



Just Time: Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® in Tasmania's Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison May 2015

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"Intimate attachments to other human beings are the hub around which a person's life revolves". John Bowlby

Abstract:

Children's early language skill, and in particular vocabulary development, are strong predictors of academic outcomes and social success (Hart & Risley, 1995). Language and social communication develop most strongly when children have exposure to safe, enjoyable interaction, imbued with positive affect across a wide range of experiences and topics (Hart & Risley, 1995). It follows, therefore, that provision of safe, warm interaction, is an undergirding staple of a child's ultimate academic and social success and empowerment. For language and social communication to flourish in a child – and in the adult who the child will become – attention must be paid to the factors within a child's relationships and social world which create safety, and allow him to experience enjoyment and a rich, positive emotional life. For if these elements are missing or are in short supply, language, social skill and mental health will be compromised (Powell et al, 2014), and attempts to later

remediate development which has been impaired through such lack is neither as effective nor as efficient as having supplied the factors for early success in the first instance. Thus, attachment theory and interventions to support children's secure attachment with their primary caregivers are foundations of a speech pathologist's activities toward support of children's mental wellbeing, social communication and language development – and through language on to literacy. It was this understanding of the relationship between secure attachment and healthy communication development which informed the *Just Time* project. *Just Time* was also informed through the understanding that despite disadvantage in early attachment experiences, 'it is never too late' for these experiences to be further developed (Powell et al, 2014).

Just Time introduced the Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® (Cooper et al, 2009) into the context of a women's prison. The Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® (COS) teaches a readily-grasped model of attachment processes, made powerful through reflective dialogue and shared video clips. The program was offered, in three successive cycles, to the women of the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison. Between six and eight women commenced the program in each cycle though only between two to six women completed *all* sessions in each cycle; because of early release from prison, clashes with court dates and in one instance with a work program, or detainment in a higher security level of the prison. One woman dropped out of the first program, but then participated in the third. Two women dropped out of the third program. Twenty-one women participated in *Just Time* with overwhelmingly positive feedback emerging from their experiences, from the experiences of the speech pathologist facilitators, and from the prison personnel. Program implementation improvement opportunities were also identified by all parties.

Disclosure:

Rosalie Martin is the founding speech pathologist of Chatter Matters Tasmania – a charitable organisation building awareness and skill in human communication: language, literacy and positive relatedness. Rosalie is also the proprietor of Speech Pathology Tasmania – a private speech pathology practice. Rosalie's time and expenses in conducting the first cycle of Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® (COS) in the *Just Time* project on behalf of Chatter Matters Tasmania were provided pro bono; clerical support and program consumables were sponsored by Speech Pathology Tasmania. The second and third cycles each engaged one of Speech Pathology Tasmania's COS registered speech pathologists, on behalf of Chatter Matters Tasmania, with funds generously made available through the Dickinson Foundation.

"What's done to children, they will do to society". Karl Menninger

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“We are all hard-wired for relationship.” Allan Schore

“We each have within us the irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired”.

Robert Frost

Genesis of Just Time and Who Was Involved:

The Co-ordinator of Family and Child Support within the Tasmanian Prison Service (TPS), Julie Bunyard, and Rosalie Martin of Chatter Matters Tasmania (CMT), met informally during a [Kids' Days](#) program in the summer holidays of 2014. This meeting revealed mutual desire to contribute to the pro-social and positive empowerment of those caught up in the structural disadvantage which is the cycle of incarceration. This led to further conversation about the benefits to language, social communication and mental health, of secure attachment, positive relationship, conversation, and time spent under a delighting and nurturing gaze.

Rosalie is a qualified provider of the Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® (COS) and this program was introduced to Julie following their first informal meeting. Further discussion and research concluded with a decision to offer a cycle of the COS program to the ladies of the Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison (MHWP) during March and April of 2014. Details of the COS program itself can be found in [Appendix A](#).

The first cycle of COS, which is an eight week program, was delivered pro bono by Rosalie, with Julie supporting the facilitation of the group. At the end of this cycle, Julie and Rosalie discussed their observations and reflections from the program and it was agreed that the program, delivered within this prison context, had been a positive experience for the women and Julie saw value in offering it again – also suggesting that the program might be offered within the men's prisons when possible.

The Hobart-based Dickinson Foundation generously supplied funds to run two more cycles of COS within the MHWP and to prepare this report of the feedback and learnings. Chatter Matters Tasmania engaged Courtney Dunbabin and Natalie Leader, speech pathologists with COS registrations, to each conduct a cycle of COS at MHWP. Courtney was supported by volunteer, Catherine Shreve; and Natalie was supported by volunteer, Sarah Kay – who is also a COS registered speech pathologist herself. Natalie's cycle of COS concluded in late March 2015 by which point 21 ladies of MHWP had had experience in the *Just Time* project.

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“Unequivocally and unquestionably do not withhold this [COS program] from at-risk parents.”

Sarah Kay

What Happened:

On each of the three occasions of COS Julie developed flyers to advertise the program to the women. The women freely opted into the program. Julie encouraged them to consider attending but did not coerce. Attendance was not a component of any sentencing or parole conditions. An example of one of the flyers can be found in [Appendix B](#). Many of the women, after experiencing one or two sessions, encouraged their friends to attend too.

Julie supported the facilitators by arranging the necessary gate passes and access to the group room and to the needed equipment and consumables for the session and tea-break. The facilitators brought biscuits to share in order to create opportunity for informal interaction with the participants over a shared 'meal', in each session.

The COS program is a proprietorial program and its administration unfolds in a prescribed way in each session – this is all detailed in its manual and much of the presented material is via clips and voice-over on DVD. But the unique configuration of the individuals in each group of participants, and the personality and experiences of the facilitators all contribute much variety to each experience of the program. A consistent factor within the program is its intentional provision of time and prompts for reflection and sharing of process-based insights about secure attachment, through reflective dialogue.

In two of the three cycles, one of the COS sessions was repeated which extended the administration of the program to nine weeks. The reasons for this were either that a woman who had missed a session asked to have it made up and the others in the group were willing, or the facilitator felt that more time was needed on certain concepts because the reflective dialogue was not fully sated.

The women were awarded certificates of completion at the end of the program. Several of the women who were released early and were not able to complete the final sessions, asked to have their certificates mailed to them. These exceptions were managed by Julie.

The women participating in *Just Time* gave their permissions for their de-identified comments to be used in this evaluative report and any interest ensuing from it. Comments and quotes were hand-recorded during each session, primarily in situ by the volunteer co-facilitator; but also in post-session reflection by the lead facilitator.

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“Dyadic regulation during the infancy period is an important foundation for later self-regulation” Alan Sroufe

Outcomes:

The intentions of *Just Time* were as simple, and yet as complex, as the delivery of a researched and proven intervention for stimulating positive and mindful behavioural change in parenting practice – the COS. The motivating intention for delivery was for the personally experienced benefit of those women within the MHWP who might choose to take the opportunity to participate. Simultaneously, however, some qualitative data in the form of comments upon learnings and insights were gathered from all of those most directly involved.

Three main stakeholder groups participated in *Just Time* – the women who were the recipients of the program, the prison personnel, and the facilitators.

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“We want the child to feel felt.” Mari Caulfield

How did the women experience COS?

The women’s very presence week after week in and of itself provided good feedback that they were enjoying the program and receiving benefit from it. If they were not experiencing benefit, it is fairly certain that they would have ceased attending. Across the three cycles, only three women elected not to continue. Rather, many participants, after experiencing one or two sessions, were telling their friends about it, encouraging others to join in and asking about further iterations of the program.

The women’s comments revealed that they experienced benefit in the direct learnings they were making about having been parented, about their own parenting and their children’s emotional

needs, the ongoing reflection upon their lives which was stimulated each week, their relationships with each other and their relationships with the facilitators. These took on both overtly positive forms, and also raised negative forms for which the group provided support, opportunity and tools, to reflect and process.

Most of the women spontaneously stated at some point during the program that they would like to do the program again. Glen Cooper, one of the authors of COS – and who provided the team of facilitators with mentoring support – stated that “in the first time parents do the program they often focus on self-as-child; in the second time the focus is more upon self-as-parent.”

