

***Launch of Recognition, respect, support:
Enabling justice for people with an ABI***

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Welcome everyone to the launch of this Report. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. I'd also thank the Public Advocate, Colleen Pearce, whose Office enabled this work to occur. It is fitting that Colleen launch this report today.

It's hard to believe that nearly half of adult male prisoners and one third of adult female prisoners in Victoria have an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), compared with about two per cent of the general population. Despite the fact that people with an ABI are one of the criminal justice system's biggest clients, this system has failed to understand or learn from their experience at almost every single point.

That is why the CIJ decided to undertake research in this area, and invited Jesuit Social Services to partner with us. We wanted to make people with lived experience of ABI and the criminal justice system visible. We designed this project in a way that allowed the participants to be seen as more than research subjects, by supporting them to tell their stories, firstly to us and then, when ready, to the broader community. The video you've just seen is just a taste of the experiences we heard about during this project.

Julie will talk more about the process of working with people with lived experience and the findings of our report. But I wanted to take this opportunity to thank the participants in this project – who formed a “Justice User Group” – for sharing their experiences with us, enabling us to shape recommendations based on their own expertise.

We also want to thank all the people and organisations that generously contributed to our research, through participating in consultations and drafting responses to our consultation paper.

The report we are launching today is really a step by step guide for criminal justice agencies to implement measures that deliver recognition, respect and support for people with an ABI. Some of the report’s recommendations require small shifts – for example, a Magistrate using plain and respectful language, so that the person before them feels respected and invested in changing their behaviour. The impact that respectful treatment can have on a person’s experience of the system is demonstrated when, on the one hand, a participant described feeling confused and irrelevant because of the Magistrate’s use of jargon and on the other, a participant attributed her decision to stop using drugs to the Magistrate’s respectful and caring approach towards her.

Other recommendations require more considered change. All of them, however, are practical and achievable and will make a huge difference to the lives of people with an ABI.

I would now like to introduce Victoria's Public Advocate, Colleen Pearce to formally launch the Report.

Colleen Speaks

Thanks Colleen. I'd like to invite Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, our partners in this project, to speak about this report and the project that sits behind it.

Julie speaks

Thanks Julie. What seems really clear is that understanding how people with an ABI experience the justice system, and identifying and responding to their needs within it, is critical to addressing recidivism. Unless the system responds to their needs, it will continue to fail people with an ABI. That's something that we can all play a part in addressing.

I would like to invite Mark and Doddy, members of the Justice User Group and Brigid Henley, Coordinator, Adult Justice Programs at Jesuit Social Services who provided support to the Justice User Group members, up for a Q&A.