

# The Forest



A co-designed concept to break the cycle of reincarceration for people with histories of drug use



# Acknowledgements

Burnet Institute (Australia) is located on the traditional land of the Boon Wurrung people and we offer our respects to their Elders past and present.

We recognise and respect the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land.

This document was developed in close collaboration between Burnet Institute and Paper Giant, and with the generous time and effort of the co-design team. To them we extend our deepest gratitude for sharing their experiences, perspectives and commitment to this ongoing relationship, and the ongoing support of their organisations. This team included Aaron Hart (VACRO), Elisa Buggy (West CASA), Hui Zhou (Fitzroy Legal Service), Jo Beckett (VACRO), Michael Lukic (Windana), Sara Stilianos, Shelley Walker (Burnet Institute), plus many others. We would also like to extend our gratitude to researchers and subject matter experts who were consulted during the process including Carla Treloar (UNSW), Lise Lafferty (UNSW), Rebecca Winter (Burnet Institute), Stuart Kinner (Curtin University) and many others.

We would like to acknowledge that this report is one part of an ambitious project that began in 2019 and we hope will continue on for many years, and to extend our thanks to all of those who have been involved, and to all those we will collaborate in the future.

In addition, we would like to thank The Paul Ramsay Foundation for their support via the Peer to Peer funding initiative and ongoing commitment to breaking cycles of disadvantage.

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# A letter from Professor Mark Stoové

**The growing rates of incarceration (and reincarceration) in Australia are unsustainable**, both at the human level, and from a cost perspective.

For people who use drugs, the experience of incarceration is typically a traumatising and extremely destabilising event. They are likely to have extensive histories of social, economic and health disadvantage, conditions which are invariably exacerbated by incarceration, creating ongoing cycles of disadvantage that cause significant individual, social and economic harms.

Ending incarceration of people for drug-related offences, either by mandating non-custodial sentences for drug-related crime or decriminalising drug use altogether, offers the most effective way forward. In the absence of these legislative and policy reforms, people who use drugs will continue to make up a substantial proportion of the growing incarcerated population in Australia, partly due to the fact they also return to prison at much greater rates than those without histories of drug use.

**Innovation and renewed investment are needed as we cannot continue to sustain the status quo and continue the modest investments into existing service structures.** In particular, the strengthening of systems to support people transitioning from prison to the community is desperately needed.

It is well understood that systems to support people exiting prison are grossly under-resourced, especially given the enormous relative expenditure associated with incarceration itself. The system is also recognised as being fractured and difficult to navigate in light of the complex needs of people experiencing incarceration. **A well-resourced, integrated, unifying and person-centred approach to supporting people exiting prison is needed.**

To be successful, any response must be closely informed by people with lived experience. **This report describes the outcomes of a co-design process used to develop the conceptual framework of a new service model – The Forest – to break the cycle of reincarceration for people with histories of drug use.** The report represents many hours generously contributed by people with lived experience and highly experienced service providers which imagined a model (that currently doesn't exist) to best support the needs of people exiting prison with histories of drug use.

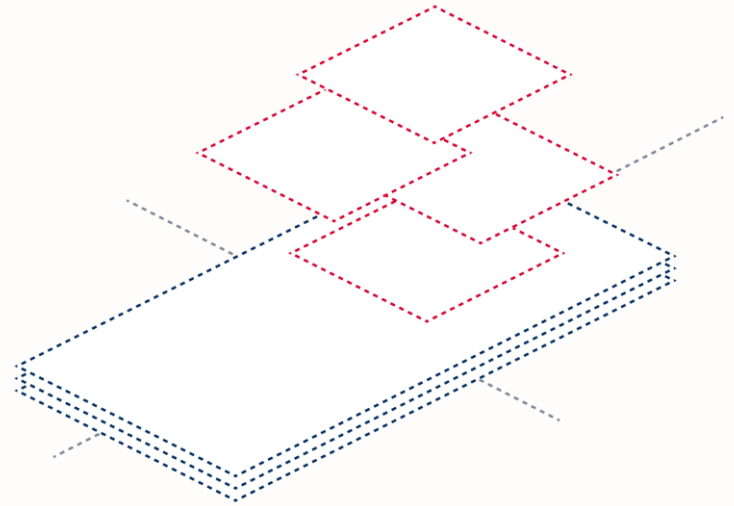
**This new service model will form the basis of substantial requests for funding to bring the concept into existence within a well resourced and carefully evaluated (both direct impact and cost-effectiveness) community-based trial.**

It represents a call to arms to undertake the significant work needed to bring this model to fruition. A model that will be supported and sustained by future governments because it is not only effective and cost-effective, but will also deliver significant social dividends to people released from prison and the community around them.



**Professor Mark Stoové, PhD**  
Burnet Institute Head of Public Health

# A reading guide to this document



This report outlines an innovative concept, The Forest, that was developed during a comprehensive co-design process with people with professional or lived experience of the post-incarceration landscape.

The intention of this document is to provide a high-level outline of the key elements of The Forest, so that the working group who carries this work forward have a North Star to navigate to.

Quotes included in this report share the perspectives of this group and were collected from workshops, interviews and remote sessions conducted throughout the project.

This document contains three versions, created for those working with different time constraints:

- One page executive summary
- Extended executive summary
- Full report

There is also a supportive video asset available that tells the story of the process and outcomes.

The primary purpose of this report is to gain funding for a pilot program, however, there are a range of individuals and organisations who will be interested in the contents of this report. Some of those parties may be:

- Those who work in the justice reform and reinvestment areas
- Those interested in co-design processes and outcomes
- Those interested in high-level service delivery model frameworks

While this report is primarily here to act as an actionable outline for the teams of people who will continue to progress this concept, we hope that others may learn and grow from the insights and processes described in this report.

# Terminology

## **Community members**

People who use the programs and access the space. This group will have histories of drug use and incarceration. It is inclusive of those who have just left prison and others who are further on their journey to independence.

## **Co-design**

The methodology of the project which involved actively engaging people with different experiences as equal collaborators in the design process.

## **Co-design team**

All people involved in the design process who participated in interviews, workshops and remote sessions. This team developed the concepts presented in this document. The team included a mix of lived and professional experience of the post-incarceration landscape as well as a range of experts from other research organisations or leaders in service provision.

## **Person-centred**

The approach to meeting individual needs in a compassionate, adaptive and trauma-informed way. It refers to the ways we approach our community members and workforce with a strengths-based mindset, and a harm-minimisation approach. Person-centred is a core value of The Forest.

## **Wider community**

People in the local community surrounding The Forest including businesses, residents or others who may visit the area.

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# Strategy on a page

Throughout multiple engagements, the co-design team developed the strategic scaffolding for The Forest that will guide future governance and operations.

## 4.1 Vision

The vision is an aspirational statement that articulates what our organisation sets out to achieve through all programs, interactions and future activity.

The Forest will help people with histories of drug use and reincarceration to leave prison and go into a well-resourced, interconnected support network that takes an ecological and holistic view.

This service will help people gain stability, connection, the ability to dream, and ultimately be an integrated part of their community.

## 4.2 Values

The values describe the foundation of The Forest's approach, operations and strategy. These values must come to life for everyone who is involved - community members, workers and the wider community.

Person-centred

Connection-driven

Co-designed

Accessible

## 4.3 Experience principles

The experience principles describe what a community member should feel as a result of engaging with The Forest.

"I can do things that are meaningful"

"This is a place where I feel safe"

"There are people who consistently support me"

"I feel secure in my health"

## 4.4 Service Model

The service model describes the key offerings of The Forest, and what one might find if they walk through the door of this organisation.

Health and support services

Activities and social connection

Peer mentoring program

Social enterprise

Flexible housing options

# Executive Summary



**The problem: The human and financial cost of the reincarceration of people who use drugs is so great that it far outweighs the investment put into post-incarceration transition efforts. With numbers of incarcerated people growing, this unsustainable approach must urgently be addressed.**

The number of people in Australian prisons is growing; between 2011 and 2021 the prison population grew from 29,106 to 43,073<sup>1</sup>. Among these people, approximately 65% have used illicit drugs in the 12 months before their reincarceration<sup>2</sup>.

Reincarceration, particularly of people who use drugs, is a major contributor to the growth in Australia's prison population. Approximately 45% of people released from Australian prisons between 2017-2019 were reincarcerated within two years of release<sup>3</sup>. One study from New South Wales among people with opioid dependence estimated the likelihood of returning to prison to be as high as 90% over the following 10 years, with participants incarcerated a median of 5 times (range 1-15) during this period<sup>4</sup>. Injecting drug use is strongly associated with reincarceration; a Queensland study found people who injected drugs after release from prison were reincarcerated at twice the rate of those who did not<sup>5</sup>.

Despite these high rates of reincarceration and knowledge of the typically complex and continuing needs of people released from prison, access to some form of post-release support is limited. In 2015, this number sat at just 20%<sup>6</sup>.

While reintegration support programs exist, they are typically overburdened, under-resourced, limited in scope and time-limited, allowing the current cycle of reincarceration, and its significant human and financial cost, to continue.



**Our methodology: for over three years, we have worked with a group of professional and lived experience experts to use best practice co-design methods, that go far beyond traditional and simplistic modes of consultation.**

Co-design is a unique and novel methodology that actively engages people with different experiences as equal collaborators in a design process. Our methodology has enabled and facilitated decision-making by people with lived experience of the post-incarceration landscape. In this way, we have sought to ensure that the reality of the needs of the end-user are put first and foremost.

The **co-design team** was a total of 25 people who had lived experience of reincarceration and drug use or professional expertise of the post-incarceration landscape, across a range of services, including alcohol and drug, legal, mental health, arts, housing, transitional support, specialised support for criminalised women, peer organisations, advocacy and research.



"I need to feel valued and like I have worth when I come back to the community. Having like-minded people that are on my side helps me to feel like I am a valuable person who is worthy of living."

- Co-design participant



**Our solution: The Forest is a place-based organisation that brings together health and support services, a social space with formal and informal activities, a social enterprise that can offer employment pathways, and flexible housing options, all delivered via a peer mentoring approach.**

The Forest focuses on creating a place where people can choose from a range of offerings that support the needs of a whole, balanced person: having somewhere safe to go, something meaningful to do, people to consistently support you, and the ability to feel secure in your health.

The Forest also helps break the stigma of incarceration by creating opportunities for connection with the wider community through a social enterprise, and other events at the location.

Crucially, this organisation will adopt a community participation-based, iterative approach that evaluates and iterates on a regular rhythm, allowing it to maintain responsiveness and person-centredness.

Its temporary name, The Forest, reflects both this organisation's ecological and holistic approach, as well as its ability to be engaged with in a non-linear way. Whether someone is in a moment of crisis, or they're getting to a point of improving job prospects, or they're interesting in becoming a peer and supporting others - The Forest is a place for everyone.



**Benefits and impacts: The Forest was designed by those with first-hand experience of how the existing post-prison landscape has failed those who use drugs. It is unique in its focus, approach and the potential of its impact.**

- The Forest is unique in Victoria in its focus on connection, community, and self-determination, while also providing access to a range of services under one roof.
- The Forest is unique in the access it provides by being open after hours, and by having a low threshold for access, with no requirements to use the space or services.
- The Forest is organised on an approach of continuous improvement that enables participation and maintains relevance and responsiveness over time.
- This concept supports a group that are particularly vulnerable and isolated.
- This concept aims to reduce the burden on other social services, as well as addressing the impacts of trauma.



# Process on a page

Our co-design process is just the first step in growing The Forest. We are seeking support to establish The Forest as a large, multi-year, community-based trial. The intention is to establish The Forest as a consortia of existing Victorian service providers under a single-governance structure. A robust evaluation structure will be integrated into The Forest trial, with a focus on key outcomes that include reduced recidivism and reincarceration and improved health and social outcomes for people who connect with The Forest. We will also embed a rigorous cost-effectiveness / cost-benefit evaluation that will support sustainability and expansion. The ultimate aim is for The Forest to catalyse a permanent systems change that is both cost-effective and delivers substantial social and community benefit.

2020

## Establishing foundations

Evidence and literature review, interviews with subject matter experts and co-design team, 3 co-design workshops.

2022

## Future state co-design

Interviews with subject matter experts, development of needs framework, co-design workshops to generate needs areas, virtual sessions.

## Feasibility co-design

Co-design workshops to test and iterate concept, virtual sessions with subject matter experts.

2023

## Funding and implementation planning

**Develop implementation roadmap and obtain private and public partnership funding for a large scale community trial.**

2026

## Pilot implementation

Implementation and operation of The Forest pilot to 500 people recently released from prison with histories of substance use over three years.

2027

## Evaluation: Implementation

Implementation evaluation to determine whether The Forest was implemented as designed.

2028

## Evaluation: Outcomes

Determine two year impact and cost-effectiveness of The Forest on recidivism, reincarceration, health and social outcomes.

# 01.

# Project context

- Why this project exists
- Numbers to know
- Project objectives
- Project phases

# Why this project exists

Addressing the economic and social burden of reincarceration

Reincarceration among people with illicit drug use histories is a major contributor to the social and economic burden associated with imprisonment in Australia.

The number of people in Australian prisons is growing; between 2011 and 2021 the prison population grew from 29,106 to 43,073<sup>1</sup>. Reincarceration is a major contributor to sustaining the prison population; 45% of people released from Australian prisons between 2017-2019 were reincarcerated within two years of release<sup>3</sup>.