The material which COS presents and the non-judgmental atmosphere it creates raise many memories and insights, and opportunities to reflect upon them. The particular shift that is being aimed for is that *process* is talked about – the reflective questions and reflective modellings of the facilitators are toward stimulation of observations of process and shared talk about this.

One of the presented concepts which had particular impact upon the women was the metaphor of ‘shark music’ (the fear-and-suspense-inducing music used in the movie ‘Jaws’) to represent subconscious fears, defensiveness and vulnerabilities. This concept particularly elicited process-talk and insights. The other major COS concepts are explained briefly in [Appendix A](#).

To demonstrate the impact the COS had on the women, some of their reflective comments appear below. These comments speak for themselves about the learning and value of COS to the participants and require little interpretation. For this reason they are reported here in their ‘raw’ form. Further data, for those interested to read more detail about the sessions and the women’s experiences, can be found in [Appendix D](#), in the form of the direct session notes from the third cycle, which was led by Natalie and Sarah.

“When they lose it you can be there. But when you lose it, it just looks scary... bad.” Participant

Insights into interactions with children:

“That circle still happens in my 22 year old. She has her own house, job, and boyfriend. But she still comes back for a mum-cuddle once a week.”

“They need that circle. Cos you’ve gotta let ‘em go.”

“The best thing I learned was about dealing with my ‘shark music’; I know now to let him explore, if he needs me he will come back to me.”

“I didn’t realise until this that babies communicate.”

“I’ll cuddle him, like, when *I* want to – but I didn’t realise that **he** wants it too.”

“I didn’t know you could get so much from their facial expressions as to how they are feeling.”

"I am here and you are worth it."

Jude Cassidy

"I didn't know that babies showed emotions that way."

[What does delighting in your face, feel like for the baby?] "Bliss."

[What might it have felt like for mum when the baby turned away? – from a teaching example in the COS material] "You don't want my attention.", "I've failed.", "I'm not wanted."

[What will it be like for baby if this circle of 'returning and mum being there' happens repeatedly?] "Reassurance that she'll always be there."

[Said of a video example of a mother not noticing her child's emotional needs] "She's not seeing the child's needs! She's thinking of her own needs over the child. She's got a fear of letting him go. Something might have happened to her [that mum]. She's struggling with being kind... with all forms of caring. She might care for her child but can't think beyond her own needs."

"She's probably got shark music about it too." *[Said of the emotional state of her young daughter about her (mother) coming home from prison]*

"They seem like they're just playing up, but they're actually needing help."



Insights into family relationships:

"I'm like that with my Nan. She was my mum and my best friend and my everything."

"My dad never did that with me. He never cuddled me – just said 'get out of here, stupid kid'."

"It makes me realise I have a [secure relationship] with my Aunty, who brought me up."

"I had to be seen and not heard"

“My relationship with my mum has got better since I’ve been in prison.”

“My parents said that to me – you’re just crying because you want attention”

“My mum never hit me; but sometimes she would verbally hit and that would hurt more. My dad was the weak one.”

“A lot of fathers can benefit from this too.”

“My mum was more of a blamer. Dad was more of a ‘mum’.”

“My parents were good. But they tried to protect me so much – and that’s why I think I went out and explored and got into trouble.”

“You are here, and therefore I must be worth it.”

[the child’s perspective] Glen Cooper

Insights into self:

“I was depressed when I left last time. A lot of things hit home. It opened my eyes about my situation.”

“I didn’t give my kid attention – I just spent all my time on my phone.”

“To be honest, I haven’t been a parent’s arsehole the last few years.”

“I take charge – but then I give in.”

“I was ‘gone’ from my sons’ lives when I was on drugs – I was taken away by police in front of the boys and I could see they were lost, but wasn’t in a position to care for them. Prison has been the best thing for me to think and change.”

“I only really interacted with my babies when I wanted to; I didn’t pick up from them that they were also giving me signals.”

“I’m gonna try to allow my son to go and explore more – without being so afraid.”

[Split screen of baby/mother delighting in each other] “I miss that.”

“I can’t wait to see my grandson. He’ll be 12 months. I’ll be able to explore all that I’ve learnt. When I was a parent and my child was crawling off I would think ‘What are you doing? I’m over here.’”

“I never blamed my kids for anything – I blamed myself. If they fell over, it was because I wasn’t watching them enough.”

[Tell about your own shark music when your child has a need on the circle] “Like being lost in a shopping centre.”

“I get a big [shark music] when it’s time to leave from the park and he’s not wanting to go. I get that feeling even before the situation.”

“I don’t want to be tough like my parents.” Participant

“When we go to the shop, we all hate it.... so we hear shark music cos he always wants to go to the ‘green shop’ [big W]. So I send him with Dad. Now Dad gets the shark music, I’m sure of it.”

[About daycare] “When he went, I made it worse for him because I didn’t want him to go.”

[Thoughts on shark music:] “It’s not wrong to have that feeling. Next time I see my kids, I’ll recognise it.”

[Clip from DVD with acted savage intonation ‘If you don’t quit crying, I’m gonna give you something to cry about’] “I didn’t realise how scary that sounds.”

[Clip: with acted savage intonation ‘I brought you into this world, and I can take you out’] “I don’t think I’ve had it said to me. I don’t think I’ve said it exactly... maybe in different words, at times. It’s scary. Frightening. Feel like their life’s been threatened.” *[What would you want that mother to know?]* “Keep calm. You can fix it by being ‘good hands’.” *[‘Good hands’ is COS language for provision of emotional needs]*

“I think I’m mean.”

“Sometimes I’m too harsh on the little ones at home, other times I’ve been weak and given in to them. The teens/adults, I give in to them because I don’t want to lose their relationship.”

[What if children are frightened to come in?] “They might find someone else to trust. They might lose their trust”.

“When I had cancer and my emotions were all over the place and I was trying not to cry when the kids came in. I was telling her everything would be ok but I was also crying. She didn’t know what cue to take. She was clinging on to me and tantruming... *[described other children’s responses to her trying to hold it in]* – I was miscuing them.”

“*[Sometimes]* I’ve gone from being the parent to the child and having them comfort me.”

“There’s been a lot of times in my life when I needed someone to ‘be with’ me, rather than just saying ‘It’ll be OK’ or ‘Time heals all wounds’. No-one told me it’d take years to deal with my brother passing away.”

[Describe how you’ll go with time-ins] “It’ll be good – it’s exciting. It might be a bit scary at first but I’ll get there. I’ll be excited to see how I bond with my fiancé’s daughter.”... *[another’s response]* “You can be there for her now. She’s probably got shark music.”... “I’m looking forward to it.”

“If he’s crying or whining or out of control, you need to see what’s behind all that.”

“I only know people who do drugs now. I want to go to mothers’ group when I get home so I can meet other mums and kids who are normal. I want to go to the park and have fish and chips with my son and other kids.”

“I felt sick for a second then... just wanting to be with my son... wanting to cuddle him... I miss my son! You take so much for granted. *[talking about cuddles with child, previously not always appreciated]*. You’d kill for it now.”

"I'm going to stand back and watch my daughter now. I'm going to sit and watch and wait for her to come back to me." Participant

The experience of being in group:

[After a profound point of sharing, this was said jokingly] "You made me cry last week. I've made you cry this week. We're even!"

[This comment given by one woman coming into the session ten minutes late with her baby] "I didn't wanna come up today. I was asleep when they said 'you gotta get up and go to group'. And then I thought 'bugger it, I don't wanna go', but then I thought 'nah, that's disrespecting your time, so I'm gonna go', but I'm crapped off, I ain't had enough sleep."

"The best thing was hearing other opinions and realizing that people do things differently and that's OK."

"It started off a bit uncomfortable, but got better."

"It's good because you get different ideas from other people."

"This is the first certificate I've ever got."

[When asked if there is anything about the program and group experience that could be changed to improve it, these comments were made] "Nah. Nothing. It was good."

"I'd like more talk and less watching TV."

"Nah, we need more group activities, everyone has something to offer."

"I didn't find the information in the video that useful, the group talk was more useful."

"Just keep it [the program] running."

