Scoping the Potential of a Noongar Re-entry Peer Navigator Model

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Scoping the Potential of a Noongar Re-entry Peer Navigator Model

Abstract
The Noongar people of the South West of Western Australia (WA) continue to seek self-determination and empowerment to ensure their families are able to meet cultural, economic and social needs. Their aspirations, however, are thwarted by a significant number of their members who are incarcerated and the adverse consequences of imprisonment on families. In the meantime, the WA prison system is yet to respond to the unique needs of Noongar prisoners transitioning out of the prison system. The article reviews the literature to develop the idea of a Noongar re-entry peer navigator (PN) model. In this model, select Noongar people who have lived experience of incarceration and who have received training in peer work would be used to support Noongar prisoners during the fraught and lengthy process of re-engaging with families, settling into their communities, and living on Country. The review traces the growth of the PN model in the health system, the prison system, and, more recently, in cross-sector engagements between the prison and service organisations. Consideration is thereafter given to the strengths and limits of the re-entry PN model. The article closes with a discussion on the potential of developing a Noongar re-entry PN to assist Noongar prisoners to achieve re-entry while increasing their prospects for a law-abiding and wholesome life Noongar way.

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Keywords
Re-entry peer navigator, prison, Aboriginal, restorative justice, throughcare, Noongar

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Between 2017–2020, a team of Noongar Elders, Respected persons, prisoners, and a non-Noongar scholar–practitioner of restorative justice (the author of this article) designed and delivered a culturally relevant restorative rehabilitation program in a regional Western Australian (WA) prison. The program has resumed in 2022. The program aims to repair a range of connections that have been damaged by historical racist policies and the offending of incarcerated Noongar men (Anderson, 2020, 2022). Participating Elders and Respected persons also act as informal conduits of communication between the prison and the community for communicating “family business” and senior prisoners frequently encourage younger prisoners to address pressing issues. It is this culturally informed ethos of prioritising relationships, as represented in the mending of connections and the giving of support, that this article seeks to develop in the idea of a Noongar re-entry peer navigator (re-entry PN) model. In this model, select Noongar people who have lived experience of incarceration and who have received training in peer work would be used to support and assist Noongar prisoners during the fraught and lengthy process of transitioning into their communities.

In the article, a literature review is undertaken to explore the potential of a Noongar re-entry PN model. The work opens with an overview of Noongar culture and history to provide context for developing the model. An assessment of relevant aspects of the WA prison system is then made to identify gaps in the current re-entry process for Noongar prisoners. Thereafter, the review links the development of Aboriginal restorative rehabilitation to the emerging use of re-entry PNs for assisting reintegration in some non-Australian criminal justice settings. The growth of the peer navigator phenomenon is next traced in the health system, the prison system, and in cross-sector engagements between the prison and service organisations, followed by an evaluation of the model’s strengths and limits. The article closes with a discussion on the possibility of developing a Noongar re-entry PN model with the dual purpose of reducing institutional and social barriers which Noongar prisoners must overcome to achieve reintegration while endeavouring to increase prospects for a law-abiding and wholesome life.
The Noongar People

The Noongar people, consisting of 14 different language groups, are the original inhabitants of the South West. They traditionally emphasise their relationships with *boodjar*—the land, as mother and nurturer; *moort*—family and relations; and *katitjin*—knowledge and cosmological stories, with these three interconnected elements forming the web of life (Collard, 2007). “Noongar ancestral connections are like an intricate system of roots, reaching back to the Dreaming or *Nyitting*. Our people are connected by kinships, the way stars in the sky form intricate constellations, connecting points together to form a unique shape” (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 2022). The all-inclusive range of relationships is reflected in the acceptance of bonds of kinship and marriage relations, and alliances with the environment and its constituents. The key value of “relational holism” in Aboriginal cultures compels sharing and reciprocity to sustain the group through every exchange across *boodjar* and *moort* (Palmer, 2016).