Despite these high rates of reincarceration and knowledge of the typically complex and continuing needs of people released from prison, access to some form of post-release support is limited. In 2015, this number sat at just 20%<sup>6</sup>.

While reintegration support programs exist, they are typically overburdened, under-resourced, limited in scope and time-limited, allowing the current cycle of reincarceration, and its significant human and financial cost, to continue.

Breaking the cycle of reincarceration in Australia requires policy and practice change to reorient public investment towards evidence-based responses. We need innovative, connected and person-centred solutions that foster community and support people with drug use histories.

This project builds on a considerable body of work undertaken by the Burnet Institute in the justice health space to date.

Our work has focused on the post-release trajectories of people who use drugs, as well as exploring their experiences in prison. Our quantitative and qualitative research heavily informed the inception of this project and has continued to provide a foundation for undertaking an evidence-supported co-design approach.

We have seen time and again that people leaving prison have limited opportunities and little means to change the direction of their lives, in line with their goals and aspirations.

This project represents the centerpiece of a future program that seeks to use collaborative design input from people with lived and professional experience of incarceration and drug use to meaningfully support people in this space.

We hope that the work described in this report provides the foundation for sustained and successful investment from government and others to support people released from prison and reduce the individual, social and economic burden of incarceration in Australia.



“Incarceration does not prevent reoffending or rehabilitate, yet it is prioritised at the expense of responses that meet these peoples’ complex health and social support needs.”

- Subject matter expert

# Numbers to know

People who use drugs are overrepresented in Australian prisons<sup>2,7</sup>.

Two-thirds (65%) of people in prison reported illicit drug use in the year preceding incarceration, with one-quarter reporting injecting drug use in the month before imprisonment<sup>8</sup>. Drug-related offences and drug-related acquisitive property crime (e.g., theft to fund drug purchases) collectively account for approximately 30% of the most serious offences for which people are incarcerated<sup>9</sup>.

**Substance use<sup>4,10-14</sup>, including injecting drug use<sup>5,15</sup>, is a significant driver of recidivism and reincarceration.**

In a study of men with injecting drug use histories exiting prison, the average number of previous lifetime adult incarcerations was five, one quarter reporting nine or more incarceration episodes and almost half reported a history of juvenile detention<sup>16</sup>. Another study from NSW found men treated for opioid dependence in prison returned to prison a median of five times over the next 10 years<sup>4</sup>.

People who use drugs and are incarcerated typically exit prison with a range of other intersecting support needs.

These include high burdens of:

- Mortality, attributable primarily to preventable causes including drug overdose<sup>17,18</sup> and suicide<sup>19</sup>.
- Mental health disorders<sup>20</sup> and poor psychiatric wellbeing<sup>2,21</sup>. Most (80%) people in prison experienced at least one mental health condition in the last 12 months<sup>20</sup>. One in five people in Queensland prisons have both a substance use and mental health disorder<sup>22</sup>.
- Blood borne viruses, with the prevalence of hepatitis C and B among people in prison estimated to be 22% and 16%, respectively<sup>8</sup>.
- Disabilities and chronic non-communicable diseases, such as acquired brain injuries<sup>23</sup>, asthma<sup>2</sup> and musculoskeletal conditions<sup>2,16</sup>.
- Unemployment, with 54% being unemployed in the month before prison<sup>2</sup>.
- Homelessness, with approximately half of people exiting prison expected to be homeless or unsure where they would live after release<sup>2</sup>.
- Low educational attainment, with 33% of people entering Australian prisons having not completed year 10<sup>2</sup>.



“People should not be in prison, it obviously does not work if they keep going back in and out”

- Co-design participant

# Project objectives

The project set out to identify and imagine what could break cycles of incarceration for people with histories of drug use.

The project's goal was to engage in a best practice co-design process that included those with lived or living experience of drug use and incarceration, and those involved in the service landscape, to identify what concept could push the boundaries of what is currently available in Australia.

The project objectives were to understand:

- What opportunities will improve post-release experiences for people with histories of drug use and incarceration?
- What concept do people with lived and professional experience believe will break cycles of incarceration for people with histories of drug use?
- How might we leverage a best practice co-design process to identify a concept that pushes the boundaries of what is available in Australia?
- How might we balance blue-sky thinking with current system constraints and develop a practical pathway to implementation that builds on existing system strengths?

# Project phases

The project followed four phases to co-design a concept that will break cycles of incarceration for people with histories of drug use.

1. Establishing Foundations
2. Future State Co-design
3. Feasibility Co-Design
4. Funding and Implementation Planning

1

### Phase 1 Establishing Foundations 2020 - 2022

The first phase focused on setting up the co-design team and clearly defining the methodology. A review of current research and the service landscape informed project design and focus for the co-design sessions.

Due to impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic, this phase was paused multiple times.

#### Activities

- Evidence and literature review
- 12 interviews with co-design team and subject matter experts
- 3 co-design workshops (appendix 1) and one other meeting of co-designers

#### Outcomes:

- Established co-design team and ways of working
- Understanding of project focus and desired outcomes

2

### Phase 2 Future State Co-design August - October 2022

The second phase brought the existing co-design team together with new participants to build on previous work and create a shared understanding of the problem space and generating concept solutions.

#### Activities:

- 6 interviews with subject matter experts
- Development of a needs framework
- 3 co-design workshops to generate concept ideas that address the problem areas (Appendix 1)
- 4 virtual sessions

#### Outcomes:

- Clear articulation of needs
- 50+ ideas to address the problem space
- Concept storyboard of service model

3

### Phase 3 Feasibility Co-Design October - December 2022

The third phase added detail and refinements to create a clear and carefully considered final concept. The co-design team assessed risks and inclusions to arrive at an outcome they believe will have the most impact for breaking cycles of incarceration for people with drug use.

#### Activities :

- 2 co-design workshops to test and iterate concept (Appendix 1)
- 5 virtual engagement sessions with subject matter experts

#### Outcomes:

- Consensus from co-design team on the final concept
- Report documenting process and outcomes

4

### Phase 4 Funding and Implementation Planning December 2022 - present

The fourth phase seeks to continue to build out the service model into a detailed implementation roadmap. The ultimate goal of this phase will be to obtain funding for a large scale community trial.

#### Desired outcomes:

- Develop a funder engagement strategy and implementation roadmap for a community trial
- Private and public partnership funding received for a large scale community trial
- Implementation planning to commence, including selection of a trial site, engagement with partners, detailed development of governance strategy, leveraging of existing public programs, and development of evaluation strategy

# 02.

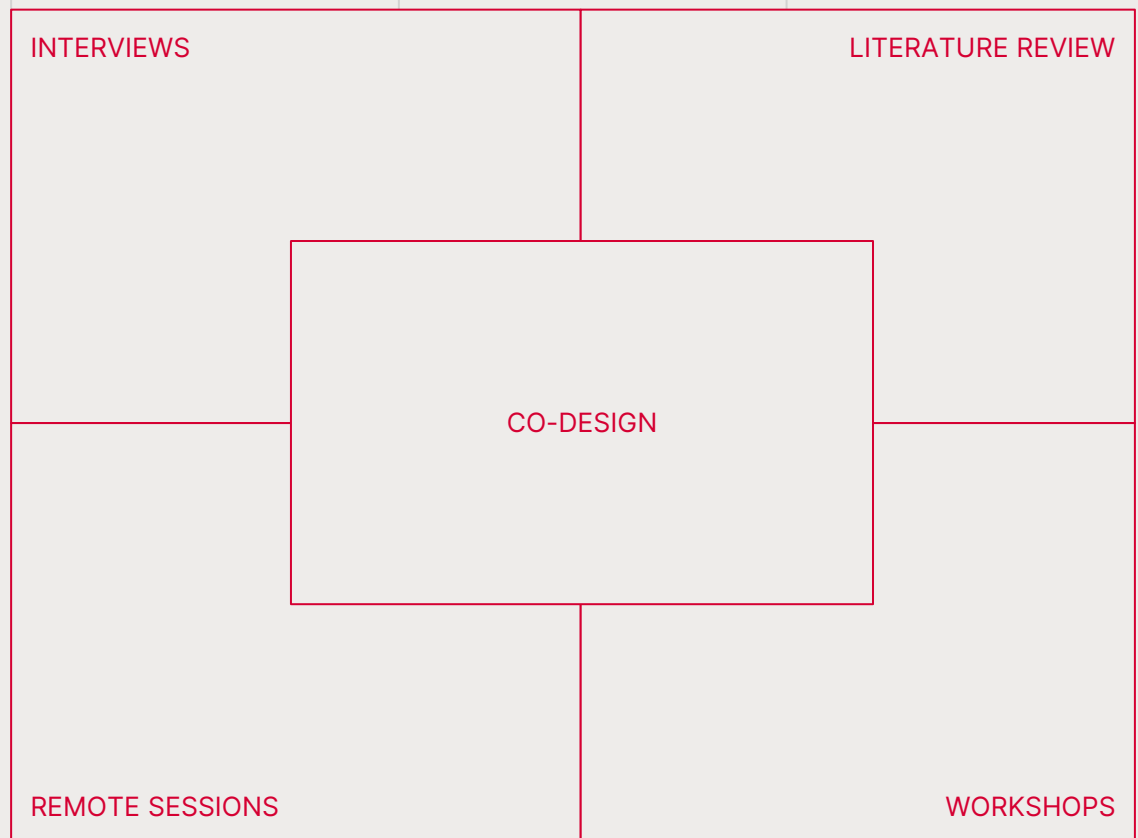
# Methodology

- Mixed methods co-design
- What is co-design?
- Why we used co-design
- Who was engaged



# Mixed methods co-design

Our project methodology centred around a best practice, mixed methods co-design approach.



The process included multiple methods and touchpoints with a diverse range of participants. By integrating multiple perspectives we ensured thorough exploration, iteration and development of final outcomes that are impactful and meaningful. A total of 37 people were engaged across 18 interviews, 8 in-person workshops and 9 virtual short form workshop engagements.

#### **Literature review**

An initial review of literature identified characteristics of therapeutic and social programs that successfully reduced post-release recidivism, particularly among people with drug use histories. National and internationally applicable exemplar programs were also identified to understand gaps, needs and opportunities. This evidence base was used to inform interviews and ensure co-design activities built on existing knowledge.

#### **Interviews**

A total of 18 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted throughout the project with subject matter experts and lived experience participants to understand their perspectives of the current service landscape and the needs they believed the project should address to achieve the most impact in breaking cycles of incarceration.

#### **Workshops**

The co-design process included a series of in-person workshops that formed the basis of the majority of design activity. Each workshop was designed to guide through a specific process to iteratively design and refine ideas that respond to the challenge of breaking the cycle of reincarceration for people with histories of drug use. Participants in the workshops were given decision making power over the outcomes and defining key elements of the concept.

#### **Satellite group remote sessions**

Satellite group sessions were also held alongside the workshops to explore crucial perspectives and avoid groupthink. These remote sessions included subject matter experts who acted as 'critical friends'. The critical friend role brought different perspectives to critically evaluate the emerging outcomes and ensure risks and practicalities were considered throughout the project.



## What is co-design?

Co-design is a methodology that actively engages people with different experiences as equal collaborators in a design process.

Co-design is used to design improvements or innovations using the experiences and expertise of all those involved, ensuring they reflect the needs of those who are embedded in the system. As such, co-design is effectively used when the nature of the challenge is complex and there is a vast diversity of opinion.

By using creative methods to make and test artefacts, co-design empowers participants to collaboratively express tacit knowledge and iteratively develop ideas. This process ultimately facilitates the development of robust designs that go beyond what people say and think, to reflect their deeper experiences and dreams.

# Why we used co-design

The Forest is directly informed by a diverse group of people who have first-hand experiences of what people and the system need to break cycles of incarceration.



To address the complexity of the post-prison service landscape, and the complexity of needs for those within it, the development of any new initiatives must be closely informed by people with lived experience. As such, co-design was elected as the methodology that would best bring the innovative approach needed to accelerate change.

Throughout multiple engagements, we were fortunate to have people sharing their experiences and stories who had successfully broken the cycle of reincarceration for themselves and now supported others to do the same. We also had those who have dedicated their careers to helping others break the cycle of reincarceration, and a few whose careers focused on changing justice policies and systems (refer to page 27 for the specifics of who was engaged).

Using best-practice co-design methods to empower this group, we engaged and elevated their voices and decision-making power in a safe, guided way. The diversity of experiences and investment of time through multiple engagements underpins the proposed concept's success.