"To tell you the truth, it was better than I thought it was gonna be. I didn't wanna come, but I wanna get parole. I thought you was just gonna tell us 'do this, do that, don't do this, don't do that', like all the other @! *# parenting programs I've done. But ya didn't. It was good. I've just learned how, like, it's never too late and that. And ya gotta listen for your 'shark music' otherwise ya just end up doin to ya kid the same crap what was done to you."

"I'd just like to say.... it's been lovely. Yes, we have learned a lot."

"I love that there's all real women in here." Participant

"I wouldn't mind doing it again." Participant

Experience of the facilitators:

[The following comment was shared in a tea break] "To tell you the truth, I'm having a shitty morning, and I didn't wanna come up here today. I felt like crap and I'm crapped off with this place. But then when I came in I saw you *[one of the facilitators]* give me this big smile and you said 'how are you?' and you was kind, and I noticed it made me feel better. Then I felt ashamed that I was so crappy. I'm glad I come up because it's made me feel good and I realise that I don't have to feel crappy. And I wanna be kind like that too."

"What's it like – like, being a professional?"

[One of our facilitators, whilst trained and sensitive, was young and without children of her own. We particularly asked the mums how they felt about this]

“Age is not a factor.”

“She still knew what she was talking about.”

“It would help if she had kids.”

“She didn’t really know what it was like for mothers, so she read from the book.”

“The core of the human is the potential for rapport of the self with an other’s mind. The infant experiences being experienced.” Colwyn Trevarthen

Thoughts about the COS program

[When asked about the handouts] “The sheets made sense with the DVD. When I first saw the sheets [and the circle], I thought it was going to be a bit silly to be honest; but seeing more, it all makes sense and I’m learning things.”

At the end, a grandmother said she had not really thought much of parenting courses but she had learnt a lot from this one. She is looking forward to seeing [her daughter upon release] and is now aware that she may feel her shark music again on seeing them. This participant is glad to no longer feel that she was to blame for her daughter’s situation. She shared that she had been molested as a child, so her shark music ‘might be louder than others’. She mentioned that her granddaughter, whom she has been very close to, was observed to be becoming withdrawn and possibly depressed. The participant had been writing letters to her granddaughter and had been including some of the things she had learnt in the COS course. She said that more recently the granddaughter has become more interactive with her peers and less withdrawn. The participant attributed this to the positive tools she had shared in her letters to the granddaughter.

[About the course overall] “I didn’t think I’d learn much, having grown up kids.... but I’ve learnt a lot. I’ll think about things differently when I go home.”

“I’ve got my folder to look back on.”

“I’ve already noticed heaps of stuff in my visits [as a result of this course]. When he’s away, I thought he’s rejecting me... but now I know he’s exploring... and then he’ll come back to me. Because our visits are so short... I thought that he didn’t want me. I just stand back and talk to mum and wait for him to come back. Now, he’s talking to me about more stuff now ... I’m ready for him.”

[Another participant’s response to the previous comment – wording not exact:] “I noticed you’re different with your son going out on the circle and exploring when he visits. You used to follow him around!” [followed by] “Not anymore; now I’m confident that he’ll return.”

[When asked about the program so far] “I’m learning stuff, even as a grandmother.”

“This program would be good for my daughter, a young mum.”

[About being reunited with step-daughter of complex dynamics, and others in family] “I’m really excited and looking forward and not as anxious and overwhelmed. I’m actually feeling tingles in my belly!”

[Asked to evaluate and give ideas, each person's response numbered below]

Participant 1. "The two best ones were: When we talked about how our parents were with us. The 'being with' *[referring to exercise of placing emotions around the circle]*. And the rupture and repair – cos no one ever talks about that."

[When asked if this participant had done previous parenting courses] "Only the one at the hospital when you're pregnant, which is mostly about the birth. I've tried to read a lot."

Participant 2. "I wish we could have our kids here in prison [for a long duration], because we could learn with them. We could practice this stuff."

Participant 3. "If we had longer visits, like a weekend or something, we could learn to be a better mother inside. Maybe if you work hard you could be rewarded with longer visits. Imagine how overwhelming it's going to be when you go home, with a houseful of kids. They're in a different routine. Four months is a long time. I just have to jump straight into it. I feel like I don't know my kids."

Participant 2. "I felt like I didn't know him. Because my mum does things differently, so he was doing things differently. I feel I have to ask my mum for approval, for how to do things. We're gonna start having conflict between me and my mum. 'You can't do this... why are you doing this?'"

Following this conversation, empathic, supportive, empowering responses were heard from other women, while also encouraging each other to see it from the outside carer's perspectives and also bear in mind what's best for the child.

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"We are relational beings."

Alan Schore

How did the prison's Coordinator of Child and Family Support experience COS?

Julie Bunyard has provided a great deal of considered feedback about the learnings and observations which she made throughout the three cycles of COS. Julie was initially concerned that the women would not take-up the program, or would come to one or two sessions and then stop attending. She was surprised by the attendance and the follow-through. In her words:

"That's actually really good numbers for a prison that is averaging low to mid-twenties at the moment. So I think that's been a really good response." And: "we got a lot doing it – it must be about 20% doing it."

Julie also said:

"I think they [the women] were engaged by the content. Partly because they identified with the issues and it was different from any other parenting program in the information they had been given. And they were treated well. I think that's a big part of it. They responded as equals because they were treated as equals... they were not treated as prisoners – but mums."

Julie stated her initial apprehensions about the ease and smoothness of managing the prison processes and supporting the facilitators to feel comfortable. She said:

“I think that the things I was most concerned about were the logistical sides of it – getting you guys in there, making you feel comfortable so that I didn’t have to come in. I was willing to come in every time, but I thought it would be good if you guys could become independent and be able to go in there and know the processes to be independent – and that depended a lot on getting you guys comfortable and also getting the staff comfortable that you were safe and going to be doing all the right things. And making sure the gate passes were done and that that worked – and I think we’ve got that down now. And letting the officers know who you are and why you’re there.”

Informally in conversation at the end of the third cycle, Julie stated:

“Senior staff were pleased that no issues had arisen which required them to intervene. They reported that it was helpful to have a program run in the prison which had a set format (without changes along the way), allowing for predictability and routine – they felt this was the reason for absence of incidents.”

Julie expressed that COS was different to other parenting programs that she had seen, but that the women enjoyed the content, warmed to the facilitators and kept coming back. She said this of the program:

“...the program builds in layers. ...it brings *you* into it as well and is about how *you* react in certain circumstances, which then gets into how *you* were parented. And then it looks at what are other ways to react to situations that might have a better outcome: a better outcome for you as a parent – and a better outcome for the child.”

Julie saw that the status of the facilitators as persons from ‘outside’ the prison system, contributed to the success of *Just Time*. She said:

“I definitely think [there is a quality in the relationship that might be different between in-house programs versus external providers coming in]. The fact that you’re giving up your time as well. I think it’s more to do with the way that the facilitators react or interact with the ladies. I’ve noticed a kind of respectfulness which... It’s hard to put a finger on it – but, y’know, you didn’t have to be there [you chose to be]. I think that that is reflected in the way that you interact with the ladies and what they pick up. Prison staff have to be there. It’s what their job is. It’s not to say that they don’t treat them with respect – they do – but there is still that different perception of it’s a job rather than it’s a passion – maybe.”

Julie strongly saw and emphasised the need for through-care in order to maximise opportunity for the women’s post-release success. Through-care refers to the provision of support via relationship which is made with an inmate prior to release, which then continues after release when she is back in community. Julie said:

“The main thing that prison parenting programs want to address is the issue of intergenerational offending. And a lot of the intergenerational offending isn’t simply parenting skills. It’s that whole other range of things that usually come with being in prison,

or what leads up to being in prison – unemployment, lack of housing and all those other things, which also can affect the child. And relationships, is an important thing as well. So... I don't know if I even would adapt COS, because it is what it is... and then it finishes and we don't have anything to address all those other things – I think that's the issue. It's a discrete [program], but there's so much more to the whole problem.

[I]t perhaps needs to be, ideally, broader and encompass a lot of other things as well. But that's not what COS's role is – and so perhaps what we need to do is to find something that can perhaps attach on to it and provide that other – so, more relationship work, more follow through in the community, more liaising with child-protection... those other things that are needed as well.