It is estimated that the ethos of relational holism was maintained and developed over five millennia, but its continuity was confronted by settlement of the Swan River in 1829 (McConvell, 2018). The Noongar people resisted pastoral expansion but to little avail. Many were brutally punished, incarcerated or massacred (Bunbury & Bunbury, 2020). The loss of lands limited severely their capacity to feed themselves and observe familial and spiritual obligations. The reduced population thereafter “forged accommodations based on negotiations with local employers, persistence of skills, values and strong family networks, and a form of ‘social invisibility’ to circumvent outside intervention in family life” (Haebich, 2000). In the early 20th century, the Noongar were then herded *en masse* to carceral environments, that is, reserves and missions wherein family groups were “mixed up” in overcrowded poor conditions (Haebich, 2000). Mixed-race children, known as the “Stolen Generations,” were forcibly removed from their families to orphanages, homes or other institutions, where they were strenuously denied access to their families and culture. In 1963, basic rights were restored to them, and, in 1972, the forced removal of children ended (Tilbrook, 1983).
The introduction of equal wages in 1968 subjected Aboriginal people to “the full and immediate brunt of market and legal institutions [which] remained deeply hostile to their lives and relationships” (Hogg, 2001). Unemployment was maintained by segregationist practices, while families were fragmented by alcohol-fuelled harms—a substance previously denied to them as non-citizens (Bunbury & Bunbury, 2020). By the 1980s, these difficulties were aggravated by neoliberal policies which effectively deny values (e.g., relational holism) that stand outside of, or in opposition to, a market model of private enterprise (Findlay, 2008). These policies were accompanied by political control of “the Aboriginal situation” and the disadvantage and unequal position of Aboriginal peoples in the increasing use of the modern prison (Cunneen et al., 2016). “Since 1985, the Aboriginal incarceration rate and the overall incarceration rate have more than doubled” (Leigh, 2020, p. 2). Today, Aboriginal peoples are widely considered the most heavily incarcerated people on the planet, and WA is the greatest contributor to the phenomenon (Anthony, 2017).

Nevertheless, Noongar people remain resilient and resolute in upholding relational holism: “family is at the heart of Noongar culture” (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 2022). In the early 2000s, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, representing all Noongar people, sought to have their native title rights recognised. The WA government denied the existence of a single Noongar people, resulting in an ensuing struggle. Many in the non-Aboriginal community perceived that Aboriginal, mainly Noongar, people living in urban centres are not “real” Aborigines; that “real” Aborigines live in the North West, and that the Noongars in the south have lost their culture (Host et al., 2009). These views were challenged successfully in 2016 with the WA government formally recognising that the “Noongar people have maintained a living cultural, spiritual, familial and social relationship with Noongar boodjar [land]” (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, n.d.). In the meantime, the robust character of the Noongar ethos of relational holism continues to be thwarted by a significant number of Noongar people who are incarcerated, and the fracturing impacts of imprisonment on their families (Martin, 2015).
The WA Prison System

In this section, a review of relevant aspects of the prison system is given, including statistics, a summary of conventional transition models, and a description of the re-entry process offered by WA Corrective Services.

Statistics

Statistical accounts of Noongar people are somewhat nebulous given that census figures, for example, homogenise Aboriginal peoples. In 2020, there were an estimated 30,000 Noongar peoples constituting 33.4% of the total Aboriginal population of 89,900 in WA (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021; WA Government, 2020). Overall, the Aboriginal population in WA made up 3.3% of the population (2.7 million), almost half (47.4%) of whom lived in Greater Perth which exists in Noongar boodjar, extending from Geraldton on the west coast to Esperance on the south coast. As for the prisoner cohort, data on how many identify as Noongar is seemingly unavailable. The following statistical overview, however, provides an approximate indication of Noongar incarceration rates. As at 30 June, 2019, Aboriginal prisoners in WA comprised 39% (2,680 prisoners) of the total adult prisoner population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Thereafter, the Aboriginal prisoner population has remained relatively stable (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). 78% of Aboriginal prisoners in WA have been in prison before (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Conventional Transitional Models