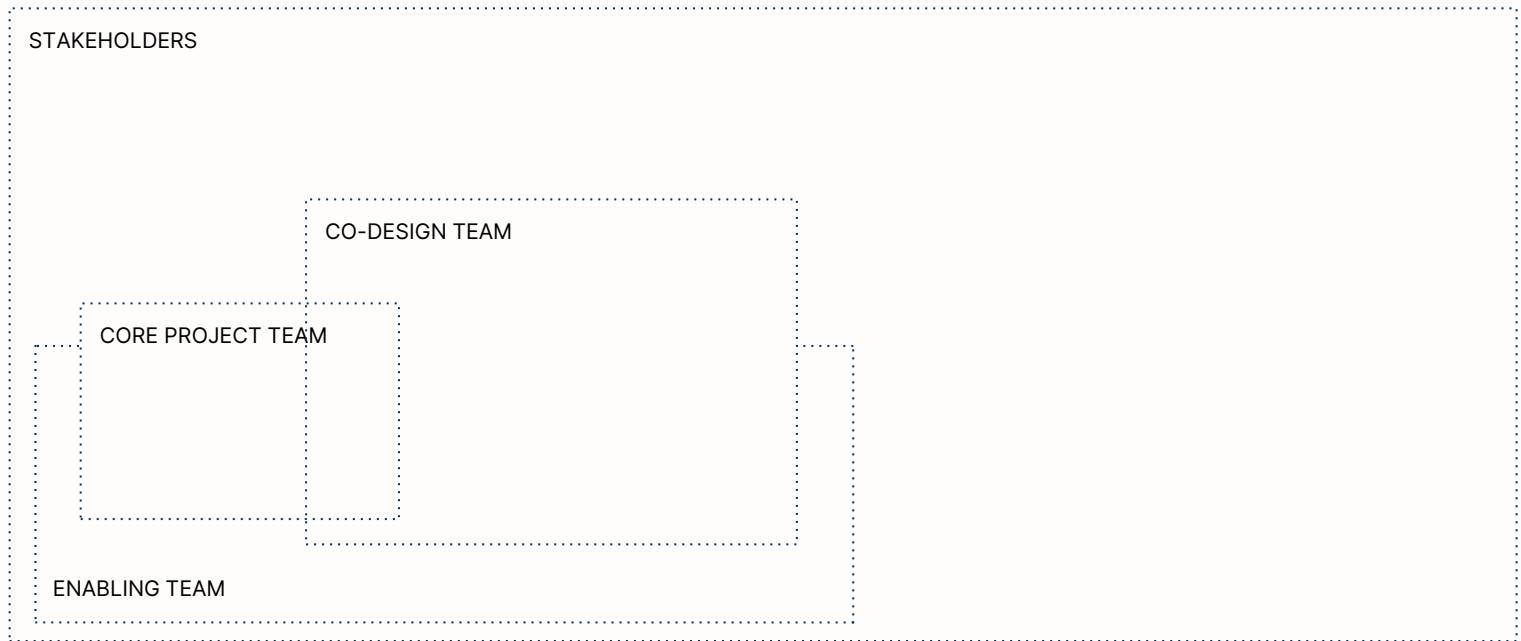
We can confidently say that The Forest is built on a wealth of shared wisdom, expertise and personal insight about how an individual can be best supported to break the cycle of incarceration, as well as what is practical, feasible and unique.

“[The co-design process] has shown me that everyone comes from different backgrounds, but everyone has the same vision”

- Co-design Participant



# Who was engaged



As part of the co-design approach, various groups were structured to enable effective conditions for co-design. Each group served a different role and ensured that multiple perspectives were incorporated. All participants were identified and engaged through partnerships and via Burnet Institute's network.

The **core project team** was comprised of Amy Kirwan, Michael Curtis, Angela Davis and Mark Stooze from Burnet Institute, and Emily Hamilton and Roya Azadi from Paper Giant for phases two and three.

The **enabling team** was other Burnet staff members who supported this work in various ways. The enabling team also included project manager Eily Williams from Paper Giant for phases two and three.

The **co-design team** was a total of 25 people who had lived experience of reincarceration and drug-use or professional expertise of the post-incarceration landscape, across a range of services, including alcohol and drugs, legal, mental health, arts, housing, transitional support, specialised support for criminalised women, peer organisations, advocacy and research.

The wider group of 12 **stakeholders** included a range of experts from Burnet, other research organisations or leaders in service provision.

While the co-design team included people who identify as Aboriginal and/or who work for Aboriginal-led organisations, the concept developed is broad in scope and applicability and does not contain culturally specific elements at this stage.

It is the intention of the project team to collaborate with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations or other groups or committees to fund and support a co-design process (co-led by community members) for a culturally specific concept for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with drug use histories who are experiencing cycles of reincarceration.

# 03.

## The concept: The Forest

- Introduction to The Forest
- Why The Forest?
- What happens at The Forest



# The Forest

Welcome to The Forest.

This is a place-based organisation whose vision is to **empower people who have been in prison and who use drugs to gain stability, connection and ultimately be an integrated part of their community.**

We do this by creating a place where people can choose from a range of offerings that go across the needs of a whole, balanced person: **having somewhere safe to go, something meaningful to do, people to consistently support you, and the ability to feel secure in your health.**

The Forest also helps break the stigma of incarceration by creating opportunities for connection with the wider community through a social enterprise, and other events at the location.

We believe that by building an organisation on the values of being **person-centred, connection-driven, co-designed and accessible**, that we will empower people who have been in prison and who use drugs to be able to not just dream of brighter futures, but gain the confidence to move towards them. Our ultimate impact will be to relieve the human and financial cost of reincarceration.

The Forest is developed with a flexible model that can adapt, grow and scale to different locations, always co-designed to meet the needs of those in the area.





# Why 'The Forest'?

The co-design team came up with a temporary name for the concept, while it's in development. The intention is for a proper branding and naming process to happen at a time that is suitable.

The concept of a forest resonated with the group because everything can find its place in a forest: humans, trees, mushrooms, animals. It's a place that supports life no matter who you are, and where natural cycles are restored.

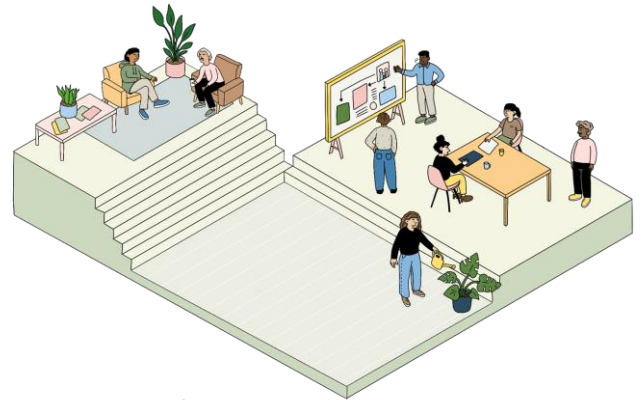
The forest is a place for non-linear journeys: there is no set way to travel through a forest, every part of it is valuable and works together.

# What happens at The Forest

The co-design team identified a cohesive range of programs that are offered in a stepped approach to meet people where they're at.

## Peer mentoring program

The Forest includes a structured peer mentoring program that supports people leaving prison. Mentors use their lived experience and other skills to provide support, inspire hope and foster relationships. The program offers stepped entry, training and pathways for future mentors. The peer workforce is an integral part of service delivery at The Forest.  
(See page 39)



## Health and support services

Co-located health and support services operate out of The Forest. Different professionals who embrace The Forest's values come together as multi-disciplinary teams to address the long-term needs of a whole person. Services are accessible to allow people to access support when they need it through extended opening times and a drop-in approach.  
(See page 43)



## Supported by a social enterprise

The Forest also provides pathways to employment, including via a self-run and integrated social enterprise that supports skills development, on the job training and funding of the support services.  
(See page 45)



## Activities and social connection

The Forest builds connection with others in social spaces that support engagement and community development. Alongside this, The Forest offers a range of activities including recreation, education and enjoyable programs to support connection and transformation.  
(See page 41)



# The Forest is underpinned by flexible housing options

Providing secure and stable housing is a necessary foundation to ensure people are supported in finding a safe place to call home that meets their needs. The co-design team discussed the ability to provide access to appropriate housing in Victoria as a systemic issue as current community, social and public housing is extremely limited with sparse support for people with histories of incarceration and drug use. However, the Victorian Government has recently committed to Australia's largest ever investment in social housing, which can be leveraged as part of this concept.

The direct provision of housing requires an entire service in parallel to this concept and is beyond the scope of the primary service model. Through strong partnerships and relationships, The Forest will leverage existing and emerging programs for housing, such as integrating with existing social housing brokers and expanded investments in social housing from the Victorian Government.

These relationships will allow The Forest to leverage current systems to offer flexible options and stay responsive to different needs, preferences and stages of people's journeys to independence.

*(See page 47)*

## Principles for housing partnerships and investments:

- Good quality
- Affordable
- Stable, safe and secure
- Available for as long as someone needs it
- Choice in options to meet different needs
- Integrates with the wider community
- Organised in prison prior to release



"None of this can happen until housing is solved, not shitty hotel rooms."

- Co-design participant

# 04.

# The strategy

- Strategy on a page
- 4.1 Vision
- 4.2 Organisational values
- 4.3 Experience principles
- 4.4 Service model
  - 4.4.1 Peer mentoring program
  - 4.4.2 Activities & social connection
  - 4.4.3 Health & support services
  - 4.4.4 Social enterprise
  - 4.4.5 Flexible housing options

# Strategy on a page

Throughout multiple engagements, the co-design team developed the strategic scaffolding for The Forest that will guide future governance and operations.

## 4.1 Vision

The vision is an aspirational statement that articulates what our organisation sets out to achieve through all programs, interactions and future activity.

The Forest will help people with histories of drug use and reincarceration to leave prison and go into a well-resourced, interconnected support network that takes an ecological and holistic view.

This service will help them gain stability, connection, the ability to dream and ultimately be an integrated part of their community.

## 4.2 Values

The values describe the foundation of The Forest's approach, operations and strategy. These values must come to life for everyone who is involved - community members, workers and the wider community.

Person-centred

Connection-driven

Co-designed

Accessible

## 4.3 Experience principles

The experience principles describe what a community member should feel as a result of engaging with The Forest.

"I can do things that are meaningful"

"This is a place where I feel safe"

"There are people who consistently support me"

"I feel secure in my health"

## 4.4 Service model

The service model describes the key offerings of The Forest, and what one might find if they walk through the door of this organisation.

Flexible housing options

Health and support services

Activities and social connection

Peer mentoring program

Social enterprise

# 4.1 Vision



The co-design team developed a statement that reflected their aspirations for what The Forest should achieve through all programs, interactions and future activity.

“The Forest will help people with histories of drug use and reincarceration leave prison into a well-resourced, interconnected support network that takes an ecological and holistic view.

This service will help them gain **stability, connection**, the **ability to dream** and ultimately be an integrated part of their community.”



## Stability

Consistent, long-term access to the basics including safe housing, health support, psychological support, job opportunities, and other tools and resources for participation and inclusion.



## Connection

Connection to peers and like-minded people, family, community, country and stories will support de-stigmatisation and lead to a sense of belonging, emotional wellbeing, self worth and purpose.



## Ability to dream

Having the choice, the will and the capability to redirect their life however they wish to do so.

# 4.2

## Organisational values

Values were developed by the co-design team to answer the question of 'what do we value as an organisation'? These are a list of non-negotiables that the organisation must deliver on, to uphold its intention. These, along with the rest of this document, provide an essential North Star for the future administration of this organisation.

- Person-centred
- Connection-driven
- Co-designed
- Accessible





## Person-centred

### "We meet people where they are at"

'Person-centred' means that we will meet individual needs in a compassionate, adaptive and trauma-informed way.

It means we will always approach our community members and our team mates with a strengths-based mindset, and a harm-minimisation approach.

For us, 'person-centred' means providing choices that allow for self-determination, flexibility and responsiveness to needs, rather than a one-size-fits all approach.

'Person-centred' also means respecting all kinds of experience including lived experience and working experience.

#### How this comes to life at the organisational level:

- We work hard to create a culture of person-centredness
- Our workers balance person-centredness with a harm minimisation approach
- Our organisation works to create partnerships to maintain a landscape of choices for those who want them.

#### How this comes to life at the ground level:

- Our community members are given options to suit their needs at that moment
- We don't need community members to do particular things at particular times
- We don't use punitive measures or consequences, we meet people where they are at and continue to support them through their journey.



## Connection-driven

### "We enable community and connection to thrive"

'Connection-driven' means that we uphold the human connection first, before anything technical or service related.

We recognise that sometimes it is the small, simple things that are the most meaningful, and that inclusiveness is crucial.

We will work towards making this place one where people can feel a sense of belonging and connection first and foremost. We will always make sure these connections are made in a safe and supported way that also puts the individual's choice first.

#### How this comes to life at the organisational level:

- The space is well-staffed with people who value inclusiveness and being non-judgemental
- We embed understanding of the effects of colonisation and social and economic factors on the breakdown of connection and community
- We work hard to create a culture of connection and inclusion.
- We create community between community members themselves, workers, as well as the wider community.

#### How this comes to life at the ground level:

- We establish certain rules of thumb for how community members are to be interacted with in a way that is warm, inviting, non-judgemental, helps support belonging and connection, while also giving them choice.
- We find ways to bring storytelling to life for our community members that is appreciative and joyful.
- We use principles of co-design to bring a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for keeping the community safe, and a place they want to be.



## Co-designed

### **"We are all a part of creating and improving this place"**

'Co-designed' means that we will establish, use and fully commit to a model of participation and iterative improvement.

This will allow us to maintain our person-centredness and improve our ability to respond to a wide range of needs, as well as to continue to build our ability to help people form meaningful connection.

This approach is essential to ensuring that The Forest fosters a sense of shared ownership between everyone who is involved and affected by the organisation. We will create and sustain community.

We recognise that 'co-design' meets people where they're at, and must be a process that maintains flexibility and responsiveness, so that it doesn't ask too much of people when they cannot give it.

#### **How this comes to life at the organisational level:**

- Intentionally designing a co-design model to support the iterative improvement of this concept.

#### **How this comes to life at the ground level:**

- Providing community members with easy ways to be involved in making choices about the space.



## Accessible

### **"This is a welcoming place for anyone who needs it"**

'Accessibility' means that we will provide an open door with low or no criteria to enter and use this space.