Often places that we can refer-to [which might provide through-care] say 'oh, we can't take them because our funding doesn't cover this situation – she's the wrong category for our funding'. [We need] an organisation that is just able to look at an individual – more a case-worker – but not too restrictive in who can [be taken on]."

When asked if she thought it would be good to offer COS again, Julie said:

"Yes. Definitely. And we should consider the men."

Julie's full reflections, drawn from interview with Rosalie Martin, can be found in [Appendix C](#).

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"There's magic in the mess." Mari Caulfield

How did the facilitators experience COS?

All of the facilitators experienced the administration of COS to this cohort as great privilege, and enjoyed the sessions immensely. It was rewarding and deeply satisfying to support the sharing of potent tools and learning with willing minds. Courtney Dunbabin's words sum the response of all:

"The most satisfying thing was building relationship with the women over the nine weeks. It makes me want to do more. I got comfortable in the environment quite quickly."

Sarah Kay spoke of the unavoidable emotionality of the experience for the facilitators:

"I was reminded again and again how difficult it was for these women to be away from their children. I could feel the 'tearing away'. I heard and FELT how much they were missing out on. I heard how they had to relinquish their ability to directly parent their children. I heard how they were nervous or scared or had 'shark music' about seeing their children again because it meant trying to find their way amongst newly formed routines and bonds. I heard how they, for the most part, appreciated those who were currently caring for their children, but how they would have to re-slot into mothering whilst being mindful of these other relationships."

Sarah also spoke strongly of her experience of *Just Time* in these words:

“COS works. It’s a simple and effective program with benefits for all families within our society. Unequivocally and unquestionably do not withhold this from at-risk parents.”

Sarah’s full reflections can be found in [Appendix G](#).

All facilitators observed and reported how quickly the women picked-up, owned, and used the COS language. Frequently in the week after new concepts had been introduced, the women were using that language in their reflections and remarks to each other, in ways that suggested that the women were experiencing the understandings opened by that language, as their own embedded understandings. It is offered that this language and these concepts might be supported to embed further if the security officers were also to undertake the COS and therefore be available in the day-to-day routines of the prison to engage in conversation with the women, using this language.

The sessions all had moments of chaos with the women deciding to go out for a smoke (NOTE: the prison is now smoke-free, but wasn’t at the time two of the cycles were run), get some lollies to share, or something they had promised to give someone. The facilitators realised that they needed to maintain flexibility, kindness and acceptance about this and about when a tea-break might be scheduled. We always got through the material with enough sharing time.

There were a number of learnings and insights which were common to all three stakeholder groups. These were:

- The need for extra follow up support in prison – and for through-care.
- The need to get the program started with a strong grounding of what lies ahead.
- The value of kindness and respect – indeed, of secure attachment in working relationships.

Speech pathologists have tools and skills to assess social skills and language development, play, dyadic play skill, literacy development and the preschool precursors of literacy development. The children of prisoners are a more high-risk group for developmental disadvantage. In the *Just Time* project it was not possible to offer screening assessments to those higher-risk children of the participating women, but each of the facilitators enquired with their group about whether such an offer would have value for the women, if it were possible. The women unanimously expressed eagerness for this. It is suggested that this would be a very valuable through-care offering.

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Recommendations:

The positive experiences and reflections arising from this project are in keeping with the type of feedback which COS receives around the world. It is a highly respected and well researched program with a 50-year history of successive adjustments and improvements bringing it to its current format.

The following recommendations arise from these iterations of the COS within the context of the MHWP:

1. The program continue – and regularly.
 - a. Having joined, full attendance by the women at the program be seen by both the participants and the prison officers as a priority, to create greatest continuity of the learning and relationship-building experience.
 - b. Contingencies be developed for unexpected absences from the program.
 - c. Shared tea/coffee and food continue as an essential component of the program.
2. The women have opportunity to undertake the program twice while they are in prison. Almost all of them asked for this; and the facilitators and Coordinator of Child and Family Support also see value in doing so. Further, COS research has shown that participants' focus tends to shift with successive occasions of participation in such a way that new learning continues to arise. Focus in the first participation tends to be self-as-child; focus in a second participation tends to be self-as-parent.
3. The women be provided with stickers and/or a booklet which capture the slogans of COS – as reminders to take with them into community.
4. Consideration be given to prison officers also undertaking the program so they too might know the content, language and model which is being shared with the women. In Sarah Kay's words: "It's a simple and effective program with benefits for all families within our society." This could be delivered as a professional and personal development for prison staff.
5. Research be undertaken regarding suitable programs which are also structured in a model of reflective dialogue, which could be used to follow-on from COS, but which address the broader issues of intergenerational crime.
6. Insofar as such programs are already being used within the MHWP, liaison be made with prison-based teams to coordinate the timing of COS and the other programs in such a way that the intended learnings might build upon each other.
7. Through-care is needed to bring the concepts learned through COS into life in community. The trust and authenticity of relationship which the COS process fosters, point toward such community-based relationship ideally taking place with the very facilitator who led or co-led the COS. However, there is some flexibility on this point – as long as the relationship which is intended to continue in community has been started while the women are in prison.
8. Through-care also include communication-skills screening of the women's children – this could happen either when the women are back in community, or before they are released, depending on the length of sentence. Speech pathologists use a number of tools which clearly indicate red-flags in development across the broadest range of communication skills – and which include literacy development.
9. Communication-skills deficits be addressed in those children in whom they are identified. This be undertaken as part of through-care in close and trusted connection with the mothers and the learnings of COS. This is an audacious goal, but it needs to be named if inter-

generational disadvantage, poverty and crime are to be broken, because communication skill underpins personal agency.

10. The activities ensuing from all recommendations be measured and evaluated as they are undertaken.
11. Chatter Matters Tasmania continues to build partnerships with prison-based services to jointly develop programs for the support of communication skills amongst the inmates. CMT is a young and innovative organisation and is developing strategy for benefactor-based funding of its programs. CMT seeks ongoing partnership with the Tasmanian Prison Service and the development of policy for effective interventions for communication skills and education in prisoners with needs in these areas. This is premised upon the understanding that these skills are foundational to flourishing and successful community living.

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Thanks:

For this enriching opportunity in which much has been shared and much has been learned, we the facilitators are deeply grateful. Natalie's words capture it best:

“I have felt utterly supported and part of a team in delivering this. It is great to have been able to pass on so much information and to present certificates of completion to participants who were keen and appreciative and very deserving of having their efforts recognised.”

In particular we wish to thank:

The Participants: with whom we were privileged to engage, and from whom we were privileged to learn.

Julie Bunyard: for wonderful, smiling support and availability; and for holding the same hope as us – that this was something worth trying and developing.

The Dickinson Foundation: for generously enabling Cycles 2 & 3 and thus, the arising learnings for the participants, the facilitators, and Julie.

Glen Cooper, co-author of COS: for mentorship and the knowledge that he was always but a skype-call away.

Craig Hughes and **Shaun Wheeler**, MHWP superintendents: for support and willingness to permit this project in their jurisdiction.

The Security Officers of MHWP: for engaging us with professionalism, respect, interest and kind help and support.

Brian Edwards, Director of Prisons: also for support and willingness for this project to go ahead.

Jonathan Field, Senior Manager, Sentence Management and Industries: for valued support in authorisation of this report.

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“We do not learn to greet our feelings, especially the difficult ones, alone. We learn to greet them in relationship.” Glen Cooper

Appendix A:

The most suitable source of information about the Circle of Security Parent DVD Program® is the [Circle of Security International](#) website. But in addition, for easy reference, a glossary of the terms used by the participants in their comments within this report, appear below.

The Hands: This refers to an illustration representing the caregiver as a secure base and safe haven, providing for the child's emotional needs.

Going Out (aka Exploring My world): This represents the infant or child moving out from the secure base, to turn his attention to the world around him. The caregiver can support this exploration by meeting the child's various emotional needs. The needs described in the program are: Watch over me, Delight in me, Help me, Enjoy with me.

Coming In: This is the process of the child returning to the secure base/safe haven to have her 'emotional cup filled'. The caregiver can support this by meeting the various emotional needs which the child has at this stage of the circling of going-out and coming-in which forms the basis of secure attachment: Protect me, Comfort me, Delight in me, Organise my feelings.

