, to remain out of prison. Within the Women's Support Services are a suite of customised specialist women's services, assisting women to address victimisation, institutionalisation, offending and the factors that contribute to re-offending. These programs include:

- » Childcare and Transport Subsidy (CCaTs)
- » Outside Prison Understanding Self (OPUS)
- » Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP)
- » VACRO Women's Mentoring Program (VWMP)

**The CCaTS Program** is an initiative of Better Pathways (2005), the Victorian government's strategy to address the increase in women's imprisonment.

The program aims to assist women offenders who are on supervised Community-Based Orders to successfully complete these Orders. This is achieved through the provision of practical support, including financial assistance to manage childcare responsibilities and access transport, for women offenders undertaking those Orders. CCaTS is designed to deliver practical assistance to women at a time when failure to comply with an order will have serious negative consequences for these women and any children in their care.

The following chart shows the number of women who received assistance and the number of episodes of assistance provided.

Type of Assistance	No. of Women	No. of Episodes
Childcare	33	348
Transport	329	767
<b>TOTAL</b>	362	1115

*"It was a real dilemma for me to get to all my appointments, it was really hard for me to get around. I couldn't have met the costs of actually reporting, doing community work, as well as childcare. I am very grateful for this service."* (Anon. client)

**The OPUS Program**, a six year partnership between VACRO and Caraniche Psychological Services provides a range of programs to women at Tarrengower Prison. VACRO offers programs targeting drug and alcohol issues, offending behaviour, personal development, parenting skills, family issues and release preparation as well as psychological issues such as depression and anxiety. These programs are in the form of both group and individual sessions; and a community outreach component is available to assist women during their initial resettlement after release. This is a continuum of care model delivering an integrated, holistic program and services, to women in custody.

The VACRO OPUS staff maintained a high level of service delivery in preparing the women at Tarrengower Prison for release:

- » 36 Exit Preparation sessions. Parenting and families and Relationships – for 30 women
- » 37 Exit Preparation for Release sessions for 40 women
- » 45 Personal Development sessions for 62 women

**WISP** is an integrated, intensive pre and post release case management program that assists women exiting from Tarrengower and the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC) prisons with their transitional requirements. The aim of WISP is to assist women to resettle into the community, within a framework of addressing needs, achieving goals and reducing re-offending. The Program is delivered through a consortium of three agencies (VACRO, MCM and the Brosnan Centre) and is an initiative of Corrections Victoria.

VACRO WISP staff case managed 17 women who were predominantly high needs clients. The support provided covered Accommodation, Drug and Alcohol issues, Family Reunification, Family Violence, Gambling, Cultural Support, Social Support, Suicidal Ideation, Justice Support, Parenting and DHS concerns, Pregnancy and Anger Management. Our WISP case managers were very resourceful in obtaining additional funding from philanthropic trusts and individuals in order to provide the women with much needed material aid.

**VWMP** celebrated 10 years of mentoring support to women exiting the prison system and those on community orders. This is a significant achievement for VACRO, as we recognize that social connectedness is vital for women transitioning into the community. The overall aim of VWMP is to assist women to reintegrate back into the community through the provision of support by voluntary female mentors from the community. The mentoring relationships and their relational qualities underpin the effectiveness of VWMP in making a difference to the female offender's ability to successfully reintegrate into the community.

The mentors in the VWMP take on a very special role in supporting this marginalised and often overlooked client group.

The positive changes in the women results in social connectedness and resilient communities.

Ninety eight women were referred to the program and VWMP consistently maintains more than thirty active mentor pairs interacting in various stages of a mentoring relationship. The support by mentors assists with Accommodation, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Court Support, Employment, Family and Children, Personal Relationships, Mental Health, Physical Health, Finances, Education and Study.