In Australia, various understandings of how prisoners make a transition from prison to society are essentialised in multiple terms, for example, “reintegration,” “resettlement,” “throughcare,” “re-entry” (Borzycki, 2005). “Re-entry” refers to the moment when a prisoner transitions from living within prison to being in the community (Willis & Moore, 2008). “Reintegration” and “resettlement,” which are used interchangeably, describe a successful transition from being a prisoner to being a normative member of society, implying a previous integration within mainstream society. “Throughcare” provides “case management for a prisoner in the lead up to their release from prison and throughout their transition to the
outside” (Council of Australian Governments, 2016, p. 62). This model is designed to provide continuous treatment, support and education for prisoners, beginning with their entry into prison and extending to their post-release. The elongated process is linked to aftercare, characterised as long-term community-based treatment and support after release from prison or institutionalisation (Baldry et al., 2002).

A critical appraisal of terms used to describe the transitional process indicates the limit of their application to Aboriginal prisoners. (NB: These terms apply to individuals and not to collectivities, e.g. families, communities. They do not reference the Noongar ethos of relational holism.) Regarding re-entry, the term seemingly explains the transitory act of physically exiting the prison. Regarding reintegration and resettlement, these terms are considered limited given that “the majority of prisoners have never been integrated or settled in the mainstream community and therefore cannot be reintegrated or resettled” (Willis & Moore, 2008, p. 44). They also imply an assimilationist aspiration for Aboriginal prisoners; yet, even if the terms were to be accepted, a complex range of marginalising conditions (e.g., economic, social, institutional) mitigate against mainstream inclusion. As for throughcare, it is “important to recognise that [the term] has emerged from a criminal justice system entrenched in a colonised and colonising framework” (Baldry & McClausand, 2009, p. 295). Making throughcare culturally appropriate would require decolonisation, meaning that it should not be delivered or bounded by criminal justice agencies. Instead, Aboriginal communities would be required to be the principal drivers for transitioning Aboriginal prisoners—a process that should be culturally and locally informed in terms of design, staffing and resourcing (Tubex et al., 2020).

In WA, prisoners are supported by transitional managers who assess the reintegration needs of prisoners. Such needs generally include sourcing identification, accessing Centrelink (i.e., a government service which delivers payments and services to eligible Australians) and making referrals to the voluntary Re-entry link program. The latter program is mostly responsible for accommodation, family issues, transport, and general case management. “Formal clients [mainly parolees] are provided additional case
management support for up to 12 months after release” (Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, 2016. p. 3). While these services are considered crucial for addressing high recidivism rates and the high costs of reoffending, they mostly rely on prisoners to opt-in and are overstretched and difficult to access in some prisons. As for Aboriginal prisoners, only 20% seek parole, meaning they are released without structured support (Tubex et al., 2020). Moreover, the Re-entry link program implies a homogenous process, that is, one that is not tailored to the needs of different Aboriginal groups or attuned to place-based realities.

An appropriate term for describing the transitioning of Aboriginal prisoners remains elusive, at least for this author. I, thus, settle on the descriptor “re-entry,” that is, the act of returning. In this article, the use of the term “re-entry,” unless stipulated otherwise, is not considered merely a momentary act of departure from the prison, but, rather, a lengthy process, which includes preparing for return; departing from the prison; and settling, to the extent possible, in one’s family, local community and Country. (NB: “To the extent possible” acknowledges that re-entry to a place is not always desired by one or both parties.)

Secondly, the selection of this descriptor and its understanding is based on the awareness of this author that Noongar prisoners usually want to return to their families, not “mainstream” communities. Thirdly, “throughcare” is essentially a professional term (i.e., jargon) and consequently difficult for non-professional people, including ordinary Noongar people, and prisoners, to grasp.