Being With: This refers to being physically and emotionally with the child through the full range of emotions, such as curiosity, fear, joy, shame, sadness, anger.

Shark Music: This refers to the fear-and-suspense-inducing music used in the movie 'Jaws' as a metaphor to represent subconscious fears, defensiveness and vulnerabilities.

Cue: A behaviour from the child which indicates a particular emotional need, such as reaching out arms to be picked up.

Miscue: When a child has a particular need but has learnt to avoid seeking it – because doing so makes the caregiver uncomfortable. For example: the child needs to come in for comfort, but gives a miscue that he is going out to explore because it makes mummy uncomfortable to provide him with, say, comfort.

Be Bigger, Stronger, Wiser and Kind: This is a 'mantra' taught to parents in the program. It is a quick reminder of the roles of the parent to support children to become securely attached. If a parent is bigger, stronger, wiser and kind, the child's emotional needs will be met because balance will be maintained between the parent 'following the child's need' and 'taking charge' when necessary.

Being mean: This refers to 'shark music' triggering the caregiver to step off the circle of security and limiting the caregiver's capacity to be both wise *and* kind.

Being Weak: This refers to 'shark music' triggering the caregiver to step off the circle of security and limiting the caregiver's capacity to take charge.

Time-out for the caregiver: Stepping away from the situation in order to calm down and then return to meet the child's need.

Time-in for the child: The caregiver spending time to 'be with' the child emotionally and to repair.

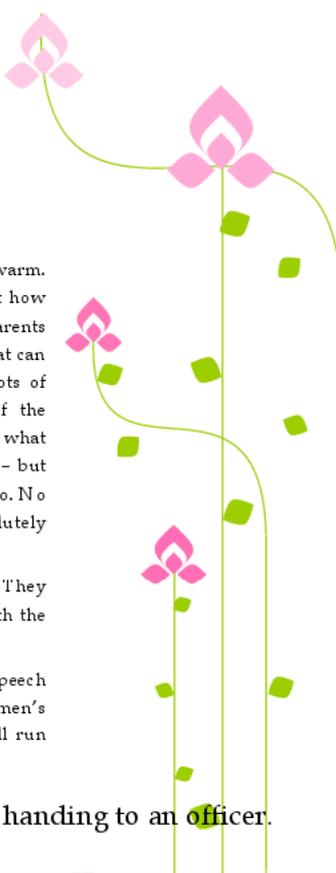
Rupture: When the caregiver steps off the circle by not meeting the child's emotional needs.

Repair: When the caregiver again becomes available to the child and signals, *I'm here with you and we'll work this out together.*

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Appendix B:

The following is a sample of one of the flyers which Julie Bunyard produced to promote the COS to the women of MHWP. The other two iterations were very similar.



Circle of Security Parenting A Relationship Based Parenting Program

About the Program

This lovely program is very kind and very warm. Information is shared together in a small group about how children learn to be connected, or attached, to their parents and to others. We will look together at the problems that can happen and at the fun that can happen. There are lots of video clips that we will watch together as part of the program. There will be opportunity for discussion of what we see in the video clips and of our own experiences – but everyone is invited to only say as much as they want to. No one *has* to say anything, if they don't want to. We absolutely honour where everyone is at.

Others who have done this program have loved it! They often say "I had no idea how much was going on" with the way children learn in their relationship together.

A program is being offered by Rosie Martin, Speech Pathologist, to the women of Mary Hutchins Women's Prison, **starting on 19th March, 2014**. The program will run for **1.5 hours each Wednesday afternoon for 8 weeks**.

Apply by completing a request form and handing to an officer.

About Rosie

Rosie is a country-girl and loves fun! She loves everything that is beautiful, but especially the beauty of human kindness and the honesty that makes it obvious that we are all equal to each other. She is a speech pathologist and loves her work because of its deep understanding of human communication at all levels of ability. Rosie specialises in helping people with autism and their families, as well as people with severe reading and writing challenges.

Rosie has lived in Tasmania for 28 years. She came to Tassie from South Australia not long after she graduated as a speech pathologist. She has two boys who are now grown up and on their own adventures in the big, wide world. She is kinda old now, but still thinks she's not!

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Appendix C:

Julie Bunyard, Co-ordinator of Family and Child Support, Sentence Management Support and Reintegration, Tasmanian Prison Service, in discussion with Rosalie Martin, Speech Pathologist, Chatter Matters Tasmania, 10th April 2015.

Tell about the numbers of participants in the COS cycles?

I think we started off with 7. One of the problems with the women's prison is the short sentences and so they tended to come and go – we certainly didn't finish with 7; and we had a few more start throughout the program. I think for most of the program we averaged 5 or 7 and toward the end they dropped off quite significantly. This was the third program that we ran.

That's actually really good numbers for a prison that is averaging low to mid twenties at the moment. So I think that's been a really good response.

What do you think stimulated the women's interest to do it?

Just having something to do. Friends saying "you gotta do this" – and sometimes that was people who had already started the program, and then did a session and then said "ooh, this is good, you've gotta do this" which I think is really positive. And others who were motivated by child protection issues – there would be two or three who wanted to have the certificate to say that they'd done something. And often it's for child protection, or they want it for their parole hearing to say that they've been participating in programs. That's not to say that they didn't get anything out of it, I think they actually still got something out of it, even though their motivation at the beginning might have been not what you want.

For that group of women – what did you notice by the end of the program?

I think they were engaged by the content. Partly because they identified with the issues and it was different from any other parenting program in the information they had been given. And they were treated well. I think that's a big part of it. They responded as equals because they were treated as equals. Even though there was definite teacher-student relationship, they were still not treated as prisoners – but mums.

Are there other times when they are not treated like mums?

It's that they are still always prisoners. Most of the programs are run by prison staff, and they're often criminogenic programs – so they'd be there because they are prisoners, not because they're mums. And because... most of the time, they are treated like prisoners, because, y'know, it is a prison. There's not many ways to get around that.

I know that they appreciated that fact that they were being treated as, something that they value, which is just being a mother. And reinforcing that identity.

Is there a quality in the relationship that might be different between in-house programs versus external providers coming in?

I definitely think so. The fact that you're giving up your time as well. I think it's more to do with the way that the [COS] facilitators react or interact with the ladies. I've noticed a kind of respectfulness

which I might not necessarily – which they might not necessarily get from prison staff. It's hard to put a finger on it – but, y'know, you didn't *have* to be there. I think that that is reflected in the way that you interact with the ladies and what they pick up. Prison staff have to be there. It's what their job is. It's not to say that they don't treat them with respect – they do – but there is still that different perception of 'it's a job' rather than 'it's a passion' – maybe.

We do have program staff, who run programs and who aren't officers – and they do a great job, but I think they are still seen as 'prison'. And it's a criminogenic program, so they are there to address your criminal behaviour.

I noticed that the women would often comment on my shoes – it seemed to be adding an element of novelty.

I must admit, I was a bit worried about how they would react to your shoes. Would they warm to you... because you're clearly from a different socioeconomic group to most of them? But it didn't diminish it. No it didn't.

What did you observe, generally, across the three cycles of COS?

The facilitators gave respect and warmth and one of the reasons why the shoes weren't an issue is because there was still an authentic sense of caring – an honesty that the women picked-up on. And they warmed to everyone.

I was worried about how they would respond to Courtney (the young speech pathologist without children) but the sessions really went alright! There was palpable stiffening in the atmosphere when Courtney shared that she had no children herself, and I wondered "where will this go?" – but I am so impressed that she pulled it off so well and that the women respected her.

Sarah and Natalie were a great team. Natalie was warm and honest as well, but she was occupied with getting the content across – but Sarah was the 'mother hen' who was able to pick up on a lot of things; and that seemed to work really well. I was usually present at just the beginning of the session to notice these things – I hope they [Natalie and Sarah] enjoyed it. [*Response from Rosalie to this question*] "They enjoyed it immensely".

I think that the things I was most concerned about were the logistical sides of it – getting you guys in there, making you feel comfortable so that I didn't have to come in. I was willing to come in every time, but I thought it would be good if you guys could become independent and be able to go in there and know the processes to be independent – and that depended a lot on getting you guys comfortable and also getting the staff comfortable that you were safe and going to be doing all the right things. And making sure the gate passes were done and that that worked – and I think we've got that down now. And letting the officers know who you are and why you're there.