*"I was introduced to my mentor whilst I was in prison. I didn't want her help and I felt too old for this whole mentoring thing! At the same time, I didn't feel that I would cope upon release and I was worried that I would go back to using drugs. I was anxious in social situations mainly because people naturally begin to question so that they can get to know you better. It's a different community altogether to what I'm used to and I do get lonely. My mentor helped me overcome a lot of this. I couldn't ask for a better mentor. She has never judged me. When I needed to talk, she was always available. Allowing me to talk and just be myself was the best! She has helped to keep me on track. Everything good now is because of my mentor. Words can't describe how great she is."*  
(VWMP Participant)

*"She gave me a renewed sense of hope and self respect that I hadn't felt since the day I came to jail. I remember sitting in my locked cell at night thinking about my mentor. How could someone who doesn't know me, knows I have committed a serious crime and gone to jail, yet be right there by my side when my own friends and some family had disowned me? I soon worked out that it was because she has a heart of gold and is one of the most genuine loving people I have ever met."*  
(VWMP Participant)

# Celebrating 10 Years: VACRO Women's Mentoring Program

On the 19th of May, VACRO celebrated 10 years of the VACRO Women's Mentoring Program at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. The key note address was delivered by The Hon. Andrew McIntosh, Minister for Corrections.

Our guest speakers included Anne Winnell, Community Corrections Officer, and one of the many women who have received mentoring and overcome the serious and enduring obstacles to reintegrating into the community after prison.

In acknowledgement of the 10 years of support to women, VACRO was joined by mentors and participants, as well as supporters and partners from a range of other organisations including Centrelink, Legal Aid, the Red Cross, Fitted for Work, the Burnet Institute and Court Network. Also in attendance were the Commissioner for Corrections, Bob Hastings; the Deputy Commissioner – Offender Management, Jan Shuard; Deputy Commissioner – Operations – Rod Wise; and Director – Sentence Management Branch, Brendan Money.

VACRO's women's mentoring program (VWMP) was developed in 2000 in response to an article 'Dying Inside' and was initiated by Carmel Benjamin AM in partnership with the women's prison region. Through the assistance of our volunteer Mentors, the VACRO Women's Mentoring Program (VWMP) has successfully assisted women to reintegrate into the community after contact with the criminal justice system.

## » **Woman to Woman founded in 2000**

- » An unfunded program
- » Supporting Women exiting Prison to integrate into the community following release.

## » **VACRO Women's Mentoring Program 2003-2006**

- » Funded by William Buckland Foundation and R.E. Ross Trust

## » **VACRO Women's Mentoring Program 2007-2012**

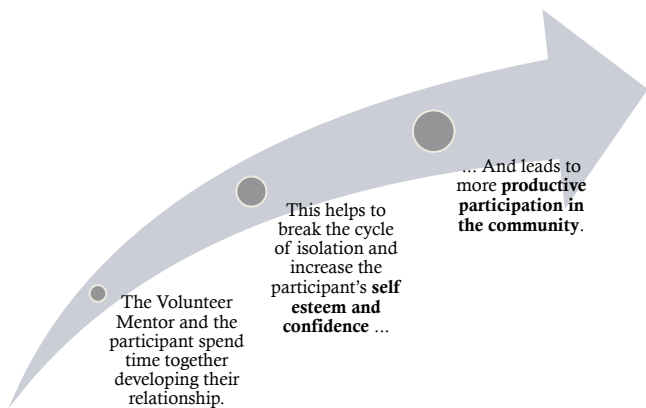
- » Funded by Department of Justice. Program expanded to include women on community based orders.

Carmel Benjamin, now an Ambassador for the program, shared her insights into the challenges facing women making the transition from prison to the community. Over the 10 year period, there have been over 300 referrals and over 250 matches.

Most importantly, the event recognised the countless hours dedicated by volunteer mentors over the 10 years and the role they have played in creating important and durable social connection and fostering resilience in individuals, families and the whole community.

With the support of their respective Mentors, the following are some of the outcomes for participants:

- » Improved self-esteem and confidence
- » Successfully completing their periods of Parole, Community Orders and Home Detention
- » Acceptance into courses of study.
- » Success in gaining and maintaining employment.
- » Family reunification
- » Successfully completing treatments including;
  - » Residential Withdrawal Programs
  - » Drug and Alcohol programs
  - » Gambling programs



The mentoring relationship is more than a substitute for the normal relationships that are unavailable to our clients. These relationships and their relational qualities underpin the effectiveness of VWMP in making a difference to the female offender's ability to successfully reintegrate into the community. The volunteer mentors in the VWMP take on a very special role in supporting this marginalised and often overlooked client group. The positive changes in the women results in social connectedness and resilient communities.