Throughcare Research

Given the dearth of studies about Noongar people and their experience of incarceration, this sub-section reviews recent research undertaken on other Aboriginal populations in WA. Tubex et al. (2020) consulted Aboriginal peoples with and without lived experience of incarceration in northern WA and the Northern Territory to develop effective throughcare strategies for Aboriginal offenders. The researchers acknowledge their findings are specific to particular Aboriginal peoples but consider the underlying issues are relevant for other places and jurisdictions.
Tubex et al. (2020) explain the high rates of Aboriginal incarceration as a result of colonisation and multiple forms of deprivation. These interrelated factors can severely impact communities, depriving them of income, undermining social order, engendering bitterness towards the criminal justice system, and generating crime. To address these harms and conflicts, they argue that what is needed are:

- political mechanisms and operational structures that allow, support, and strengthen traditional systems that co-exist alongside the non-Indigenous world. To achieve this level of cohabitation requires, in the first place, the involvement of Indigenous Elders and Respected people, as well as the wider Indigenous community in all matters of incarceration and post-release placement and activities (Tubex et al., 2020, p. 49).

In taking a whole community approach, key Aboriginal people are more likely to be aware of issues that interfere with the attempts of former prisoners to desist from criminal activity, for example, “lack of housing or a safe place to go after release, overcrowding, family feuds and peer pressure” (Tubex et al., 2020, p. 7). This is also reflected in prisoners’ experiences with some acknowledging that prison can be a source of relief from dysfunction, and, in addition to the consequences of their own offending, these elements might not have been resolved, or may have even worsened over the prison term. What is needed to facilitate a community approach is more and supported accommodation, assistance with how to deal with administration, family and community reintegration, and budgeting (Tubex et al., 2020).

Regarding in-prison preparation for release, place-based Aboriginal people should be involved in all re-entry stages, leading to an increase in communication and the development of a collaborative and coordinated service inside and outside of the prison. Such service should begin well in advance of release and extend at least 12 months after release (Tubex et al., 2020). This process also requires adaptations to in-prison services, as follows. To navigate bureaucratic expectations (e.g., paperwork and referrals), hands-on assistance needs to be provided. To increase access to services, cross-sector communication and collaboration needs to be improved; likewise, these actions must extend to Elders and
Respected Persons. To improve rehabilitation programming, cultural relevancy must be considered, and, relatedly, should address the following issues: domestic, family and lateral violence; alcohol, drugs and health; grief and trauma; and life direction. To assist eventual socialisation, culturally appropriate recreation should be provided. To improve employment prospects, in-prison jobs training needs to be realistically linked to the economic opportunities that may be available in the communities to which they return, e.g., production of cultural artefacts, addressing in-community skill shortages (Tubex et al., 2020).

To the extent that this is possible, and during the immediacy of the transitional phase, released prisoners should be provided with safe passage to their intended residence (Tubex et al., 2020). Thereafter, support needs to be given to both former prisoners and their families to reduce diverse strains on each party and to amplify positive cultural capacities for recovering wellbeing and relationship. Indeed, “consideration needs to be given to [re-entry] strategies that involve the whole family in recovery, moving from an individual to a family/community model” (Tubex et al., 2020, p. 50). In this model, people require support in practical arrangements (e.g., provision of halfway housing, financial advice), dealing with contrary social pressures (e.g., humbugging) and addressing family repair (e.g., via mediation). In short, Aboriginal prisoners should be supported in each and every stage of their return to their communities.