Did things feel comfortable from the prison administration point of view?

Yes it did.

What were your expectations at the outset; and what problems did you foresee at the outset?

I was concerned that we wouldn't get anybody wanting to do it. Which we did!

I was concerned that they would come to the first one and then say "no this is not for me", and then not want to come back again. But they didn't! They came back.

I was concerned that they might not warm to the facilitators. But they did.

After my seeing the first session I was a bit concerned, thinking "is this what it is?". I think that first session... it's a new concept – which I hadn't come across before – but it's a fairly simple concept. And I thought "is this it – is this all it's going to be for eight weeks?" – this is me being honest. I don't know if the ladies thought that as well. Because obviously there's a lot more to it than that. I think it might pay to give a little bit more of an outline at the beginning – to let them know that it's going to get more in-depth.

Some of the other things that I was a little bit concerned about is that because it is a proprietary program – that is a specific program in which you need to cover certain content and you shouldn't vary too much from it – the prison's programs are very different and sometimes we need to have programs that are tailored for the prison. So we would more likely adapt most programs that come into the prison, to suit the prison population – but you can't really do that too much with COS. So... that's a concern. It doesn't seem to have been an issue – but that is what we would normally do. Initially I was concerned too because I had never heard of the program – I'd done quite a bit of research on parenting programs used in prisons and it's not one that had come up.

I imagine that COS would be interested to hear this and to respond to a comment like that, Julie. What kind of adaptations would you recommend?

The main thing that prison parenting programs want to address is the issue of intergenerational offending. And a lot of the intergenerational offending isn't simply parenting skills. It's that whole other range of things that usually come with being in prison, or what leads up to being in prison – unemployment, lack of housing and all those other things, which also can affect the child. And relationships, is an important thing as well.

So... I don't know if I even would adapt COS, because it is what it is... and then it finishes and we don't have anything to address all those other things – I think that's the issue. It's a discrete thing, but there's so much more to the whole problem. And some of the parenting programs might do through-care, where they follow through on release as well. It hasn't happened a lot, and we would like it to happen more, but so far as a parenting program goes, it perhaps needs to be, ideally, broader and encompass a lot of other things as well. But that's not what COS's role is – and so perhaps what we need to do is to find something that can perhaps attach on to it and provide that other – so, more relationship work, more follow through in the community, more liaising with child-protection... those other things that are needed as well.

We are very interested to do through-care, but as a group of speech pathologists it would be from a framework of communication – speech, language, play-based, emotional-regulation, relationship between parent and child and ongoing development to lead and feed into literacy skill – such as nursery-rhymes, book-sharing. What advice might you give us about this?

It's hard to have a program – this is what I have found, anyway – because we are a fairly small population, and a lot of people will need to go all over the state, and so to get a group of people together to do that is really difficult, because they're all leaving at different times, they're all just so diverse. So an individual approach, I think, is the one that's going to have the most success. Being able to be where they are, and look at what their needs are rather than trying to put together a group which we can refer to. Often places that we can refer to say "oh, we can't take them because our funding doesn't cover this situation – she's the wrong category for our funding". An organisation that is just able to look at an individual – more a case-worker – but not too restrictive in who you can take.

I'm thinking about the development of relationship between the women and the facilitators in a group like COS which has taken place in the prison – when the women are released, how important do you think it is to have the same worker – the very same actual person – that they met inside, working with them on the outside? Or is there some capacity for the support on the outside to work if we can say "this is my friend who does the same kind of work as me – let me introduce you to my friend"?

Ideally it would be the same worker – but more important is that they meet the worker before they are released. So they have some idea of who it is before they are released. Or they at least have a name and a place – though meeting them before release is the ideal. And ideally not a week before release, but a few months before release – and then continuing that relationship past the prison-gate.

What did you notice about the value of the COS to those women who missed out on one or two sessions for whatever reason?

Well, my perception is that the program builds in layers. So the first week is pretty basic – but it's still interesting stuff. Then it brings *you* into it as well and is about how *you* react in certain circumstances, which then gets into how *you* were parented. And then it looks at what are other ways to react to situations that might have a better outcome: a better outcome for you as a parent – and a better outcome for the child.

Did you see apprehension from those who were nearing release, about using those skills back out in community?

I think it does add another layer of pressure, in that "these are things that I know that I should be doing, but can I do them? Can I actually apply it?". And that's where you do need that through-care for someone to back you up. And that's the other problem with prison parenting programs because you just don't get to practise it during the program which people within the community do – so you can't come back and say "oh, it didn't work the way I expected it to" or "it worked really well".

Say some more about what you observed in the women who attended, about that point of the extra pressure of knowing they have this information now, but wondering "can I do it?".

I didn't see a lot of women after the program, but one thing I would notice is that they have a lot of things that they are concerned about on release, and their parenting skills are probably fairly low down on the list. Because there's housing, there's unemployment, there's the whole bigger family that they often have to patch things up with, there's the pressures of staying off drugs and I think their parenting probably gets pushed down the list. One of the things they most want to do is to reconnect with their child, but there's all those other things that have to fall into place before they can actually do that. It might also be negotiating with Child Protection to even get their child back, in a lot of cases.

What did you learn?

I think it was reflected quite well by one of the ladies who said "so you mean when he comes to me and he's crying, the best thing I can do is give him a cuddle and he'll be happy and then go off again on his own, rather than tell him 'you'll be right'".

I really liked 'time-in' rather than 'time-out'. I've been talking to a lot of people about this – that what they actually need is time-in rather than time-out. Because that just makes perfect sense.

We recently had Steve Biddulph come and talk to the men – and he also did a staff thing as well – and I've learned quite a bit from him, and from Circles – and a lot of what he says is meshed in with what you've been saying with Circles as well.

How do you think COS would go in the men's prisons?

I think some of them would love it. It wouldn't be a big group. But I think you've got to get past that first session. I can see that a lot of men don't give the cuddles when needed, and say things like "toughen up", "you're ok", "don't be a cry baby" – those kinds of things. So there's a lot that men could learn about what children actually need, is not to toughen up. But they've been told that their whole life – "toughen up" – and even in prison it's "toughen up; don't be a cry baby". You can't show weakness – and that's told to the children. Maybe it's more the medium-security and maximum-security guys, than in minimum-security; but there's still that sense that you have to be reasonably tough – even as a child. Most of them were probably on the streets from an early age, and you do have to be tough.

What else would you like to say?

There's a real appreciation of people wanting to do this. And what a gift it has been to the prison. I think that's really important to get across. Because we really appreciate it. It's just fantastic that you guys offered to do this. Because you don't need to!

How have you felt honoured in this work?

Well, it's in that appreciation. That you guys have been happy to do this. And by the way you treat everybody. You treat everybody so nicely – right from the top, down. And you're very understanding of the difficulties of working in the prison. And there's no way around it – it's the way it is, and you roll with it, or you roll out, basically.

The entry to the program is totally voluntary, isn't it?

Yes. I often go around and say “you should do it”- but they don’t have to do it. They know that. And we got a lot doing it – it must be about 20% doing it.

Do you think it’s worth doing again?

Yes. Definitely. And we should consider the men. We’d need to approach people, I think. The New Pin Parenting Program had only two participants in minimum-security last time – would you guys do it with two? Even if we could just get a couple – we’d see who’s there – and take it from there.

One of the things I was concerned about was the American video – I wondered how that would go. But it was OK; I don’t think it was a problem.

But I do wonder about the production of a little booklet that they could have which summarises all of the material and gives a little more explanation along with some of the diagrams. It would help with through-care too.

And the saying Bigger-Stronger-Wiser-Kind – I’d love to see a sticker. They’re great words. And it’s little things like that which could be more useful to them.

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Appendix D:

Session notes – Natalie Leader, facilitator and Sarah Kay, co-facilitator – Cycle 3.

Week 1:

The group seems to all be on the same page about why they are there. Some have aligned with those adjacent to them, often similar aged.

Some are surprised to be called upon to share, although happy to do so when re-oriented with the material of the moment. Perhaps minds are wandering.