Vi Lotter  
Program Manager

*"My dad says who would have thought that someone from our family is going to university! This came from the ongoing support, encouragement of my mentor. And my family couldn't be prouder of me."*  
(VWMP Participant)

*"The one thing that I have really found with VACRO is the consistency before and after my release from prison. Every appointment I have made or anything that I may have needed or was promised before release, has eventuated, as well as full emotional support that has been readily accessible. In life, a lot of people want to help but few are actually able. I have been exceptionally lucky with the support I have had since my release. It is now 21 months that I have been free."*  
(VWMP Participant)

# personal GROWTH

Although the intent of the Criminal Justice System is to punish only the offender, direct and indirect consequences of offending invariably extend to children, parents and partners of offenders. Families can often be left disorientated by their contact with the justice system and left alone to deal with the grief, shock and shame of losing a loved one to the prison system. In addition to this, the children of offenders often experience significant, multiple and well documented forms of disadvantage. VACRO Family Services provided a bridge between the community and custodial settings.

For many years, VACRO has supported parents as they adapt to the change and overcome the issues associated with the incarceration of their loved one. By building links and delivering education and training to other family support agencies, VACRO has highlighted the needs of families, who are the 'invisible victims of crime'.

In 2010-11, VACRO continued a long history of support for the families of offenders, providing a range of services including counselling, telephone information and support, informational resources and assistance for families visiting prisons.

**Supporting Kids and Youth (SKY)** is a collaboration between the R.E. Ross Trust and VACRO offering two key areas of support to children and families of offenders: counselling / family support and mentoring (provided by SHINE for Kids) from 2008 through to 2011. It is part of a phased approach to develop an integrated model that draws upon the extensive history and experience of VACRO to establish an integrated, child centred and family inclusive framework to address the unique and complex needs of children and families of offenders in Victoria.

The program has been overwhelmingly successful with referrals from a range of services including prisons, family support services, Department of Human Services and Police. Support has been multifaceted in working with the child, the carer, other supporting agencies and the incarcerated parent where possible, to deal with issues such as the following:

- » complex grief & loss/ trauma histories
- » fear & nightmares resulting from criminal justice processes and parents' offending
- » being parented from prison and issues of belonging
- » parenting from inside prison
- » living with uncertainty
- » grandparents as primary carers
- » re-establishing relationships post-release
- » closure from therapy, maintaining coping skills

The SKY Program covers a wide geographic region and VACRO has responded by developing an outreach model to provide this service to families from a number of different locations. Permanent outpost locations include: Broadmeadows, Cheltenham, Dandenong, Footscray, Melbourne, Noble Park, Thornbury and Springvale. Excellent networks were also developed with schools and SKY has used their premises and counselling facilities.

## Prison-Based Family Liaison & Visitor Programs

VACRO's Family Liaison worker at **Melbourne Assessment Prison (MAP)** provides support to males entering the prison system by ensuring links with their children and family members are continued and maintained. This service also provides



valuable support to families navigating the criminal justice system.

The Family Liaison Worker is based at MAP two days per week and attends the orientation sessions for all new prisoners to provide information about services that VACRO can assist them with. The Support to families is predominantly through provision of information and counselling. VACRO's Information and Referral Worker (based at VACRO) also responds to and supports family callers through telephone counselling, brief intervention and information.

» 185 prisoners and 210 families were supported

VACRO worked in partnership with the Red Cross, delivering training for the **Prison Visitor Centre** volunteers based at Port Phillip Prison, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Fulham Prisons. These volunteers provide practical and emotional support to families and friends visiting the prisons. VACRO's resources are available in the Prison Visitor Centres. The volunteers are trained to provide information about VACRO services and encourage families to contact VACRO for further support.