The Restorative Segue

One way of reducing recidivism is through delivery of culturally relevant programs. However, these are not generally available to Aboriginal prisoners (Jones & Guthrie, 2016). To address the lack of dedicated programming, a group of Noongar Elders, Respected persons and prisoners, and myself, set out to produce a culturally relevant restorative rehabilitation program. The year-long design process (2017–2018) incorporated the restorative justice principle of putting decision-making into the hands of those impacted by wrongdoing and crime, enabling them to make decisions about how to transform the past, make justice more healing, and refresh ideas about a value-oriented future (Zehr, 2015). The program is populated by 2 (preferably) Aboriginal facilitators, 2–4 visiting Elders, and 12–14
Aboriginal prisoners, and is held one day per week over the course of 10 weeks. The course fosters recovery of Aboriginal (Noongar) values, improves awareness of the impacts of historical racist policies, cultivates a mindset for making things right, and initiates repair of relationships and wellbeing. The program was anecdotally successful and has since been documented (Anderson, 2020, 2022).

The program is considered “a first step towards reviving relational holism among prisoners, but others are required. Nonetheless, this initiative produces a base from which to launch other actions” (Anderson, 2022, p. 209). During the program, it was reported to me that visiting Elders and Respected persons would—in addition to providing mentoring, support and advice to prisoners—sometimes act as a communication bridge with prisoners’ family members, especially those who find it difficult to visit their prisoner family member and during “Sorry Business.”¹ Likewise, after each session, respected senior prisoners would spend time yarning² with younger ones about issues that had arisen in the program and encourage them to take socially positive actions to address personal and family issues. In using a natural support system influenced by an ethos of relational holism, each party increased communication and collaboration within and between the prison and the Aboriginal community. These cultural peers, in effect, normalised collective engagement; they acted as mediators of restorative knowledge directed to relational repair.

Moreover, I recognised the similitude between the natural support system used by Noongar representatives and a rudimentary peer support service that I supported as Chair of the management board of the organisation. In this organisation, parents of adult problematic drug users—non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike—organised themselves to develop structured ways of giving assistance to family members and others struggling with problematic drug use—some of whom were prisoners (Anderson, 2021). As peer workers, they act as intermediaries between vulnerable people and professional providers: they recover trust;

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¹ Sorry Business is an important time of mourning that involves responsibilities and obligations to attend funerals and participate in other cultural events, but which is thwarted by incarceration.
² Yarning involves the sharing of stories and experiences directed to the individual and collective development of knowledge.
provide support; and ease transitions in care, welfare and community (Lennox et al., 2021). I identified in their example a useful conceptual bridge which connects an ethos of relational holism with emerging ideas of relationally focused peer support and the potential of structuring a linkage between the local prison and local Noongar communities.

**Exploring Peer Work**

In this section, a literature review is given to the evolution of peer work and its application to the prison setting.

**Peer Navigator Origins**

The origins of peer navigators (PNs), also referred to as “peer workers” or “peer specialists,” can be traced to established groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous which provide mutual aid to peers (Davidson & Rowe, 2008; Tracy and Wallace, 2016). Select participants have since developed the idea of sharing experience in structured ways, and now, the practice is commonly used to improve access to mental health care and recovery of substance use (Repper & Carter, 2011; Schweizer, 2021). PNs draw on their lived experience and experiential knowledge of these conditions, supplemented by formal training, to give informal and personal support by “offering and receiving help based on shared understanding, respect and mutual empowerment” (Mead et al., 2001, p. 135). They assist peers to build relationships, socialise and improve self-esteem and skills. PNs also provide mentoring and goal-setting, making connections to resources, and advocating and facilitating groups (Jacobson et al., 2012). They contribute to maintaining client engagement, mitigating relapse risk, enabling connections to community-based support services and mutual-aid organisations, and contributing to increased satisfaction with treatment engagement (Eddie et al., 2019; Reif et al., 2014). PNs effectively operate relationally, acting as role models, that is, exemplars of “recovery in action” (Jacobson et al., 2012, p. 8).