One mum feels she was a good mother to her three. She is attending as she is resigned to the reality (although also confounded) that she needs ‘a piece of paper’ indicating she’s done a parenting course to have contact with her grandchildren.

Later, this mother was sharing how she observed the COS in her own life, sharing that her daughter still phones her once a week and used to visit with that frequency to have a hug.

“To be honest, I haven’t been a parent’s arsehole the last few years” said one young mum of three. “He’s a good dad.”

Sarah’s notes:

That circle still happens in my 22 year old. She has her own house, job, and boyfriend. But she still comes back for a mum cuddle once a week.

I’m like that with my Nan. She was my mum and my best friend and my everything.

I can’t wait to observe it in my grandkids.

It makes sense.

They need that circle. Cos you've gotta let 'em go.

It's an eye-opener.

Week 2:

With two participants choosing not to continue and one in court today, we're down to 5, but they are all fully engaged and sharing. One approached and asked if her friend could do it, which was referred to Julie. Another, without children, who came to orientation but was not approved for course attendance, arrived at the start of the session. It was discussed with Steve that Julie had made a decision to this end. Once again, an alternative was discussed of providing an individual session for that woman if she would like one.

There were quite a few comings and goings of participants. One went to get Minties to share.

Greater challenge to elicit flow of commencing on subject of where participants' parents felt most comfortable – with child going out or in. But many participants added short and brusque comments while simultaneously calling for a 'change of subject' or 'next question'.

"I love that there's all real women in here." Said in reference to honesty and authenticity.

Week 3:

Today included four new participants, one without children. The women who have started are telling their fellow inmates.

Some are very quiet – it turns out that it's very difficult for one to hear the content in her situation of having extremely limited contact with her children and relative social isolation, as family is at a distance. The other is a new inmate.

The session starts off with a participant explaining the COS to the new people. Then a review is done of the child's different needs all around the circle. The session is about 'Being With' (hands on the circle) and includes an activity of reflecting on how one's own caregiver was able to 'be with' for different emotions. Some decline to do this and several voice how difficult this is. One mentions outright that it is bringing up hard stuff for her because of something that happened to her as a child.

****NB:** This reflective activity could be made more accessible and potentially less threatening if the participant drew the circle on a page, then was given pieces of paper to position according to how they observed their own experience. No writing would be required.

No direct quotes are recorded during this session.

Week 4:

It was evident that everyone planned to return and all were seen at some point during the session, some being called out to duties. At least two participants were quite emotional or troubled (one had something stuck in her throat and needed to cough a lot to begin with) and were only present

for part. They were happy to hear the key points of the session from myself and Sarah when the opportunity arose towards the end.

The content about the COS for infants allowed for this session to act as a catch-up session, which is helpful.

[What does delighting in your face feel like for the baby?] Bliss

[What feelings can come up when your baby cries and needs you?] Stress. You might not be happy in yourself. Bub's sick and you're not sure if they're throwing a tantrum.

[What might it have felt like for mum when the baby turned away?]

You don't want my attention.

Failed.

Not nice.

I'm not wanted.

[What will it be like for baby if this circle of returning and mum being there happens repeatedly?]
Reassurance that she'll always be there.

Look at her little face – she's like mum!

Delighting in him...He definitely didn't drop out at all *[watching clip of baby engaged with parent]*

A connection moment for both *[parent and infant]*

She was out and not OK. *[using terminology to describe changing situation for baby]*

Look at her eyes – you can see it in her eyes not just her smile

Trying to comfort themselves *[when baby is looking out, what are they trying to do?]*

[What did we see about the mum's using words in the out/in of the interaction?] Teaches them what their emotions are.

Frontal lobe is the bit that helps you know consequences of your actions. My mum told me that. *[following discussion about early brain development that we're seeing and ongoing development of parts of the brain until age 25]*

I can't wait to see my grandson. He'll be 12 months. I'll be able to explore all that I've learnt. When I was a parent and my child was crawling off I would think "What are you doing? I'm over here".

[When asked about the program so far]

I'm learning stuff, even as a grandmother.

After I learnt if following my first 3, I've been able to use it with my younger two.

I now realised that when they're going out, I don't need to call them back.

This program would be good for my daughter, a young mum.

[When asked about the handouts]

The sheets made sense with the DVD.

When I first saw the sheets [and the circle], I thought it was going to be a bit silly, to be honest, [but seeing more, it all makes sense and I'm learning things.]

Week 5:

We had myself, Sarah Kay and Mari Caulfield *[visiting speech pathologist and specialist in dyadic play therapy]* in attendance. Mari's Irish accent brought on some merriment.

One person was not attending due to being in the kitchen but her associate collected her handouts.

At the end, a grandmother said she had not really thought much of parenting courses but she had learnt much from this one. She is looking forward to seeing [her daughter upon release] and is now aware that she may feel her shark music again on seeing them. This participant is glad to no longer feel that she was to blame for her daughter's situation. She shared that she had been molested as a child, so her shark music 'might be louder than others'. She mentioned that one young relative, whom she has been very close to, was observed to be becoming withdrawn and possibly depressed. The participant has been writing letters to this relative and has been including some of the things she has learnt in the COS course. She said that more recently this relative has become more interactive with her peers and less withdrawn.

Another participant shared that she is choosing to parent very differently than her parents, although she thought they did an OK job. She is more open with her children about what's in the real world, telling them when they are old enough about things such as drugs. She has made a conscious choice to do this so that they are less likely to go exploring and get into trouble as she did.

Another participant volunteered that she did not agree with the generalisation that if your parents were not able to be with you with particular emotions, that you were likely to find it hard to be with your own children through those emotions. She felt that she was there for her children in those emotions despite not having had a mother or father around as a child to do this with her.

The response to seeing the beach scene for the first time was '*This is the worst thing you could show us*'. It is likely that this was due to the nature of the participants being incarcerated so not free to enjoy such natural beauty.

Sarah's notes:

[describe the circle in own words]

To let your child go out and explore and as they come in, you need to fill their cup with love.

I never blamed my kids for anything – I blamed myself. Eg If they fell over, it was because I wasn't watching them enough.

[blame] It hurts me.

I still blame all the time, and then I start to question was I a good mum? I know I was but...

I'm going to stand back and watch my daughter now. I'm going to sit and watch and wait for her to come back to me.

It's always a circle, and they always want to come back.

My mum was more of a blamer. Dad was more of a 'mum'.

[shark music] it made my hair stick up.

Safety aspect – calm/relaxing versus fear and anxiety, like what a child would feel being away from your mum.

[Tell about your own shark music when your child has a need on the circle] "Like being lost in a shopping centre."

When they first start walking

I get a big one when it's time to leave from the park and he's not wanting to go. I get that feeling even before the situation.

When we go to the shop, we all hate it.... so we hear shark music cos he always wants to go to the 'green shop' [big W]. So i send him with Dad. Now Dad gets the shark music, I'm sure of it.

[Daycare].... When he went, *I* made it worse for him because I didn't want him to go.

*[School].....*I didn't want to leave, but the kids came up an hour later and said "You can go now Mummy".

[My shark music is] if the child is going out.

My parents were good. But they tried to protect me so much.. .and that's why I think I went out and explored and got into trouble.

[how does our child make sense of it when they get uncomfortable due to our shark music?]

Confusing...[If a child knows a parent is getting shark music when child is going out]

If they [the parent] are feeling it [going out to explore] is wrong, it must be wrong.

[Thoughts on shark music:]

It's not wrong to have that feeling.

Next time I see my kids, I'll recognise it.

Week 6:

One participant wanted to know when the course would be run again as her fellow inmates were asking (3 of them).

[Shark music]

Hard to put into words

When things are stressful for you

Like child in the car, seatbelt removal *[this comment led to discussion about genuine safety issue]*

More like at the supermarket when he might pull things off the shelves.

[DVD – If you don't quit crying, I'm gonna give you something to cry about] I didn't realise how scary that sounds.

I think I'm mean.

I'm the opposite.

I was balanced when the kids were younger but found it more difficult as they got older.

Sometimes I'm too harsh on the little ones at home, other times I've been weak and given in to them. The teens/adults, I give in to them because I don't want to lose their relationship.

... Oh that's so cute, it makes me want to cry.