We continued to provide **Family Travel and Accommodation** services through accommodation near regional prisons - Mulwilla House in Beechworth and Blake Cottage until May 2011 in Castlemaine- so that families, already financially burdened by their relative's incarceration, could visit them. VACRO also provides accommodation and travel support under the Aboriginal Family Travel program (AbFam) and the Rail Ticket program.

## A summary of support provided to clients

### **AbFam Accommodation**

- » 43 Families
  - » 93 Adults
  - » 69 Children
- » 67 Nights

### **AbFam Travel**

- » 41 Families
  - » 97 Adults
  - » 50 Children

### **Rail Ticket Program**

- » 429 travels
  - » 655 Adults
  - » 118 Children

### **Mulwilla House**

- » Total bookings: 35 families/groups

**Video Visits** operates a direct video conferencing link between prisons and an external site to overcome barriers to the maintenance of parental relationships; particularly where children are unable or unwilling to visit. Families can take their children to either their local Community Correctional facility, or a community agency site that has conferencing technology. To organise one visit takes an average of three weeks. The video visits service currently has 12 clients who all require on-going visits.

Having a dedicated worker attached to the Video Visits program has resulted in awareness and access increasing, not only statewide, but giving families across Australia the opportunity to connect with family members in custody.

NEW BEGINNINGS  
FAMILY SOCIAL  
**ACCOUNTABILITY**  
EMPLOYMENT  
GROWTH EVOLVE  
THE CYCLE REBUILD  
NEW BEGINNINGS  
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
ACCOUNTABILITY FUTURE  
EMPLOYMENT PERSONAL  
EVOLVE BREAK THE

# Prisoner Banking Services

The VACRO Prisoner Banking Services compliments existing prison based and transitional services and provides practical support to our clients whilst in custody.

Services provided include opening and closing personal bank accounts, assistance with statements, withdrawals and deposits, balance enquiries, changing postal addresses and key card establishment/cancellation.

Essential services for families include payments to families and third parties and payment of invoices.

The Banking Services program is managed by qualified accountants who provide an accurate and efficient service for clients. All transactions are managed through an established Trust Account and appropriate risk management and supervisory oversight has been established. The Trust Account and processes are independently audited annually.

During the 12 months to June 2011 the total number of banking requests was 6,229 at an average of 120 transactions per week.

The total number of active clients at year end was in excess of 1200 and this number continues to grow weekly.

At this time, the majority of clients are located at Metropolitan Remand Centre, Melbourne Assessment Prison, Port Phillip Prison and Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. VACRO is planning to further market the availability of this valuable service to other prisoners who may be currently unaware of the facility.

# Message from the Treasurer

At the commencement of the 2010-11 financial year, the outlook for VACRO was looking rather tenuous with several programs scheduled to close down at the end of the first quarter. However, VACRO secured a number of contract extensions such that its larger programs continued right through the financial year and coupled with improved business controls the financial results were substantially better than originally budgeted. A surplus of \$102,046 was achieved (deficit of \$45,802 in 2009-10) and this result is very pleasing for the VACRO Council.

The appointment of Carol Nikakis as Chief Executive Officer, supported by a committed team has enhanced VACRO's business capability and provided leadership for ongoing program delivery during the year. Through the year, the Council and its Committees monitored the organisation's operational performance, financial position, results and forecasts, thus fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and ensuring sustainability of operations.

From the commencement of the year, VACRO targeted to preserve its solid financial base whilst delivering its suite of important programs to stakeholder groups at similar levels of performance to previous years. The initial budget was for a deficit of \$169,369; however the contract extensions and business control improvements outlined above resulted in the achievement of the surplus. This result was in line with Council's objectives of protecting the long-term financial viability of VACRO via two key principles:

- » to plan for a small surplus each year, and
- » to utilise strong financial and project cost management to efficiently deliver program and strategic objectives of VACRO's available funding.

These principles have been established to ensure VACRO retains its ability to viably deliver client services in the long-term and to ensure financial security for our talented and dedicated staff.