**Peers in Prisons**

Peer support has become an established feature of prison life in many countries, but its scope is confined to the boundaries of the prison (Bagnall, et al., 2015; Hinde & White, 2019). These peer support schemes work to address a multitude of issues that are often
experienced by prisoners. Prisoner–peer workers are noted for their ability to connect with other prisoners and to have social influence with vulnerable populations resistant to professional advice (Daigle, et al., 2007.) They assist prisoners to navigate prison life through provisioning prison orientation, and play a role in reducing anti-bullying and anti-racism (Stewart, 2011). They provide peer-based support and advice to other prisoners in the areas of education and health, including: health education, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV management and subsequent sexual behaviours, and suicide prevention (Coates, 2016; Cook et al., 2009; Grinstead et al., 1999; Parkin & McKeeganey, 2000). There are also direct benefits for the peer deliverers themselves. Prisoner-peer workers are able to exercise a greater degree of responsibility and contribute to society (Edgar et al., 2011). Likewise, there are benefits for the prison system; notably, they assist in ensuring an effective use of resources (Levenson & Farrant, 2022; Sirdifield, et al., 2007).

Peers and the Personal

The use of prisoner peers is increasingly being tied to programmatic support. Most scholars now accept that punitive prison environments are not conducive to rehabilitating prisoners and may actually increase the risk of reoffending for some individuals (Cullen et al., 2011; Gendreau et al., 2014). To mitigate the threats, prisons are now being reimagined as places of wellbeing (Helliwell, 2011; Maruna, 2001). This shift has to some extent been supported by the Good Lives Model (GLM), a one-size-fits-all strengths-based rehabilitation framework which gives therapeutic responses to individual interests, abilities, and aspirations of prisoners (Ward & Fortune, 2013). GLM directs participants to construct intervention plans directed to assisting capabilities for achieving needs, wants and desires that are personally meaningful. The strengths-based Therapeutic Community (TC) model of rehabilitation has also found favour and aims to assist individual prisoners who display specific antisocial behaviours (e.g., violence, drug use) to acquire skills deemed necessary for them to live in the “real world” (Blagden et al., 2017; Ware et al., 2010). As this shift towards the personal has gathered pace, more and more peer-led programs are being set up in prisons (Devilly et al., 2005). What they hold in common is the idea that such
interventions, which focus on common variables of criminal behaviour, are more successful when they address individual goals and ambitions in the belief that deviance can be fixed (Zwick, 2018).

The use of prisoner peers to address the faults of others, however, maintains institutional preoccupations for addressing criminogenic needs of the offender (Bonta & Andrews, 2017). The conventional approach restricts the capacity to respond to the familial and social needs of prisoners and impedes the development of culturally appropriate programs and processes for marginal groups. Crime and incarceration damage a range of personal and collective relationships, and while culturally relevant in-prison restorative interventions that are place-based and community driven can initiate the repair of that harm, endeavours to maintain the restorative trajectory are thwarted by institutional preoccupations and remain largely invisible in WA.

**Peer Navigators in Justice Settings**

Endeavours have been undertaken recently to expand the purview of the peer in prison settings to include transition and post release in America and some European countries, although not in Australia (Gonzalez et al., 2019; Hinde & White, 2019). Research shows that re-entry PNs significantly reduce multiple threats associated with release, which, otherwise, lead to substantial instability and material need, frequent relapse on illicit drugs, and increased mortality from drug overdose and other causes (Cullen et al., 2011; Harding et al., 2014; Luther et al., 2011; Portillo et al., 2017; Schinkel & Whyte, 2012; Swarbrick, et al., 2019).