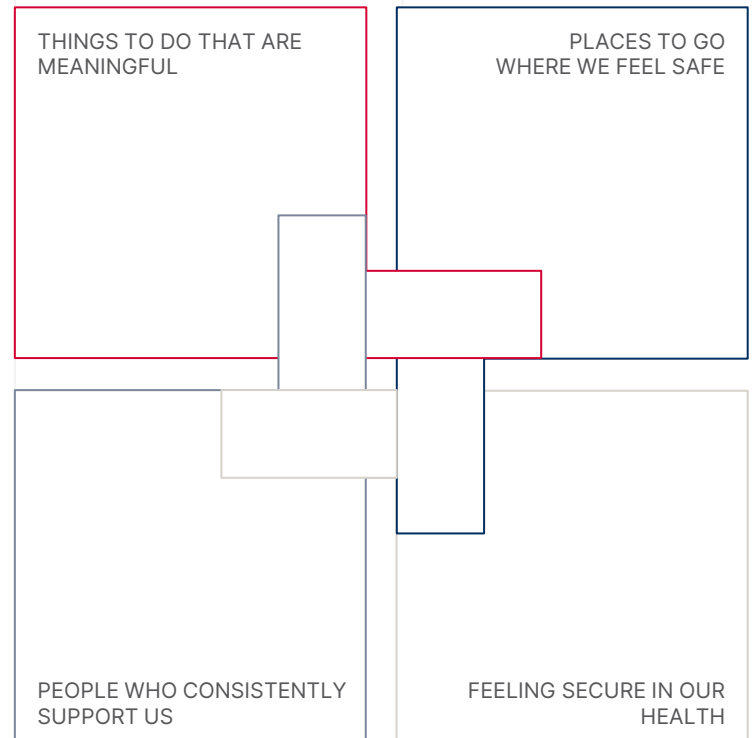
We believe in removing barriers so that anyone can find support, community or even a quiet place at their time of need.

#### **How this comes to life at the organisational level:**

- We create an environment that's inclusive for people to access, at different stages of their journeys and lives, without requiring unrealistic eligibility criteria
- We support people where they are at through harm-minimisation approaches.

#### **How this comes to life at the ground level:**

- We continue to support people through ups and downs without using punitive measures
- We work to give people immediate access to support and the things they need
- Our physical locations are easy to access, and we work to expand access through other channels
- We recognise that everyone has different levels of participation and we cater to different needs.



## 4.3

# Experience principles

The experience principles describe what an attendee of The Forest should feel, as a result of engaging with The Forest. This helps us to remain flexible in the details of what is provided, but provide non-negotiables in terms of the experience we are creating.

The co-design team designed the experience principles to be facets of a whole person, and fluidly overlapping.



## I can do something meaningful

We acknowledge that having meaningful things to do can build a sense of purpose and self-worth. Leaving prison, time is often taken up with obligations and commitments, without the space for people to discover and explore what is meaningful or set goals about the future. Conversely, some people may find it difficult to fill their time or engage in activities that they find enjoyable or meaningful.

Our organisation has multiple things that people can do on-site with different modes of access. Whether it's something simple like read a magazine or have a chat, it could be playing a game, or something bigger like engaging in an education program or a hobby class, as well as partnerships with organisations who can help people with this.

### How this may come to life:

- Things to do on site at any time (eg. books, magazines, games, art space etc.)
- Organised activities (eg. digital literacy class, painting class, soccer team)
- Pathways to employment through the social enterprise.
- Partnerships with organisations who can connect people with volunteer positions, jobs or more.



## This is a place where I feel safe

We acknowledge that safety - physical and psychological - can be hard to come by for most coming out of prison. Without this, it will be difficult to focus attention on things that may help them achieve their goals.

Our organisation will always provide and maintain a safe environment through all operations, as well as maintain relationships with organisations that can help people find permanent safe spaces to live and work in.

### How this may come to life:

- Rules for the space are developed via co-design methods with those coming into the space, to develop a shared responsibility for maintaining psychological and physical safety
- Well-trained and professional staff will always be present to enable a safe environment
- Partnerships with organisations who can help people find other safe spaces to live and work in.



## There are people who consistently support me

We recognise that consistent access to a kind, relatable, supportive person can be rare for someone coming out of prison. Without this person, taking steps towards independence can be difficult.

Our organisation invests in a generous workforce of peers and other trained professionals who embody our organisation's values of person-centred, co-designed, connection-driven and accessible. This workforce approach ensures every person who walks through our doors experiences kindness and helpfulness without judgement.

### How this may come to life:

- Well-trained peers and other professionals
- A workforce who are supported themselves to provide this, without burn-out
- Consistent, no-waitlist access to service providers whose help may be needed, such as legal or housing support.



## I feel secure in my health

We recognise that without feeling secure with their health, it will be very difficult for someone coming out of prison to focus on other aspects of their new phase of life. We acknowledge that those coming out of prison with histories of drug use have complex health needs, and require bespoke support to build their health and wellbeing.

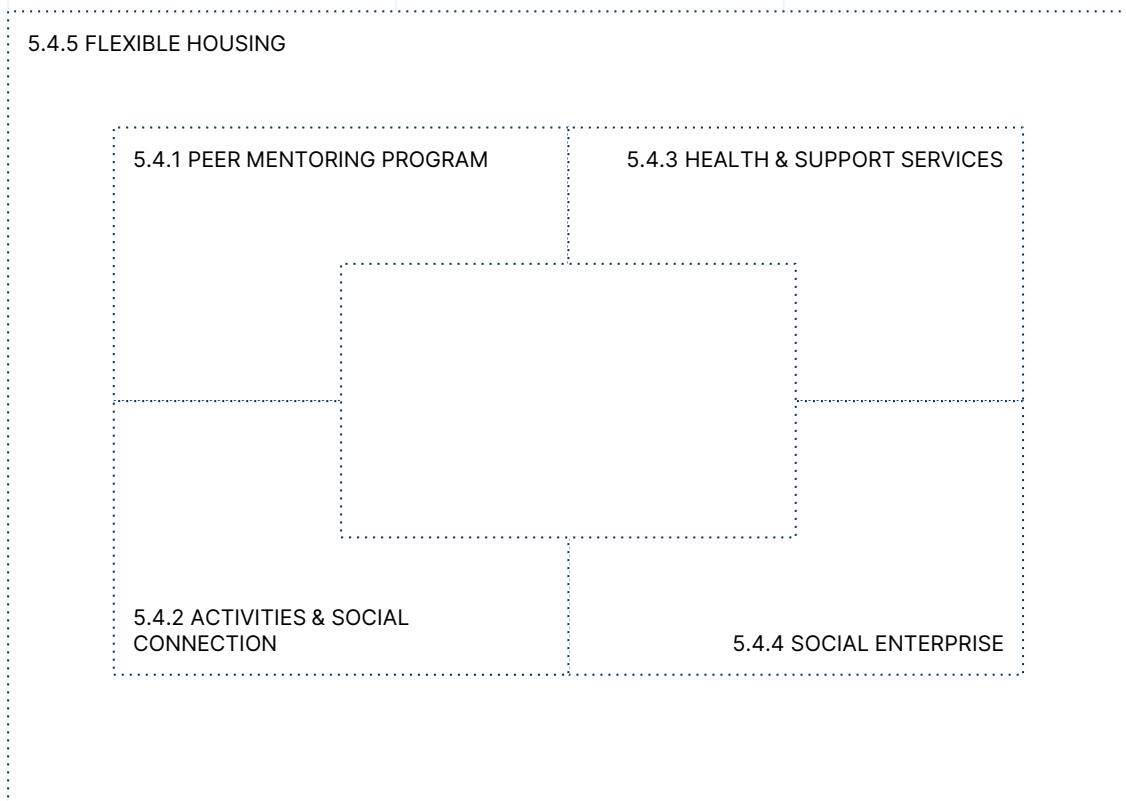
Our organisation invests in partnerships with health service providers who work onsite, so that those who come through our doors can access consistent health support. We also support healthy living through activities provided at The Forest while maintaining a harm-minimisation approach.

### How this may come to life:

- Partnerships with health organisations who are able to provide consistent, no-waitlist access to health support
- Access to healthy-living activities (eg. sports teams, cooking classes etc.)

# 4.4 Service model

The co-design team developed a service model with four program areas and the need for flexible housing options to support these. The team outlined each area with key features that address multiple needs.



# The programs are structured under one organisation with close government and local community partnerships.



## Organisational structure

The Forest is constructed on a consortium model. The Forest has its own governance structure, in addition to governance provided by the partner organisations.. The Forest has close relationships with government (including leveraging broader government programs such as housing and education and training) and local partners for priority access and referrals to services not offered in house.

The services are offered out of the physical community space. There is also an opportunity to test the effectiveness of online facilitation of telehealth style appointments or educational programs during pilot phase to expand reach. This must be considered in the context that digital literacy is typically low for our cohort.

The proposed programs are intended to be responsive to the local area need and flexible to adapt to needs and impact.



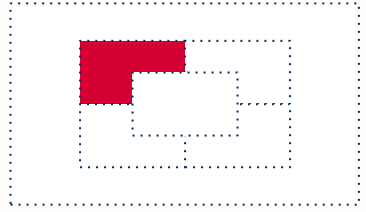
## Harm minimisation approach

The programs will all operate with a harm minimisation approach. This will ensure inclusive practices and greater accessibility. However, it is acknowledged that a harm minimisation approach will require monitoring of behaviours and a higher demand for resourcing and management which have been addressed in the risks section.



“There needs to be access to things in one place - an integrated framework that’s holistic, seamless. And the program shouldn’t discriminate.”

- Co-design participant



## 4.4.1

# Peer mentoring program

The Forest includes a structured peer mentoring program that supports people leaving prison. Mentors use their lived experience and other skills to provide support, inspire hope and foster relationships. The program offers stepped entry, training and pathways for future mentors. The peer workforce is an integral part of service delivery at The Forest.

### Features:

- People can choose a suitable peer mentor who supports them before, during and after release
- Clearly defined roles and code of conduct for peer mentors
- Structured pathways and training including small volunteering opportunities to help people through growth (see page 42)
- Structural support in peer mentor role from other professionals
- Opportunities for storytelling and sharing lived experiences to inspire hope

### Needs addressed:

#### People who consistently support us

- I need people that can relate to my experience in prison
- I need people who advocate for me
- I need tangible support such as coordinating things when I leave prison

#### Things to do that are meaningful

- I need help in setting and achieving goals that are suitable for where I'm at
- I need visibility of different pathways from people who have gone through it
- I need support and training when working in peer mentor roles



Pilot peer mentoring programs show promising results in relation to improved motivation<sup>24</sup> and self-efficacy<sup>24,25</sup>, reducing recidivism<sup>26</sup>, and improved access to community resources<sup>27</sup> during community reintegration. Larger studies among people not exclusively involved in the justice system participating in peer-mentoring programs also show improved outcomes; peer support programs contribute to improved substance use outcomes among people with substance use disorders<sup>28,29</sup>, improved self-management and psychosocial outcomes among people with mental health disorders<sup>30,31</sup>, and reduced depression symptoms among people living with depression<sup>32</sup>. Further, peer support programs encourage hope and recovery<sup>33,34</sup> and can provide avenues for future pro-social engagement



“Because of the extreme marginalisation of this group, (having) peer workers involved is very important.”

- Co-design participant



The program offers both access to mentors for people leaving prison and a program to develop and support future peer mentors. The development takes a stepped approach, allowing time for future mentors to build up training, confidence and skills in a safe and supported environment.

### Support for people leaving prison

People leaving prison are connected with a peer mentor with lived experience and skills to support them in a flexible capacity.

Someone preparing to leave prison is connected to a mentor who is appropriately matched by preferences and culture. They are provided opportunities to:

- Have the mentor connect while in prison to help plan their release
- Reach out to the peer mentor on an ongoing basis to ask questions, get help organising something or have a chat
- When ready, volunteer or help out around The Forest to build a sense of inclusiveness, meaning and purpose.

### Stepped entry to a mentor role

The mentor is able to work in a supportive role at The Forest while they complete training and learn the skills to become a mentor.

The role of an entry mentor includes:

- Platform to develop in a safe and supportive environment with like minded people
- Progress through a peer mentor capability building program run on site (including choice in modules such as digital literacy, introduction to the service system, engaging with service stakeholders)
- Fostering connection and a sense of community
- Supporting the welcome/concierge desk, running activities and day to day operations
- Assisting people to navigate the offering at The Forest.

People are assessed on eligibility for an entry role based on where they are at and if they can demonstrate:

- Lived experience of incarceration
- Interest in The Forest leadership in some capacity
- People skills when engaging with others
- Alignment with the vision and values.

### Opportunities for peer mentors

Once they receive their training qualification and have demonstrated confidence and stability in the role, mentors have the opportunity to become part of the care team and engage with mentees in a 1:1 capacity.

The role of a peer mentor includes:

- Meeting with mentee in prison to plan their release without putting the mentor in a vulnerable position
- Helping a mentee choose and organise activities to do
- Acting as a professional friend and providing information to help navigate service landscape
- Working collaboratively as part of the care team
- Providing non-clinical assistance
- Voicing concerns to others and understanding appropriate points to hand over to other professionals
- Running of activities, events and mentor training at The Forest

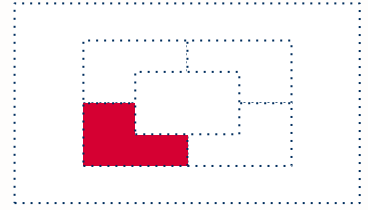
The mentor is supported by:

- Growth opportunities to work in the sector if people choose
- Clear line of support for the peer worker.