VACRO's financial position as at 30 June 2011 remains strong with:

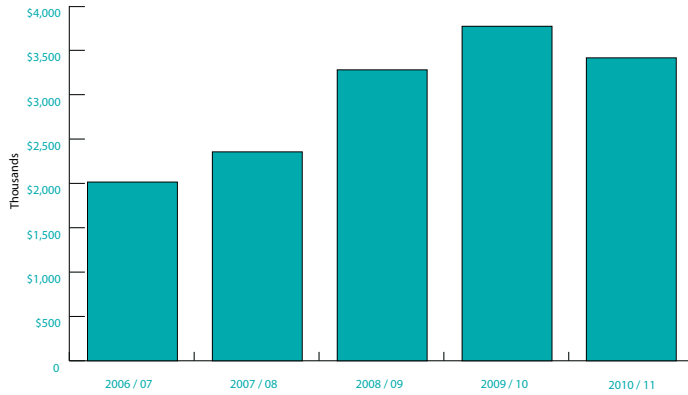
- » working capital (current assets minus current liabilities) of \$527,019 (\$384,551 at 30 June 2010),
- » a working capital ratio (current assets to current liabilities) of 1.48 (1.41 at 30 June 2010),
- » a proprietary ratio (total equity to total assets) of 47.5% (48.5% at 30 June 2010), and
- » a debt ratio (total liabilities to total assets) of 52.5% (51.5% at 30 June 2010).

The graphs following show VACRO's growth over recent years. Continued growth may be unlikely in the short-term as VACRO reviews and updates its strategic direction prior to seeking more growth.

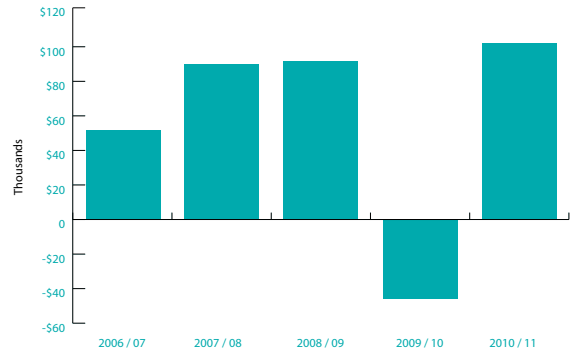
The 2011-12 financial year is seen as a challenging one with termination of one substantial program and introduction of different replacement programs. The Council looks forward to working in partnership with our many agencies, donors and members who continue to provide VACRO with generous and invaluable support. We are very thankful for the contribution of the many people who make the valuable outcome that VACRO provides, successful. In particular I would like to recognise VACRO's major asset – its staff – in achieving this success.

**David Finn**  
**Treasurer**

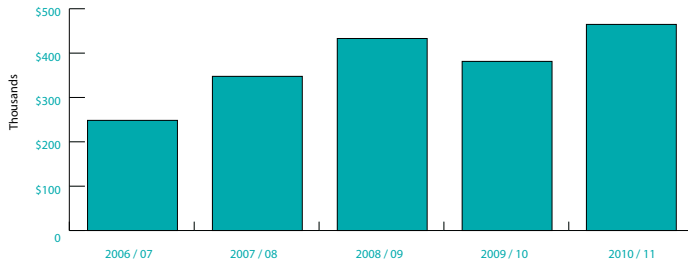
### Income: 2006-07 to 2010-11



### Surplus/(Deficit): 2006-07 to 2010-11



### Working Capital: 2006-07 to 2010-11



# Financial Report

## INCOME STATEMENT for the year ended 30 June 2011

INCOME	2011	2010
<b>Program Grants</b>	\$	\$
Federal Government	0	135,815
State Government	2,872,901	3,083,049
Local Government	5,700	14,104
Philanthropic	373,842	499,590
<b>Total Program Grants</b>	<b>3,252,443</b>	<b>3,732,558</b>
Consultancy Fees	674	182
Donations	15,081	11,157
Interest	46,114	24,357
Other Income	106,110	2,664
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>3,420,422</b>	<b>3,770,918</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Employee Benefits	2,173,266	2,377,558
Depreciation of Assets	54,997	54,861
Consultancy Expenses	90,347	123,115
Motor Vehicle Expenses	329,938	357,881
Occupancy Expenses	141,823	161,508
Administration Expenses	44,354	75,019
Client Expenses	237,440	378,052
Other Expenses	246,211	288,726
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>3,318,376</b>	<b>3,816,720</b>
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for the Year</b>	<b>102,046</b>	<b>(45,802)</b>