Re-entry PNs often work with professionals to provide pre-release in-reach support. In working with prisoners, they build rapport with prisoners, foster agency, and encourage the relinquishing of non-criminal and in-prison identities (Buck, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019). In assisting the navigation of re-entry, they assist with discharge planning, needs assessment and long-term management (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2017; Hailemariam et al., 2020). Re-entry PNs serve to ease the burden of community reintegration by leveraging their previous lived experience with the criminal justice system,
including imprisonment, to support former prisoners to gain and sustain positive community involvement (Gonzalez, 2019; Seppings, 2016). Their shared journey may offer credibility, authenticity, a high potential for empathy, and some similar experiences and perspectives (Buck, 2018; Barrenger et al., 2019). Within the community, re-entry PNs give support in identifying housing, employment, health care and treatment sources. They transport former prisoners to medical and other appointments, scheduled arrangements, and hold them accountable to treatment plans (Cunningham, et al., 2018). They provide access to community networks for engagement and social inclusion, and are tolerant of slip-ups (Marlow et al., 2015; Schinkel & Whyte, 2012). Although peer support efforts are focused on prisoners and former prisoners, peer programs also have demonstrable positive efforts for re-entry PNs themselves, including improvement in non-criminal attitudes, satisfaction with life, and decreased likelihood of rearrest in the three years following release (LeBel, 2007).

Limits

In this review of limits to the re-entry PN model, I first draw on literature that evaluates PNs in the health system to provide insight for developing the model under consideration. PNs in this sector typically work alongside professional workers, acting in para-professional roles: functions that may produce some challenges, ranging from role conflicts, boundary issues, issues regarding status disclosure, role ambiguity, low compensation, and limited hours of work (Anderson, 2021; Miyamoto & Sono, 2012). Organisations integrating PNs into their structures and processes may also encounter limitations in professionalism and training, although these features may be temporary (Whyte, 2011). The task of addressing uses of fit, processes and structures may require ongoing adjustments as to how PNs are to be integrated within professionally administered organisations (Portillo et al., 2017).

Specific to the prison system, state providers of justice may prevent PNs from having access to prisoners due to legal prohibitions or perceptions of risk (Portillo et al., 2017). In providing through-the-gate support, re-entry PNs who seek to visit prisoners as care providers may experience barriers because of their criminal records (Whyte, 2011).
Furthermore, they may not be taken seriously by prison administrators, leading to PNs, for example, not being informed about changes with regard prisoners who they seek to give support (Schinkel & Whyte, 2012). In the community, re-entry PNs, who are on probation or parole themselves, may be prevented by policies from associating with other individuals currently on probation or parole (Portillo et al., 2017). As a workforce, re-entry PNs may face resistance from various justice providers, administrators and professionals who may be reluctant to accept them as legitimate support workers or stigmatise them because of their criminal and incarceration history. Nevertheless, the emergence of the re-entry PN model suggests that these barriers are not insurmountable.

Questions have been raised about the need for providing the re-entry PN with support and supervision, addressing role ambiguity, and developing the role (Davidson & Rowe, 2008). In response, various recommendations include: providing sufficient support to these workers in setting boundaries with clients, navigating the extent of the disclosure of their criminal and prison histories, preventing burnout, facilitating appropriate referrals, instrumentalising shared knowledge about best practice, encouraging informal or educational opportunities to gain additional experience and skills (Barrenger et al., 2019; Hailemariam et al., 2020; Whyte, 2011). Conversely, re-entry PNs must recognise the limits of what can be done in the context of structural constraints (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

As for developing the role, supervisors and others must consider how much and what re-entry PNs can deliver. These considerations include rates of “case load” (e.g., with respect to stabilising highly vulnerable clients); the often-inordinate amounts of time needed for obtaining necessary identification and documentation for clients; and the difficulties that may be encountered in addressing client needs with regard accessing housing and clinical care (Gonzalez et al., 2019; Whyte, 2011). Recognition must also be given to some clients whose multiple and complex needs may make it inevitable that they will continue to struggle to engage or to make positive changes to their lives, noting that readiness for change must ultimately come from the individual and not from the re-entry PN.
Discussion