### Opportunities for community volunteers

To add to the support network and resourcing there are opportunities to involve other community members as a buddy. These empathetic and non-judgmental roles can model positive experiences and society expectations for people who would like that exposure or support.



## 4.4.2

# Activities & social connection

The Forest provides a safe place to build connection with others and develop community in meaningful ways. The physical space offers zones for quiet and more social areas to cater to different needs. Alongside this, The Forest holds a range of activities including recreation, education and enjoyable programs to support connection and transformation.

### Features:

- A variety of programs that contribute to building confidence and positive self-identities by developing relevant skills, supporting connection and joy
- Educational programs that stack towards qualifications
- A range of social activities and connection with recreational groups to support wellbeing and physical and mental health
- Physical design of the space includes informal spaces where people can 'hang out' allowing people time to build relationships and reconnect with culture and community

### Needs addressed:

- Places to go where we feel safe
- I need welcoming environments that are judgement free
- Feeling secure in our health
- I need affordable ways to be healthy
- Things to do that are meaningful
- I need opportunities to grow and learn
  - I need ways to build my independence
  - I need emotional support and confidence when out in the wider community
  - I need to feel I belong and am accepted by the wider community
  - I need to feel I belong and have value
  - I need ways to find and feel purpose



The development of a prosocial identity, activities and community is are key ingredients for desistance from crime <sup>12,35,36</sup>. However, people exiting prison commonly experience social isolation and may otherwise lack the resources to engage in prosocial recreational activities or develop community <sup>37,38</sup>. Provision of social, recreation and education activities with other people with similar experiences can reduce social isolation, provide meaning and structure to each day <sup>39</sup>, while also providing a low-threshold engagement opportunity into other co-located services <sup>40</sup>.



"There's not a lot of organisations whose job it is to provide a soft landing, but what about after that time? People are still vulnerable if they don't have a community."

- Co-design participant

The activities offered at The Forest include informal and formal programs that cater to different access needs. For some people, dropping into an art class might be preferred, while others who desire more structure might sign up for training. There are a variety of programs on offer, ensuring flexibility to adapt with feedback on what the community members find most valuable.

### Educational programs

The programs offered include relevant, marketable and life skills and can stack to contribute to qualifications such as peer mentoring. These programs may be led by the peer workforce. The programs may also be piloted in digital format.

Programs that build qualifications and skills:

- AoD education
- Digital literacy
- Inner/personal development
- Drug driving courses
- Harm reduction (e.g. naloxone training)
- Resources to make a start and connect with the wider community

Programs where activities support people to pursue their hobbies or simply engage in something enjoyable such as:

- Arts
- Cultural specific programs
- Cooking
- Pet therapy

Note: partnerships with TAFE and other registered organisations to refer people to other desired qualifications based on their needs may be required

### Recreational activities

To support health and wellbeing, The Forest will provide opportunities to connect with recreational activities. These activities may be via partner organisations externally or offered on site.

- Personal training
- Connection with existing community sports groups
- On-site physical activities

### Physical space that supports connection

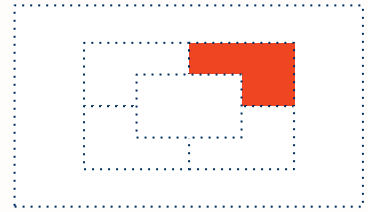
Adaptive physical space in The Forest that supports people to 'hang out'. The space is supported by warmth from the peer and professional workers. There is both quiet and active open areas with activities such as pool/table tennis for people to use while they either wait for appointments or occupy their time.

- Couches
- Books and magazines for solo connection
- Games
- Cafe or kitchen area that welcomes the wider community



### Opportunities for activities outside the space

The Forest can foster ways for connections to be formed and people to support each other outside of the physical space. This might include self-organised walking or riding groups.



## 4.4.3

# Health & support services

Co-located health and support services operate out of The Forest. Different professionals who embrace The Forest's values come together as multi-disciplinary teams to address the long-term needs of a whole person. Services are accessible to allow people to access support when they need it through extended opening times and a drop-in approach.

### Features:

- Permanent staff who work in multidisciplinary teams to address the needs of the whole person
- Workers are skilled at working with complex needs of the community members. Each has a speciality lens and is also trained as an all round worker to support in other areas as needs arise
- Close partnerships and priority access with other services or organisations such as psychiatrists, psychologists and dentists
- Telehealth style appointments available to improve access
- Inreach in prison to start relationships and identify appropriate support network

### Needs addressed:

Places to go where we feel safe

- I need appointments that are easy to get to and feel safe
- I need welcoming environments that are judgement free (online places as well)

Feeling secure in our health

- I need access to long term therapeutic care
- I need access to emotional and mental health support
- I need continuity of care

People who consistently support us

- I need a network of people who I can rely on
- I need workers who listen, care and provide practical and culturally sensitive support across the transition from prison to community and beyond
- I need access to specialist people
- I need consistency and quality in support I am given



People in prison commonly experience a range of complex physical, mental and social support needs<sup>41-43</sup>. Upon release, people often report a range of barriers to accessing support including difficulty navigating service systems<sup>44</sup>, anxiety about use of public transport<sup>37</sup>, reduced willpower<sup>45</sup>, insecure housing and homelessness<sup>38,46</sup>, limited financial resources<sup>38,46</sup> and competing reintegration priorities<sup>44</sup>. The co-location of low-threshold health and social services will support improved access to healthcare by reducing barriers to care and improving coordination between service providers<sup>47-50</sup>. Further, service provision by professionals who embrace The Forest's values will foster trust in The Forest, a critical component to service engagement<sup>51</sup>.



"Things need to be flexible to adapt to the kinds of support people want. We need to meet them where they are at, rather than where we want them to be."

- Co-design participant

Services offered will be tailored to the location of The Forest and the specific needs of that area. As a baseline, the services outlined are the ones identified by the co-design team as most important for people to access in one location. While each practitioner brings a core speciality, they are trained in the ability to support and guide on multiple issues. The Forest will also explore alternative ways to improve access such as telehealth or home visits.

### **General practitioners and practice nurse**

GPs with a holistic approach and awareness of AoD. GPs conduct an initial assessment of health and reevaluate what people have been prescribed. GPs can support in prescribing opioid agonist treatment and address injecting related infections on site. Practice nurses can support on-site testing and treatment for Hepatitis C and other blood borne viruses and administer medications on site.

### **Legal support**

Legal services are important to advocate for people. The legal service conducts in reach while someone is in prison and supports with legal matters while in The Forest.

### **Mental health and crisis support**

A mental health nurse is present to support other services and assist in de-escalating situations.

### **Centrelink (outreach)**

A Centrelink representative who aligns with the communities' mission and values is present for one day a week at The Forest. This provides a failsafe if someone misses an appointment.

### **Alcohol or Other Drugs (AoD) support**

Counsellors or workers with an Alcohol and Drug speciality. The worker is an all rounder and knows how to refer on to other services or suggest activities someone may enjoy. The AoD worker is connected with various modalities of detox programs and drug treatment providers to provide immediate or priority access so people can access the support when they are ready,

### **Family support**

Counsellors or workers with a family speciality who can provide family mediation and restorative supports. The family supports help to reconnect people. This is not a surveillance service.

### **Financial support**

Services for navigating, reducing and eliminating debt and fines to support the journey to financial independence.

### **Needle and syringe program**

Explore the most appropriate access to NSP such as a separate entrance for discrete access, vending machine that is separate from the space or outreach partnerships.

### **Food and material aid**

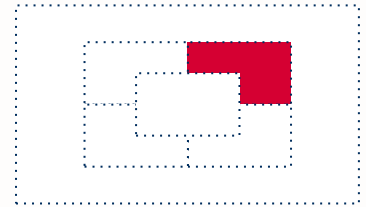
There is access to non-perishable food and vouchers that address immediate needs such as clothing, shoes and Mykis. Beyond this, The Forest will refer to partner organisations and provide a backpack to someone exiting prison that includes essential items inside.

### **Housing support**

Housing services that connect with multiple housing providers ensuring that people have access to safe and secure housing that is appropriate to their needs.

### **Culturally appropriate and representative support**

Consideration for appropriate services to support and provide culturally relevant services for Aboriginal, LGBTIQ+ and other communities.



## 4.4.4

# Social enterprise

Providing pathways to employment via a self-run and integrated social enterprise that supports the application of learnt skills and funding of the support services. The social enterprise has the opportunity to target local or wider community needs or an area of workforce shortage. In this way the social enterprise benefits not only the people who are employed by the program, but society at large.

### Features:

- Provides pathways and opportunities for employment
- Provides on the job training and application of skills in a welcoming workplace that builds trust and safety
- Profits support funding for the other services and programs offered
- Opportunities to be self-owned by people who work there
- Opportunities to leverage a priority industry, skills gap, workforce shortage, innovation area, sustainability or local community need.

### Needs addressed:

Things to do that are meaningful

- I need ways to get a secure and sustainable income or employment
- I need employment where I feel valued
- I need things to do that contribute to positive perceptions of me

Places to go where we feel safe

- I need supportive and welcoming workplaces that are judgement free



Employment can support financial stability and reduce criminal activity after release from prison; however intersecting issues including reduced educational attainment, homelessness or insecure housing, criminal records and other re-entry requirements such as parole meetings pose significant barriers to post-release employment<sup>38,52,53</sup>. Australian<sup>54-56</sup> and international<sup>57,58</sup> social enterprises have demonstrated success in providing employment to people who have otherwise struggled to gain employment. To-date, few social enterprises targeting people involved in the justice system have undergone formal evaluation; however, among those that have, there is preliminary evidence to support reduced recidivism among people employed in social enterprises<sup>58,59</sup>.



“When people can find meaningful ways to occupy their time, they feel like they are making a step forward.”

- Co-design participant

The following social enterprise ideas were discussed by the co-design team, with the recognition that the focus of the social enterprise can contribute to industry shortages or priority areas to expand impact. The co-design team also outlined that many options should be considered to provide people with choice, flexibility and the opportunity to work in a field that is meaningful to them.

### **Public gym**

The co-design team discussed a social enterprise that would build on skills and strengths as people leave prison. Men in particular often workout in prison and the idea emerged of a public gym to integrate with the wider community and provide health focused opportunities for employment.

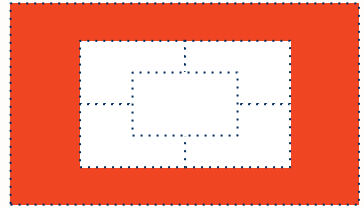
[Confit Pathways](#) is an example of a fitness program currently running in Australia with the goal of reducing recidivism in young people.

### **Building trade to renovate vacant properties or improve sustainability or efficiency in housing for people on low incomes**

The co-design team discussed the opportunity for the social enterprise to contribute to the availability and affordability of housing. In this social enterprise, employees learn and apply skills in a building trade to conduct renovations and revitalise vacant community or public housing or improve efficiency or sustainability in occupied housing, for example through installing insulation or solar panels.

### **Cafe that integrates with the community**

The co-design team discussed the benefits of an adjoining cafe social enterprise with main location of The Forest. The idea of a cafe as a social enterprise was used by the group to describe ways that the local community could be integrated or benefit from The Forest



## 4.4.5

# Flexible housing options

Providing secure and stable housing is a necessary foundation to ensure people are supported in finding a safe place to call home that meets their needs. The direct provision of housing requires an entire service in parallel to this concept and is beyond the scope of the primary service model. However, through strong partnerships and relationships, The Forest will leverage existing and emerging programs for housing, such as integrating with existing social housing brokers and expanded investments in social housing from the Victorian Government.

These relationships will allow The Forest to offer flexible options to stay responsive to different needs, preferences and stages of people's journeys to independence. The objective is to offer multiple options and priority access by leveraging current structures, and ensuring that people are adequately supported in housing. The co-design team developed the guiding principles of housing for future partnerships and investments.

### Principles for housing partnerships and investments:

- Good quality
- Affordable
- Stable, safe and secure
- Available for as long as someone needs it
- Choice in options to meet different needs
- Integrates with the wider community
- Organised in prison prior to release

### Needs to address:

#### Places to go where we feel safe

- I need choice in places to go that I feel comfortable
- I need an accessible place to go when I leave prison
- I need more access to places to call home, during prison and from the moment you leave prison
- I need less discrimination around housing



Safe, secure and affordable housing is a necessity for breaking cycles of reincarceration. Homelessness and unstable accommodation are associated with reincarceration<sup>60</sup>, BBV acquisition<sup>61</sup>, poor psychiatric well-being<sup>62</sup>, ED contact and hospitalisation<sup>63,64</sup> and death<sup>65</sup>.

Provision of secure post-release housing, such as social housing, to people with incarceration histories is associated with reduced criminal activity<sup>66,67</sup> and is cheaper than provision of crisis accommodation or rental subsidies<sup>66</sup>. Further, provision of public housing is also associated with reduced rates of contact with emergency departments, intensive care units and in-patient psychiatric services<sup>68</sup>.



"We can't just slot into one housing option, one of my clients lives in a tent in the country and that makes them feel safe."

- Co-design participant



The co-design team discussed that the ability to provide access to appropriate housing in Victoria is extremely limited, with sparse models set up to support people with histories of incarceration and drug use. The team discussed that crisis housing or temporary housing is not the answer, and people need long term options that meet different needs. Through a survey and card sorting activity, the co-design team selected the options outlined as the top preferences to support people with histories of drug use and incarceration to access safe, secure and stable housing.