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION as at 30 June 2011**

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>2011</b>		<b>2010</b>	
<b>Current Assets</b>	\$		\$	
Cash and Equivalents	943,778		652,840	
Trade Receivables	648,683		597,449	
Other	25,813		62,378	
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>1,618,274</b>		<b>1,312,667</b>	
<b>Non-current Assets</b>				
Building	494,979		491,374	
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(91,099)	403,880	(83,655)	407,719
Office Equipment	46,420		46,982	
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(34,912)	11,508	(26,374)	20,608
Computer Equipment	146,549		147,099	
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(108,530)	38,019	(80,277)	66,822
Furniture, Fixtures and Fittings	85,282		85,417	
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(40,648)	44,634	(33,458)	51,959
<b>Total Non-current Assets</b>	<b>498,041</b>		<b>547,108</b>	
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>2,116,315</b>		<b>1,859,775</b>	
<b>LIABILITIES</b>				
<b>Current Liabilities</b>				
Trade Creditors	47,340		29,682	
Sundry Creditors and Accruals	156,668		186,406	
Employee Benefits	163,471		168,558	
Deferred Income	723,776		543,470	
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>1,091,255</b>		<b>928,116</b>	
<b>Non-current Liabilities</b>				
Employee Benefits	20,505		29,150	
<b>Total Non-current Liabilities</b>	<b>20,505</b>		<b>29,150</b>	
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>1,111,760</b>		<b>957,266</b>	
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>1,004,555</b>		<b>902,509</b>	
<b>ACCUMULATED FUNDS</b>				
Retained Accumulated Funds	902,509		948,311	
Current Year Surplus	102,046		(45,802)	
<b>Total Accumulated Funds</b>	<b>1,004,555</b>		<b>902,509</b>	

**STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS for the year ended 30 June 2011**

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>Cash Flow From Operating Activities</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$</b>
Receipts from Customers	3,853,718	3,827,800
Payments to Suppliers and Employees	(3,602,863)	(3,962,840)
Interest Received	46,114	24,357
<b>Net Cash Provided by/(used in) Operating Activities</b>	<b>296,969</b>	<b>(110,683)</b>
<b>Cash Flow From Investing Activities</b>		
Proceeds from Sale of Property, Plant and Equipment	0	0
Payment for Property , Plant and Equipment	(6,031)	(59,084)
<b>Net Cash Used in Investing Activities</b>	<b>(6,031)</b>	<b>(59,084)</b>
Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash Held	290,938	(169,767)
Cash at Beginning of Financial Year	652,840	822,607
<b>Cash at End of Financial Year</b>	<b>943,778</b>	<b>652,840</b>



VACRO has an ongoing commitment to review and reform of the criminal justice system as it affects our client group and the wider community. We participate in a broad range of advisory groups and networks including:

- » CBD Homelessness Group
- » Centrelink/Justice Working Group
- » City of Melbourne Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee
- » City of Melbourne Family and Children's Advisory Committee
- » Criminal Justice Research Consortium (Advisory Group)
- » FaPMI (Families where a Parent has mental illness) Advice and Exchange Group.
- » Justice Mental Health Group
- » Maribyrnong Immigration and Detention Centre (Community Consultative Group)
- » Ministerial Community Advisory Committee
- » Multicultural Health and Support/Justice Advisory Committee
- » Victorian Coalition of ABI Service Providers Criminal Justice Working Group
- » Victorian Custody Centre Reference Group

VACRO has recently begun to explore the idea of place based service networks in the North West Metropolitan region. We are working with a number of agencies that draw together a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and service systems. We aim to build stronger, 'wrap around' service linkages and referral systems for our common client group while building staff knowledge and skill in assisting clients to access service systems in the region.