The Noongar people have long upheld an ethos of relational holism in *boodjar* (Country), *moort* (family) and *katijin* (cultural knowledge), but these enduring connections have been damaged by dispossession and displacement. This harm has been compounded in intergenerational trauma and multiple forms of disadvantage, and has created fertile conditions for crime, leading to high rates of incarceration. The mixed reality—one of resilience and woundedness—is the ground on which a Noongar re-entry PN model would operate in assisting Noongar prisoners. On the one hand, the model would assist the Noongar peoples’ bid for self-determination and empowerment, replete with the freedom and responsibility to support incarcerated family members negotiating the extended arc of release and return. On the other hand, the model would attend and be potentially challenged by the complex hurts of history, including those pains resulting from multigenerational experiences of incarceration, and economic and social hardship. These seemingly opposing positions flag the need for cautious development of a Noongar re-entry PN model, while holding promise for some potential Noongar PNs and the majority of Noongar prisoners who would otherwise remain greatly exposed to the revolving prison gate.

With regard to the WA prison system, statistical accounts indicate high rates of incarceration for Aboriginal peoples, including high rates of return. The review also shows that the conventional model for transitioning prisoners fails to consider their unique needs. The range of terms used to describe the transition process from prison to society represent the current limits in understanding and practice. Aboriginal prisoners and former prisoners are not likely to be reintegrated or resettled in mainstream communities because of multiple forms of deprivation, and the concept of throughcare requires decolonising. To address these constraints, place-based Aboriginal communities represented by the diversity of stakeholder families, should drive the transition of imprisoned members. This is likely to produce an increase in communication and the development of a collaborative and coordinated service inside and outside of the prison. The work of Tubex et al. (2020) provides some guidelines as to why and how that might occur, and the extent of support that
is needed. However, given the different historical pressures placed on Noongar peoples and their ongoing effects and challenges, investigation will need to be undertaken to determine the detail of how locally situated Noongar peoples can steer and engage the re-entry PN model.

The review shows that the PN model of service, as delivered in health and prison systems, addresses service gaps. PNs act as intermediaries between vulnerable people and professional providers, that is, they provide relational support. Prisoner–peer workers are a well-established feature of prisons, and, more recently, are being used to service institutionally framed therapeutic models. The idea of using re-entry PNs to act as intermediaries between the prison system and other systems, services and communities, nonetheless, remains a novel one and is not yet available in Australia. Yet, as elsewhere, the emergence of this model presages the potential of providing structured and extended place-based practical and social assistance for prisoners and former prisoners. More pertinently, the model with its relational constructs of mutual help and shared understanding suggest a resonance with the Noongar ethos of relational holism. Hence, in a Noongar re-entry PN model, the natural giving of support to satisfy relational expectations would likely be amplified in comparison to a non-Aboriginal PN model, while, at the same time, it would provide structured ways of giving assistance.

So, now, how to progress the Noongar re-entry PN model? In keeping with the Noongar aspiration for self-determination and empowerment, the development of the model requires the engagement of Noongar stakeholders, including former prisoners with criminal and incarceration experience. To initiate this place-based task, Yarning Circles, for example, might be used to explore the following questions: What is most needed on the ground to support Noongar prisoners during the lengthy process of returning to their families and Country? What is most needed on the ground to help families connect with family members returning from prison? In addition to identifying barriers and possibilities for re-entry, consideration might be given to recruitment criteria for re-entry PNs and methods, the type of training required, and how the PN model is to be delivered and evaluated.
More broadly, consideration needs to be given to when and how state providers of justice and prison administrators are to be approached or included in the development of the model, and how the model might work collaboratively with other providers of transitional services and community-based services. Adequate funding must also be made available to support the developmental phase of the model and safeguards must be put in place to protect its progress from being stifled by political, bureaucratic, and other pressures. By implementing these criteria and unknown others that will emerge in the exploratory process, Noongar people and their collaborators can produce a culturally relevant re-entry PN model that is meaningful and relevant for producing desired and positive outcomes.
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