#### **Supported permanent accommodation**

Permanent accommodation with onsite case-management and peer support which is linked with The Forest.

#### **Co-operative community housing**

Direct access to an apartment block that's run by a self-supporting community and residents can stay as long as they want to.

#### **Improve eligibility to public or social housing**

Increase available housing to our group to ensure people who engage with The Forest are eligible for public/social housing.

#### **Private rental support packages**

Consider financial status of people and support the provision of financial support to enable private rental access such as bond support and rental subsidies (tapered or permanent).

#### **Increase access to housing by directing funding to maintenance of government-owned housing**

Contribute to maintenance or renovations of unused or dilapidated houses to increase supply of housing stock available.



“People rarely get a housing agency that will support them, They end up in rooming houses; it’s just setting them up to fail.”

- Co-design participant

# 05.

## The experience

- User stories
- Story 1: Exiting prison with peer introduction
- Story 2: Drop in to access services
- Story 3: Discover something meaningful to do
- Story 4: Become a peer mentor
- Story 5: Pathways to employment

# User stories

User stories show key moments that may happen for people as they move through The Forest.

The co-design team designed The Forest to provide long-term support and connection, starting with in-reach while in prison to support along the journey to independence. It addresses a spectrum of needs across three key areas that the co-design team identified as milestones. The team recognised that, for most people, their journey is not linear and the types of help required can change along the way. Creating an open and flexible space can address a spectrum of needs and allow people to grow on a timeline appropriate to them.

In the following pages, five stories illustrate how someone engages with the community—showing how the different services overlap and the experiences of people interacting with the programs.

## Uncertainty

- I am focused on getting the basics sorted and settling in to a community.
- Finding my team
- Building relationships

## Stability

- I am feeling stable enough in the day to day to make decisions, set goals and plan for the future
- Start to look ahead to what's next
- Able to cope with choice and navigate uncertainty

## Long term independence

- I have built trust and am ready to try something different by myself
- A period of stability
- Confidence and positive self-identity
- A desire to do things more independently

Story 1: Exiting prison with peer introduction

Story 2: Drop in to access services

Story 3: Discover something meaningful to do

Story 4: Become a peer mentor

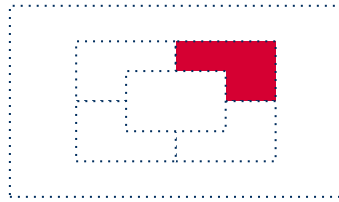
Story 5: Pathways to employment

# Story 1

## Exiting prison with peer introduction

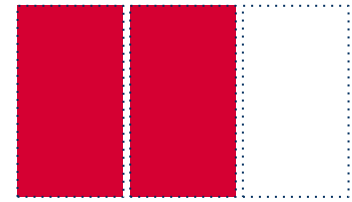
This story shows the journey of Jesse planning their prison release with a peer mentor and their first experience of The Forest. A peer mentor is a prominent person during this phase and provides a positive, friendly presence to build a relationship. The peer provides options about what Jesse can do and supports them to settle in.

### Service model



Peer mentoring program  
Activities & social connection

### User story



Uncertainty  
Stability



A suitably matched peer mentor meets with Jesse in prison multiple times. They talk about Jesse's whole situation to establish release plans that are best suited. The peer shares some information of accommodation options to choose from. Following this conversation, the peer connects with other relevant professionals to gather information and plan Jesse's release.



The peer mentor meets Jesse at the gate with a backpack full of basic essentials including a myki, phone and personal care items. The mentor takes Jesse to their accommodation that was arranged with Jesse while they were in prison. On the way, Jesse and the peer mentor stop at a cafe that Jesse used to enjoy.



Jesse is trying to find their feet and settle in. They are encouraged by their mentor to check out The Forest. The peer mentor arranges to meet Jesse at the train station and take the short walk together. On the way, the peer points out some useful things close by such as a Centrelink.



The Forest is located amongst the community and has a large welcoming front door. A friendly worker is present to welcome Jesse on arrival. Jesse's peer mentor shows them around the space and introduces some of the people who work there. Jesse is surprised at how nice the space is; it feels really comfortable with good quality amenities.



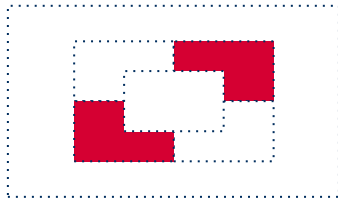
As the peer mentor shows Jesse around, they talk about the things Jesse can do at the space, and note that Jesse can come back whenever they want to. Jesse is particularly interested in the veggie patch outside, as they were involved in the garden at prison. Jesse is introduced to another peer mentor who is working in the garden who gives Jesse a quick overview of how they can use the space. After they meet a few people, the peer mentor gives Jesse some vouchers to buy new clothes.

Story 2

# Drop in to access services

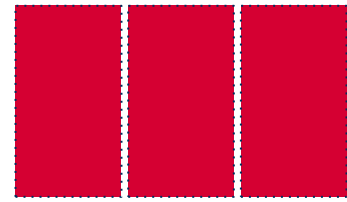
This story shows the journey of Jesse first attending The Forest on their own to access some support. They are a bit nervous at first, but they are made to feel welcome as soon as they walk in the door.

Service model



Health & support services  
Activities & social connection

User story



Uncertainty  
Stability  
Long term independence



Jesse is trying hard to adjust to life outside of prison and feeling exhausted. They are determined that things will be different this time and really want to stay off drugs. Jesse isn't sure what the next step is, but after speaking with their peer mentor, they know The Forest will be able to help them. They put off going until late in the day, but luckily The Forest is open after hours.



This is the first time attending The Forest on their own and Jesse is feeling anxious about it. As they walk in, Jesse feels welcome when the person at the desk remembers their name. There is a lot going on in Jesse's mind, and they find it hard to express what they need. The welcome person introduces Jesse to a peer worker that Jesse had met on their first visit who's helping out tonight.



The peer mentor takes Jesse to a quiet spot and makes them a cup of tea. They listen to Jesse and let them know Taylor is around who will be a good person to speak with and build an ongoing relationship. There is a short wait but Jesse is able to enjoy a healthy meal from the kitchen area.



Taylor, an AoD worker, takes Jesse to a light-filled office at the back of The Forest. Taylor takes the time to listen to Jesse and hears that multiple things are going on, such as legal, family and debt issues, leading to overwhelming feelings. Taylor talks through some next steps and options for Jesse and explains Jesse doesn't have to make any decisions today. Taylor will take over the coordination role in collaboration with Jesse's peer mentor and mentions they will chat with colleagues at The Forest about helping Jesse in other areas.



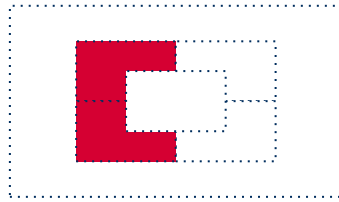
After the session, Jesse feels like they have some clarity about what's next. So, as Jesse feels a little more confident in themselves, they decide to hang around and watch others playing ping pong. The other people playing introduce themselves as Sloan, who got out of prison last year, and their friend who has come along to The Forest with Sloan to hang out.

# Story 3

## Discover something meaningful to do

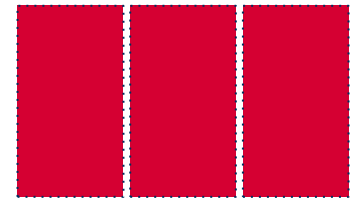
This story shows the journey of Jesse becoming familiar and more confident with different activities and trying new things. It illustrates the power of connections and how various programs may be co-designed by the community through the participatory iteration model.

### Service model



Peer mentoring program  
Activities & social connection

### User story



Uncertainty  
Stability  
Long term independence



Jesse wants to do something different with their time. They've looked at the activities available but are nervous about committing to something new. The only thing Jesse has completed before was some programs in prison, and they are worried they will not be as good as others. However, Jesse enjoys regularly attending The Forest and one afternoon they see an art program happening in the communal space.

They notice a familiar face is taking part in the art program, Sloan, who was released from prison last year. Sloan waves at Jesse to come over.



Jesse is initially hesitant and feels like they don't fit in because they have never painted before. They get started and feel ashamed about what they paint, but as they look around the room at other mentors, staff and people participating, Jesse realised that the paintings of others are no better. Everyone is just enjoying the activity.



Jesse learns that Sloan had suggested The Forest trial an art program as part of the ongoing co-design initiative to iterate and improve the services offered. Jesse has previously heard that the community is open to feedback and listens to Sloan's experiences participating in reflection forums. Jesse is impressed that The Forest really listens to this feedback and continually ensures it is meeting the community's needs.



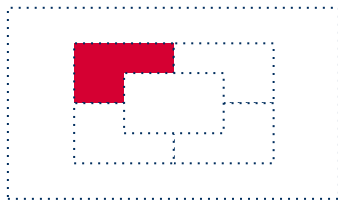
After the session, one of the peer mentors present chats with Jesse about other activities that are offered around The Forest. Jesse asks what they found useful on their journey and learns about a program for digital literacy that helped the peer mentor build confidence. Jesse thinks about attending one of the classes tomorrow.

### Story 4

# Become a peer mentor

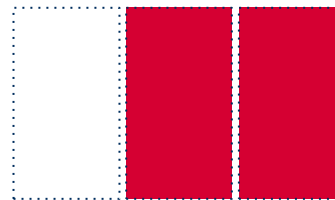
This story shows the journey of Jesse becoming a peer mentor. Jesse builds confidence by helping out around The Forest. When something throws Jesse off track, there are support systems and flexibility in the role.

#### Service model



Peer mentoring program

#### User story



Stability  
Long term independence



Jesse attends a session where peer mentors share their stories, experiences and how they got to where they are at today. It was helpful to understand that some peer mentors are drug free, while others might be using if it doesn't affect their work. This made Jesse feel inspired and hopeful that they could also set some goals in becoming a peer mentor. Next, Jesse's peer mentor connects them with the mentor manager to discuss their options.



Jesse starts to become more active around The Forest and begins volunteering in a more formal capacity. They get assigned a role, which gives them a sense of ownership. Jesse starts to attend the peer mentoring training program in the afternoon to learn about the service system, engaging with stakeholders, collaborating with others and other skills for peer mentoring.



Something has happened in Jesse's life, and they are experiencing grief. This moment has brought up old feelings about not being capable, and Jesse has started using again. Jesse feels shameful and guilty that they can't do their usual role.

Jesse's support worker and peer manager visit Jesse at their home to chat about other duties Jesse can choose to do for the next month or two.



Time has passed since the incident, and with support, Jesse eased back into their role and is starting to get the hang of things. Jesse feels like they are ready to take the next step.

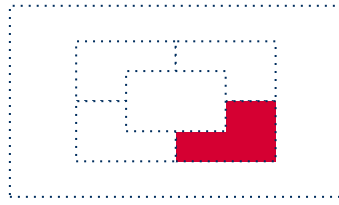
Jesse's peer mentor explains the different paths they can take for role progression. Some paths operate from the peer mentoring at The Forest, and others are with partner organisations. Jesse is passionate about AoD and wants to go into this area. With their peer's help, Jesse sets a goal to get a job in the community and get a certificate in this qualification.

### Story 5

# Pathways to employment

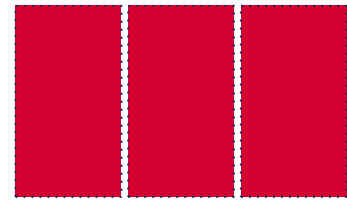
This story shows the journey of Jesse becoming employed with the social enterprise and how it brings meaning to their lives. The story focuses on the key milestones of Jesse moving through the program.

Service model



Social enterprise

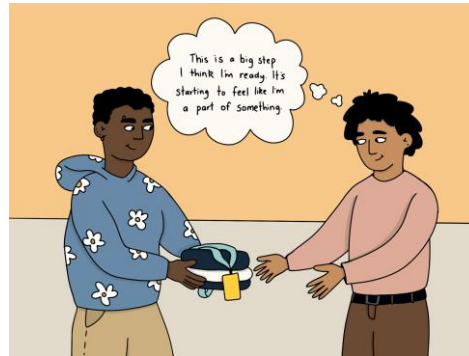
User story



Uncertainty  
Stability  
Long term independence



Jesse feels more stable in their day to day. They speak with their peer mentor about how they might start to get an income and become interested in one of the social enterprises The Forest offers. Jesse feels nervous because they've never really had a proper job before, and their experiences were pretty negative when they last tried. The peer mentor puts Jesse in touch with someone working in the social enterprise to get a feel of what's involved. Jesse hears about the types of things they will learn and the time commitments.



It's Jesse's first day engaging with the social enterprise. They are introduced to someone who shows them around the workplace and the different areas where people work. Jesse meets some of the employees and hears about the things they are working on. At the end of the tour, Jesse is handed their uniform. Jesse feels a sense of pride that they have come this far.



Jesse is starting to build confidence in their skills a few months into their employment with the social enterprise. Jesse has made connections with other people who work there and feels like a part of a team. Someone new is working close to Jesse and starts to get frustrated about the job. They throw something across the room and begin to get angry. Jesse observes a senior colleague pull them aside to suggest they go outside for a break and a coffee.



Time has passed, and Jesse is learning more about themselves and what they might want to do with these skills they have built. They have saved up some money and are considering getting their own rental soon.

One morning while Jesse is working, a community member stops to say thanks for Jesse's help. Jesse has never had someone say such kind words before, and this moment means something to them. Jesse feels like they are really contributing to the community.