# Donors & Supporters

- » Alfred Felton Bequest
- » ANZ Trustees
- » Cheltenham Secondary College
- » City of Yarra Community Grants
- » Corrs Chambers Westgarth Lawyers
- » Crisis Support Services (Mens Line)
- » Department of Justice – Southern Region
- » Dousta Galla Community Health Centre
- » Estate of the Late Edward Wilson
- » Good Shepherd, NILS
- » Greater Dandenong Community Health Centre, Springvale
- » Grenet Foundation
- » Hanover, Cheltenham
- » Helen McPherson Smith Trust
- » Inner North Community Foundation
- » LillyPilly
- » Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation
- » MacKillop Family Services, Footscray
- » Medicare ‘Better Access’
- » Merri Outreach Support Services, Broadmeadows
- » Monash University, Criminal Justice Research Consortium
- » Perpetual Trustees
- » Queens Trust
- » RACV Minor Sponsorship Program
- » Red Cross
- » R.E. Ross Trust
- » Soul Sisters Removals Dandenong
- » Streetsmart
- » The Salvation Army Crisis Centre, St Kilda
- » Victoria Law Foundation
- » Victorian Legal Aid
- » Walter & Eliza Hall Trust
- » Wales Street Primary School, Thornbury
- » Wallarano Primary School, Noble Park
- » William Angliss Charitable Fund
- » William Buckland Foundation – ANZ Trustees

VACRO has been fortunate to receive support from philanthropic organisations and a range of committed individual donors. It is this valuable contribution that allows us to confidently build and strengthen our services and trial innovative programs for the benefit and safety of the whole community.

To contribute to our programs please visit the website [www.vacro.org.au](http://www.vacro.org.au).

# Family Case-Study

*Mary\* is a vulnerable and at-risk young girl who was referred for counselling by a social worker from the child and family agency involved with her family. Both her parents were in prison for robbery and drug-related offences. In addition the family has an extensive history of family violence.*

*Mary's story is one of violence, chaos, transience and abandonment. Her parents separated when she was three years old and from the age of six she lived with a number of different carers, and at times with her mother and father (separately), and her maternal grandmother. For the last two years she has been in foster care with her two siblings. During one of the periods Mary resided with her mother, she was sexually abused by one of her mother's partners. Despite these difficulties Mary and her siblings maintained contact with both parents and members of their extended family. In particular they had a close relationship with their maternal grandmother.*

*Given her long history of trauma, Mary developed behavioural and academic difficulties at school, poor relationships with peers, distrust of adults and difficulty in expressing emotions. Mary is a bright girl, who communicated a hope for 'a better life'. She was very good at sport and loved horse riding.*

*Mary attended counselling sessions with the VACRO SKY counsellor over a 14 month period. Initially it took Mary a while to identify the goals she wanted to achieve, but she eventually articulated a wish to improve her family relationships particularly with her father, to learn to talk about her feelings and to understand, 'where do I fit?'*

*It took time to establish a trusting therapeutic relationship. The VACRO SKY counsellor worked at a pace Mary could manage. This entailed the counselling sessions lasting for as long as Mary could tolerate it and respecting her hesitance and reluctance in discussing painful issues. The counsellor also maintained regular contact with Mary's grandmother, foster carer and social worker and had semi-regular contact with her incarcerated parents. She also saw one of Mary's siblings for a few meetings.*

*The VACRO counsellor used trauma and attachment theoretical framework and other creative methods such as the use of strength cards, play and art therapy. One strategy involved building a closet together where Mary metaphorically placed her most painful feelings and took them out to discuss when she felt able to. They also created a feeling circle where Mary identified and painted her feelings. Mary also kept her own scrapbook where she placed some of her special drawings. Through these activities Mary was slowly able to discuss her feelings about her mother's drug use, parent's imprisonment and her own sexual assault.*

*Mary's self-esteem improved, she became more relaxed and positive, demonstrated improved coping skills at school and home, her relationship with her father improved. She became more consistent in her attendance at sessions and was able to cope with longer sessions.*

*The counselling ended after Mary, her foster parents, parents, social worker and school all reported consistent improvements. Mary reported that she felt calmer, 'okay' and more positive about her future. She related that she didn't need the closet anymore because she felt able to deal more constructively with her feelings and was pleased to take her scrapbook of drawings home.*

\*Name has been changed

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