# 06.

## Benefits & impact

- 6.1 A unique model
- 6.2 Addresses cycles of disadvantage
- 6.3 Economic and social benefits
- 6.4 Participatory iteration approach

# Benefits & impact

The Forest was co-designed by those in the system who have first-hand experiences of shortfalls of the post-prison landscape for people who use drugs. Therefore, the concept reflects gaps in the current system and the needs this group believes are not addressed in current support.

Throughout the project, the co-design team defined and refined unique aspects of The Forest. They considered how it would benefit those who interact with it over long time periods and the positive impacts of making social connection a central part.

The Forest is intended to shift the system and model by addressing social and structural issues in a connected approach that can appropriately support people leaving prison and reduce the individual, social and economic costs of reincarceration.



"We can't keep doing things the way they are, the whole things doesn't make sense."

- Co-design participant

# 6.1

## A unique model

The Forest weaves together multiple supports across traditional disciplinary boundaries to holistically support people.

The co-design team designed a holistic approach to build connection and a sense of community, strengthening the impact through enabling people to access things in one place, rather than navigating individual services. While there are examples of 'drop-in spaces' and models of 'wrap-around services' (Living Room, Front Yard Youth Services, Access Health), this concept is unique in its components and approach. In addition, by integrating a strong focus on connection and ownership, this concept has a unique value to impact cycles of reincarceration.

# What makes The Forest unique?

## It centres a social community where people feel they belong and are valued

The co-design team expressed that social connectedness is often undervalued, yet plays a significant role in positive experiences. The surrounding culture of The Forest which fosters community members to develop a sense of belonging and connection is a key point of difference for the space. The shared and welcoming environment will empower people to participate, develop self-worth and create foundations for meaning and growth.

**“Not a lot of services are funded from a social connection point of view, but those moments mean so much to people.”**

- Subject matter expert

**“The social community is the real point of difference from other things, and the social stuff is really important.”**

- Co-design participant

## It provides integrated support to join the dots between multiple areas of need

The Forest makes several types of appointments accessible and available in one place to streamline what can be a stressful experience navigating the post-prison service landscape. In this way, integrated support reduces current silos by integrating multiple providers through multi-disciplinary teams that work together to address the needs of the whole person.

**“There needs to be access to things in one place - an integrated framework that’s holistic, seamless. And the program shouldn’t discriminate.”**

- Co-design participant

## It offers a shared ownership model to empower participation

The Forest offers a unique shared ownership model between peers, workers and those who access The Forest. This model empowers people to contribute in informal or formal capacities to develop a sense of belonging and ownership over the space. It is underpinned by opportunities to provide feedback and create ongoing improvements empowering everyone involved to contribute to the impact.

**“It’s their space, workers are the guests”**

- Co-design participant

## It is accessible

The co-design team discussed that people with histories of drug use and incarceration require access to support at all times. The team established that the ability to offer broad support and open the space beyond traditional business hours would make The Forest distinctly different to others currently available. Other available services also tend to have a narrow focus and remit. This concept provides after-hours access to a mix of programs, including health, support, activities and peer mentors. These programs respond to community member needs and ensure that support is available when someone needs to reach out.

The Forest is also inclusive and accessible for people at all stages of their journeys and lives. It will offer low threshold access with no requirements or punitive measures to ensure people are continually supported through ups and downs. By being responsive and offering consistent support, The Forest will minimise the likelihood of community members disengaging.

The geographic location will also be selected to ensure it responds to where people are concentrated. In addition, the physical space and design will consider accessibility, including zoning for quiet and more active areas.

The Forest will also explore alternative ways to increase access beyond the physical site, such as digital channels, telehealth or home visits.

**“If you don’t get help when you need it, that’s the whole problem. You lose that moment when you wait 2-3 weeks to have an appointment. Time is a big thing, you need help and services now.”**

- Co-design participant

## 6.2

# Addresses cycles of disadvantage

Ensuring vulnerable people with complex needs can access quality support and build self-worth in ways that are meaningful to them.

The co-design team designed The Forest to address cycles of disadvantage for people with histories of drug use and incarceration. This group of people often have complex needs, histories of trauma and are stuck in a system that perpetuates these disadvantages through people cycling in and out of prison. The concept aims to break these cycles of disadvantage by placing support in areas where people need and providing flexible structures that allow people to build self-worth.

# How does The Forest uniquely address cycles of disadvantage?

## It supports a cohort that is particularly vulnerable and isolated

People with histories of drug use and incarceration are segregated and marginalised in society. There is often stigma and judgement from society that results in feelings of low self-worth. This concept provides high quality amenities and services and opportunities that support people where they are at. It provides foundational ways for people to connect, feel like a valued part of a community and that they belong to something. For some people, this may mean a safe place to go, while for others it may be filling their time with new ways to create meaning and purpose.

**“The system has made people feel like they don’t matter - like we are numbers.”**

- Co-design participant

**“This is a large portion of people, who are often forgotten about or get the bottom end of services. They deserve more than that.”**

- Co-design participant

## It creates foundations and fosters the ability to dream

As people leave prison they often talk about aspirations and a hope for “things to be different this time”. These aspirations currently do not have structures to adequately support the ability to dream, develop self-determination or ability to create the life that people want to lead. With a network of support and a community where people feel valued and welcome, this concept enables people to pursue things that are meaningful to them.

**“People have nothing behind them, it’s rarely different because people go back to same lack of supports.”**

- Co-design participant

## It offers consistent support that adapts to different needs and circumstances, ensuring no one is left behind

The concept adapts to different circumstances and stages of their lives, ensuring that support is consistent and available when people need it. The governance and strategy maintains avoidance of use of punitive measures or ‘consequences’ to improve conduct, taking a person-centred approach to meet people where they are at and continue to support them through their journey. This means if someone is having a bad day, the support structure is flexible to respond to needs through a harm minimisation approach and the service will continue to ‘be there’ to support someone.

**“[In this concept] nobody gets left behind. If something happens you’re not thrown or pushed away.”**

- Co-design participant

**“There’s organisations whose job it is to provide a soft landing, but what about after that? People are still vulnerable if they don’t have a community.”**

- Subject matter expert

# 6.3

## Economic and social benefits

**An opportunity for an effective and cost-effective solution to the unsustainable growth of incarceration**

The co-design team considered the wider economic and social benefits beyond the walls of The Forest. People who use drugs make up a substantial proportion of the growing incarcerated population in Australia. The Forest provides a real opportunity for change by addressing the economic and social costs of reincarceration for people who use drugs. It provides a well-resourced, integrated, holistic and person-centred approach to supporting people. This approach will benefit not only the people who access the programs, but their families, community and society. It will benefit the economy by placing adequate funding and support where people need it, rather than funding more prisons and greater rates of incarceration.

# How will The Forest have economic and social impact?

## Reducing rates of incarceration

The Forest intends to reduce rates of incarceration for people who use drugs by providing a well-resourced, holistic and connected framework that supports people to build self-worth and meaning. Through a robust evaluation framework, the impact on rates of incarceration will be measured. Costs associated with court proceedings and incarceration approximate \$155,513 per annum for each person imprisoned<sup>3,69</sup>. Assuming a pilot of 500 participants, lowering the rate of reincarceration by 20% could reduce justice expenditure by more than \$5.5m per year

## Reducing the burden on other public services

By providing inclusive access to a mix of programs, The Forest will reduce the burden on other public and community services. For example, in Victoria, a cohort of men with histories of injecting drug use presented to emergency departments in the first three months after release from prison at more than six times the rates of the general Victorian population; almost half of these presentations were non-urgent<sup>64</sup>. Assuming a pilot of 500 participants, increased healthcare engagement at The Forest could reduce urgent and non-urgent emergency department presentations by 25% and 50%, respectively; this could reduce emergency department expenditure by approximately \$240,000 per annum<sup>70</sup>. Reductions in hospital admission, ambulance and homelessness expenditure are also likely.

## Addressing impacts of intergenerational trauma

The cycle of returning to prison not only impacts the individual, but their family as well. Almost one in five people entering prison report that at least one of their parents were imprisoned during their childhood<sup>2</sup>. There is a social cost of intergenerational disadvantage that disrupts families of those cycling in and out of prison; international evidence shows that parental incarceration is associated with increased crime and unemployment<sup>71</sup>. The Forest aims to intervene in this cycle by reducing rates of reincarceration and providing people with appropriate supports to live a life that is meaningful to them.

## Increasing economic participation

By providing pathways to employment through the peer mentoring program and social enterprise, the Forest will increase employment among people who have been incarcerated, thereby improving economic participation among people recently released from prison. Assuming an annual income of \$42,000 per year (25<sup>th</sup> percentile of Australian wages<sup>72</sup>), each person The Forest supports through 12 months of full-time employment would yield approximately \$5,300 in income tax revenue.



# 6.4

## Participatory iteration approach

Using co-design to ensure programs stay meaningful, relevant and impactful.

A participatory iteration approach will support continual improvement and evaluation to ensure The Forest will benefit those who use the services. By developing structures for reflection, iteration and implementation, the concept will encourage participation from people within the community such as staff, peer mentors, community members or the wider community. These processes will ensure the concept stays meaningful, relevant and impactful to those who interact with it.

# What ensures this concept will continue to have impact?

## Co-design as a core value

Co-design is a core value of The Forest and future policies and programs will be designed in partnership with the communities affected by them. The concept will develop processes for reflection to action iterative improvements, ensuring it continues to meet the needs of the community and deliver services safely and effectively.

**“When you work with disempowered people, giving them an opportunity to provide feedback is really welcomed.”**

- Co-design participant

**“[The services] change as the needs change of the people around it.”**

- Co-design participant

## Future opportunities to scale

There are future opportunities to expand reach and adapt the model across different locations and groups. Design processes can be utilised when defining future opportunities to ensure The Forest is designed collaboratively to meet the needs of that local community.

The concept will also leverage sector experiences over recent years to understand the most appropriate digital technologies that can be applied to create adaptive models for program delivery. Using digital channels, the concept will look to expand geographic boundaries and increase access.

**“This is a large portion of people, who are often forgotten about or get the bottom end of services. They deserve more than that.”**

- Co-design participant



"Being a part of a co-design process gives you a job. It's a job by definition. It gives you dignity and self-worth by design."

- Co-design participant

# 07.

# Implementation

- 7.1 Identifying and managing risks
- 7.2 Partnerships
- 7.3 Governance model
- 7.4 Resourcing and capacity development
- 7.5 Evaluating success

# Implementation

The next phase of the project will build on the information outlined in this section to begin implementation planning for the pilot program. These next steps will include the selection of a trial site, engagement with partners, detailed development of governance strategy and evaluation strategy.

# 7.1

## Identifying and managing risks

The co-design team considered quality, ethics and risk management when developing the concept at various stages of our engagements. The following pages outline the risk categories and mitigations the co-design team identified that might occur at various stages during implementation or the pilot phase. A more detailed breakdown of risks under each category will be completed in the implementation planning phase.

## 1

**Risk 01 - On-site behaviours and balancing recovery needs**

Monitoring intoxication, drug use and violent behaviour as part of a harm reduction approach and ensuring the space is safe for all in the context of competing needs.

**Our mitigation**

- Robust conflict resolution processes
- Clear guidance on potential risks
- Medical response procedures
- Adequate staff resourcing, training, support and supervision
- Design of spaces to adequately consider zoning and safety needs
- Policy and procedure is robust and recognises complexity in community member needs and priorities
- Governance and strategy to implement values in practice that service is low threshold and maintains avoidance of use of 'consequences' to improve conduct or service engagement

## 2

**Risk 02 - Workforce experience, capacity and support**

Ensuring adequate resourcing and support for all staff to operate in line with values and principles. Managing competing hierarchies and obligations of multiple areas of workforce.

**Our mitigation**

- Adequate staff resourcing for after hours and rotation of staff to reduce burnout
- Workforce recruitment plan and attractive recruitment conditions
- Ongoing dialogue about role definition and embedded in reflective practice
- Robust policy and procedures and code of conduct to guide appropriate behaviour
- Clear position descriptions, supervision, training and lines of support
- Timeline for pilot scale up

## 3

**Risk 03 - Access to peer mentoring opportunities**

Inequity of access to peer mentor opportunities making it unattainable for some people who may like to engage.

**Our mitigation**

- Diversity of roles that suit different needs and capabilities and individualised career planning processes

## 4

**Risk 04 - Safe and welcoming culture**

Balancing culture with community member needs and safety. The space is not sufficiently trauma-informed or people do not find the space welcoming, safe, therapeutic or accessible. Perpetrator and survivor of violence both attending the space.

**Our mitigation**

- Community member, peer, staff involvement in organisational culture, services and setup
- Iterative and reflective co-design processes to adapt to ongoing needs
- Robust policy and procedure that recognises competing needs and barriers
- Adaptive design including unique ways to enter and zoning of the space
- Adequate resourcing
- Appropriate hours of operation
- Provision of quality furnishings and amenities
- Signage to educate community members on how to signal for support

## 5

**Risk 05 - Person-centred services**

Services are not person-centred enough, not appropriate to meet people's needs and service demand is low.

**Our mitigation**

- Community members, peer, staff involvement in organisational culture, services and setup
- Iterative and reflective co-design processes to adapt to ongoing needs
- Adequate staff resourcing, training, support and supervision
- Managing volume of availability
- Policy relating to maximum capacity and managing flows of people through the space
- Relationships with other local services

## 6

**Risk 06 - Local community integration**

Managing wider community attitudes, stigma and feelings of safety. Presence of challenging behaviours or drug use in close proximity to the premises.

**Our mitigation**

- Co-design model with community members, the wider community, and workforce
- Creation of a community advisory group to listen and respond to wider community concerns
- Engagement with police, ambulance and local stakeholders
- Community member education addressing wider community needs and concerns
- Utilisation of peer workforce to integrate positive relationships between groups
- Appropriate site selection
- Appropriate medical response procedure to overdose
- Naloxone distribution

## 7

**Risk 07 - Justice system integration**

Replicating institutional practices and risks, inappropriate integration with the justice system and political alignment to a community corrections approach that negatively impacts the experience and and community member opportunities and outcomes.

**Our mitigation**

- Governance and strategy to implement values in practice that service is low threshold and maintains avoidance of use of 'consequences' to improve conduct or service engagement
- Incorporating diverse perspectives into governance structures and culture review
- Relationships, liaison and education with police
- Educating and engagement with community members about best ways to reduce police attendance

## 8

**Risk 08 - Housing**

Unable to fund or provide access to quality housing options that are appropriate.

**Our mitigation**

- Partnerships with other housing services
- Adequate scoping and participatory development of housing strategy before launch



## 9

**Risk 09 - Funding**

Inadequate funding to fully realise the concept.

**Our mitigation**

- Ongoing communication and relationship building with philanthropy and government
- Exploration of social impact investing opportunities
- Deployment of partnership strategy

## 10

**Risk 10 - Impact**

The model is not sustainable or there is no measurable change to incarceration as a result of this model.

**Our mitigation**

- Strong evaluation strategy
- Process of co-design and iteration throughout the pilot to continue to test, measure and adapt
- Ongoing communication and relationship building with philanthropy and government
- Exploration of social impact investing opportunities
- Deployment of partnership strategy

## 11

**Risk 11 - Social enterprise**

Inadequate or ineffective leadership and strategy to realise the full impact of social enterprise or meet people's diverse needs.

**Our mitigation**

- Regular review of progress via evaluation, co-design and iteration
- Board of management for social enterprise with specific expertise needed to guide effectively

## 12

**Risk 12 - Governance**

Governance model is not effective in delivering on the values, vision and goals of The Forest.

**Our mitigation**

- Collaborative identification and adoption of appropriate governance model with partners
- Strong, transparent and functioning governance, to deliver accountability and performance
- Ongoing review and iteration of governance model

# 7.2

## Partnerships

As an organisation constructed on a consortium model, partnerships will be integral to the operation of the concept.

### **Foundation partners**

We have identified three foundation partners with complementary skills, capabilities, structures and experiences that reflect the core elements of The Forest. The partners have distinct experience and capabilities related to what The Forest will need to do and who it is for, and can deliver on the value proposition and potential impact of the concept. These partners have all been involved in the co-design of The Forest.

These foundation partners have collaborated with us for a number of years and we have built trusting relationships and have shared values and goals. They bring experience in post-release support, social work, working with criminalised women, housing and homelessness, peer models, support for people using drugs and much more.

Together we have started identifying an appropriate governance model, negotiating partnership agreements, planning programs, and building understanding of resourcing which will support the delivery of our concept.

# Flat Out

Flat Out is a grassroots community organisation that supports and advocates for women, trans and gender diverse people to get out, and stay out, of prison.

We are guided by the lived experience and expertise of criminalised and imprisoned people. We understand that safe, secure housing is the cornerstone for self-determination, escaping violence, parenting, improving physical and mental health, living well with disability, managing substance use, connecting with community and securing a liveable income. We advocate for criminalised people to be able to access to mainstream services, resources and support without stigma or discrimination.

In our 35 years we have developed respect and expertise working with criminalised women and trans and gender diverse people, as well as extensive networks of support and collaboration with likeminded people and services including ACCOs. Approximately 15-20% of the people we support – often in collaboration with ACCOs - are Aboriginal.

We currently have four programs:

- Our core *Outreach Support and Advocacy* program focuses on housing for people leaving prison but also brings in AOD, family violence, child protection, mental health and disability support. The OS&A team is diverse and interdisciplinary.
- *Beyond Bricks and Bars* provides peer support and advocacy for criminalised and imprisoned trans and gender diverse people.
- *Beyond Survival* works in partnership with Inner Melbourne Community Legal Centre's Police Accountability Project to support and advocate – including in court - for victim/survivors of police-involved family violence.
- The *Family Violence Justice Project* is led by criminalised victim/survivors of FV delivering sector development – including FV worker training - to reduce barriers preventing criminalised women and their children from accessing mainstream FV services.

We also initiated and continue to auspice the grassroots activist *Homes not Prisons* campaign which agitates for reduction of prison spending in Victoria and redirection to public housing and social supports.

We are pleased and excited to partner with Burnet, Launch and SHARC in the next stage of development of The Forest.

We are inspired by the vision of *a well-resourced, interconnected support network that helps people gain stability, connection, the ability to dream and become an integrated part of their community* to life. We consider the focus on co-design and respect for lived experience provide a firm foundation for good outcomes and we are keen to bring our expertise, experience, history and networks to the table.

# Self Help Addiction Resource Centre (SHARC)

Self Help Addiction Resource Centre Inc ([SHARC](#)) is a peer-led organisation supporting people impacted by alcohol and other drugs (AOD) and gambling.

Unique within the Australian context, SHARC's staff and board have lived experience:

- Approximately 95% of staff at SHARC have lived experience,
- The board is Constituted to be 2/3 lived experience and,
- CEO and key senior managers are in designated lived experience roles.

Although the impact of lived experience is increasingly recognised in Australia, SHARC has been promoting, advocating and embedding lived experience through services, programs, and policies for more than 25 years.

SHARC was founded on the belief that people are experts in their own recovery and that addiction can affect anyone, including family and friends. At SHARC, we believe recovery is possible with the right information, education, and support. The lived experience, of those affected by addiction, is central to SHARC's programs and services. The expertise and empathy of peers ensures SHARC's programs are welcoming, inclusive and effective.

SHARC is delighted to work with the [Burnet Institute](#), and foundation partners, [FlatOut](#) and [Launch Housing](#) on further developing and implementing [The Forest](#): a co-designed concept to break the cycle of reincarceration for people who use drugs.

A large proportion of the SHARC community have firsthand experience of the justice system including moving between the juvenile and adult systems. SHARC considers the *The Forest* to be central to our organisational mission *to provide opportunities for individuals, families and communities affected by addiction and related problems to recover and achieve meaningful, satisfying and contributing lives.*

# Launch Housing

**Launch Housing** is an independent Melbourne based community organisation passionately committed to ending homelessness.

From providing high-quality housing and an innovative range of crisis and transitional support, education and youth services, Launch Housing brings solutions to homelessness for thousands at risk of, or experiencing, the crisis and trauma of homelessness. We understand that ending homelessness requires us to be bold and not accept the status quo.

Both the General & Group Managers of the relevant portfolios have extensive experience in leading coordinated access to vulnerable clients with clinical and community mental health, clinical and community AOD services and primary health services. The team at Launch also bring to The Forest project commitment to collective impact and a belief in new beginnings for people using our services. Launch Housing are proud to contribute to The Forest, a project that bring together partners, both traditional and non-traditional, to systemically respond to the reducing the incidence of reincarceration among people with illicit drug use histories and prioritize their future access for housing & support resources on their pathways to stable housing and in line with their broader goals and aspirations.

Since the establishment phase of The Forest project, Launch Housing has been a keen participant, bringing a range of operational and strategic framings to the co-design effort. This reflects the purposeful manner in which Launch Housing seeks to partner with various consortia to deliver integrated homelessness, housing, primary health, mental health and drug and alcohol responses.

Valuing and meaningfully incorporating client feedback into the design and roll-out of our services is also crucial, and reflects the strong engagement with people with a lived experience of incarceration and homelessness in the project co-design.

We do this by adopting an intersectional approach to homelessness — and finding solutions to homelessness by also addressing barriers to education, employment, health and wellbeing, and social connections. We also actively engage with partners and local leaders to advocate for change at a community and societal level. The stigma surrounding people experiencing homelessness can often contribute to the lack of effective action to end homelessness. At Launch Housing, we are focused on eradicating this stigma and changing attitudes in our communities. These represent strong synergies with the aspirations of The Forest, a project which Launch Housing is proud to champion.

# Place-based partnership

## Integrating with the local community

An evidence based process will be undertaken to identify the most appropriate region to establish the first iteration of the concept. As part of this process, needs assessment and service mapping will be conducted to determine the priority service and partnership mix for the local area. This assessment will build on and complement the strengths in the local area service environment, address gaps with new service offerings and ensure that The Forest does not replicated or compete for local resources.

Relationships with local government, residents and businesses will be integral to supporting community acceptability and underpin success of The Forest, so early identification of a potential locale will be important for developing and understanding of local needs and anticipated concerns, engagement plans and identifying local champions (including influential individuals and organisations).

Following an initial trial period and further prototyping and iteration of the co-designed concept, consideration will be given to how it may be adapted to scale to different locations. This would entail conducting local assessments to ensure the program mix integrates effectively with the local community strengths and needs.

## Strong referral networks through partnerships

While programs will be offered in house by a permanent Forest team, the establishment of strong referral networks will focus on consistency and quality of the service experiences, and expanded capacity to provide support. For example, close partnerships and relationships with various drug treatment services will be required to provide priority access support when people are ready. These partnerships will be integrated to create seamless pathways and maintain an integrated support network.

## Assessing local partners

Any additional partners will be evaluated on their capacity to meet the needs of community members and alignment with organisation vision, values and principles.

# 7.3

## Governance model

### **Governance structures**

- Principles
- Future considerations and next steps

# Principles

Burnet and our foundation partners have experience of a wide range of governance models including consortia, cooperatives, collectives, alliances, coalitions and unique incorporated entities. Together we have commenced investigating the benefits and drawbacks of various models and ways in which we can derive the greatest value for The Forest from the diversity of our experience, expertise and organisational infrastructure.

We have commenced a process of alignment around shared values, recognising that each of our organisations has a different history and context. We understand that we may not always agree, but that we can establish processes to work through divergence effectively as there already exists strong values convergence both around The Forest concept and our own ways of working, visions and goals outside of this project.

Our initial shared principles for governance are as follows:

- Burnet as lead agency in the implementation planning phase, with a potential ongoing operational leadership role to be explored during this phase
- Partners to be offered equal representation on a board of governance / board of management
- An equivalent number of places on the board are to be reserved for people with lived experience of incarceration and drug use
- Burnet, partners and others members of the board commit to the shared values of The Forest
- A separate consumer advisory group (or similar) advises the board and has a delegated authority to influence governance and operations
- The effectiveness of the governance structure will be assessed during the trial



# Future considerations and next steps

## Priorities for governance

As we move towards establishing an appropriate governance model, Burnet and partner organisations have identified a series of priority issues that must be resolved in order to set up an agreed structure and associated functions.

- How to best support the cohesiveness of daily operations and consistency of organisational culture
- Data governance (i.e. client data) principles around how, between whom and for what purpose client information is shared
- Ensuring community member and staff safety
- Relationship with Victorian government and Paul Ramsay Foundation
- Clinical governance
- Establishing The Forest in the health space, rather than in the justice space
- Avoiding the replication of carceral systems or conditions, including punitive or sanctions-based approaches for non-compliance or mandating of participation in aspects of The Forest
- Principles to guide relationships with local community including agencies such as Victoria Police

## Next steps

- Continue to workshop governance model with foundation partners
- Document an agreed model
- Seek legal advice on proposed model
- Negotiate and finalise partnership agreements based on this model

# 7.4

## Evaluating success

Success will be measured in a mixed-methods evaluation approach across several impact areas.

A robust evaluation framework will be established to ensure impact is measured across several components. A portion of funding will be dedicated to ongoing evaluation through both traditional research and design-led approaches. A design-led evaluation approach will be established under an iterative improvement model to reflect and respond to input from community members, staff and the wider community.

The primary impact indicator will centre around reduced rates of incarceration and reincarceration, with additional outcomes (see below) extending implicitly from, but also independent of, this indicator. Economic indicators will also be evaluated to understand community cost saving across health and wellbeing that are supported by this program; for example:

- Directly health related
- Social wellbeing
- Rates of employment
- Rates of education and training

We will also examine a “what works and why” approach to evaluations to understand the core and non-negotiable sustained elements of the program and the extent to which program intensity influences impact and what level of intensity results in diminishing returns. This outputs will be key to indicating to government the cost-effectiveness of the program and support long-term sustainability.

Through robust evaluation, successful elements of the concept can be implemented at scale to create long term outcomes and systems change.

**Example measures for potential review and inclusion:**

- **Reduced rates of incarceration and reincarceration**
- High service utilisation and retention
- Reduced rates of recidivism
- Individual measures of drug use, health, wellbeing and social stability
- Retention in employment
- Elevation to involvement in peer mentor program
- Experience of community and sense of belonging
- Retention in housing
- Financial stability
- Self efficacy
- Social and familial relationships
- Measures of perceived acceptability and accessibility of the community
- Perceived quality of experience of The Forest
- Participation in design-led approach

**Iterative improvement model**

A participatory iteration approach will support continual improvement and evaluation to ensure the concept will benefit those who use the services. By developing structures around reflection, iteration and implementation, the concept will encourage bottom-up change from people within the community such as staff, peer mentors, service users or wider community. These processes will ensure the concept stays meaningful, relevant and impactful to those who interact with it.

09.

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