[If they are frightened to come in]

They might find someone else to trust. They might lose their trust

[various clip responses]

She's not engaging with or welcoming the child.

I'd be mad

My parents said that to me – you're just crying because you want attention.

It would be horrible.

She's not seeing the child's needs.

I'd feel smothered.

She's thinking of her own needs over the child.

She's got a fear of letting him go. Something might have happened to her [that mum].

She's struggling with being kind... with all forms of caring.

I'd feel fearful.

My mum never hit me... but sometimes she would verbally hit and that would hurt more. My dad was the weak one.

She might care for her child but can't think beyond her own needs.

[How could reflection make a difference?]

She'll learn when she hears the shark music, how to deal with it differently

She might realise she has to let her go. You've gotta let them go to get over her own fear.

She needs a break. Ask for help. She's got options [to do things differently].

[Response to clip 4 – don't be mad]

She's not compassionate. She looks like an abused woman. She's not thinking about the child.

She looks like she's ready to say 'I need my mum!'

I could never stand seeing my girls cry. They should be happy and beautiful all the time! *[facetious]*

[How would child feel?]

Despair. No-one to go to.

Not want to go to mum cause it upsets her

Hold it inside.

My youngest would come and cry with me because she was so emotionally attached.

[how would reflection help?]

It's going to make a lot of difference to sit back and think.

She needs a way to toughen up a bit without going over to mean.

[clip 5]

He's so confused.

She was like forcing it on him

He was watching her and going "What does she want"

[after the actress reflected]

The brow was back to normal. She put the toy away and he was relieved from that.

I hear my shark music when I think about my grandchildren [seeing them again].

I'll have to take them one at a time and form that bond. *[talking about younger and older grandchildren]*

Get older one involved [in the process with younger ones and talking explicitly about sharing attention]

My shark music – I was so scared of losing my connection with my 10 year old when my new baby was coming. So I involved her a lot. She didn't want to at first but she came around.

I had shark music when my son comes to visit me after I hadn't seen him for a few months. I get shark music when he leaves – I'm scared about him going on the plane.

[About the course overall]

I didn't think I'd learn much, having grown up kids.... but I've learnt a lot. I'll think about things differently when I go home.

WEEK 7:

Before the session, we were approached again by participants asking if a couple of new girls could come along today, although they were aware that it would not be the ideal time to start.

One girl has been telling the others about how useful/worthwhile the program has been... and how they would benefit. This was reported as happening again during a drug and alcohol program yesterday, when issues about parenting came up in discussion.

Participants are starting to use the term 'shark music' as their own phrase and recognising that others have it too. See below.

[Reflect on a time when you had an emotional need and your behaviour was either clear or not clear about this:]

When I had cancer and my emotions were all over the place and I was trying not to cry when the kids came in. I was telling her everything would be ok but I was also crying. She didn't know what cue to take. She was clinging on to me and tantruming. [described other children's responses to her trying to hold it in] ...I was miscuing them.

[if someone was punitive to you when you were expressing the emotions as behaviour]

Horrible

That would be awful.

[smoke alarm analogy]

That's a good one, that.

And you're just dealing with that [the alarm/behaviour] and not the emotion.

[rupture, and having your own difficulties with shark music]

That makes sense.

When they lose it you can be there. But when you lose it, it just looks scary/bad.

My daughter would ring me [at those times when she was losing it]

Yeah, I'd ring my mum... my mum would always know what to say on the phone ... to bring me back to reality... pull yourself together/ deal with it.

[commenting on another's example of supporting her daughter in her daughters parenting] That's good that she had that support.

[what's it like for your child when you come off the circle?]

Horrible, but good when they can see you come through.

[clip: I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.]

I don't think I've had it said to me. I don't think I've said it exactly... maybe in different words, at times. Scary. Frightening. Feel like their life's been threatened.

[tell a story about this mother hearing shark music]

She probably feels her parenting has been questioned and to get to the stage that you have to be saying something like that, she could feel like she'd lost it.

[what would you want her to know?]

Keep calm.

You can fix it by being good hands.

Everyone makes mistakes... work together.

You can come back.

[clip – mother saying it's all too much, being weak]

The child could... feel alone.

[what was it like for you to watch?]

I've cried.

I've gone from being the parent to the child and having them comfort me.

My daughter was the mum for my younger ones. But because I had a good relationship with all my kids, we stayed together and got through it.

[what would you say to her]

It'll pass. The baby needs you.

You can do it.

Step back and take a deep breath.

[reflect on a time your child was acting out]

My 6 year old is always really embarrassing and throws tantrums in the shops (wants \$20 toy) because my dad always gives in to her and buys her everything. She doesn't like no.

Leaving jail is scary, cos I'm gonna have to say 'no'. She is going to be a bit put out. But she's intelligent so she'll learn.

She's probably got shark music about it too.

[discussions between older and younger mum's about different stage 'perspectives' on how much they share and turn to their children or their mothers]

I can't even imagine being like that with my son – he's only 5. It's great to hear about that stage you're going through.

[After this profound point of sharing, said jokingly:] You made me cry last week. I've made you cry this week. We're even!

[new idea of time-out]

When your child is chucking a tantrum, give yourself a time out to get your head together... and then come in and help them deal with the issue.

They seem like they're just playing up, but they're actually needing help.

Eg, watching The Nanny show – she puts them in time out and then explains why they're there... she spends time with them.

[Reflect on a time when you needed time in and either people could be with or people just didn't get it]

There's been a lot of times in my life when I needed someone to be with me, rather than just saying 'It'll be OK' or 'Time heals all wounds'. No-one told me it'd take years to deal with my brother passing away.

[time-in clip, in own words]

She was being supportive, bigger.

It's ok to feel like this but not ok to act out.

She described his feelings, eg I know you're angry at me and frustrated but it's not ok to hit me.

[pondering on dealing with criticism when changing parenting behaviour]

They'll just have to get used to it.

You have to get better. You're learning all the time.

[describe how you'll go with time-ins]

It'll be good..... it's exciting.

It might be a bit scary at first but I'll get there.

I'll be excited to see how I bond with my fiance's daughter.

... *[another's response]* You can be there for her now. She's probably got shark music.

I'm looking forward to it.

I've got my folder to look back on.

I've already noticed heaps of stuff in my visits [as a result of this course]. When he's away, I thought he's rejecting me... but now I know he's exploring.. and then he'll come back to me. Because our visits are so short... I thought that he didn't want me. I just stand back and talk to mum and wait for him to come back. Now, he's talking to me about more stuff now ... I'm ready for him.

[another participant's response to the previous comment – wording not exact:] "I noticed you're different with your son going out on the circle and exploring when he visits. You used to follow him around!" *[followed by]* "Not anymore; now I'm confident that he'll return."

[about being reunited with step-daughter of complex dynamics, and others in family]

I'm really excited and looking forward and not as anxious and overwhelmed. I'm actually feeling tingles in my belly!

Week 8:

[Wrap up of last week in own words]

When we hear our shark music we don't see what our child is doing/needing. [we think about what the child did last time and can get stressed].

If he's crying or whining or out of control, you need to see what's behind all that.

I like how it says 'When you are calm ENOUGH'[implying that you can still be upset but calm enough to think clearly and talk].

.. and I like how it says when the child is calm ENOUGH. [continued to reflect on seeing the child be calm enough to talk about what's happened, even if not completely calm]

[watching sum up]

It's showed all our time together.

I'd just like to say.... it's been lovely. Yes, we have learnt a lot.

[after watching clip]

I think he wanted her attention.

She wasn't looking at him a lot of the time when she was talking.

He wanted something physical too.

[second clip]

Is that the same kid?!

Look at him now. He looks young now.

He looks cute. He looks happy and not demonic.

Oh, mum understands.

So relaxed.

He can just be the kid.

I felt sick for a second then... Just wanting to be with my son... wanting to cuddle him... I miss my son!

You take so much for granted. *[talking about cuddles with child, previously not always appreciated]*. You'd kill for it now.

[Asked to evaluate and give ideas, each person's response numbered below:]

Participant 1. The two best ones were:

When we talked about how our parents were with us. The being with. *[exercise of placing emotions around the circle]* The rupture and repair – cos no one ever talks about that.

[when asked if this participant had done previous parenting courses] Only the one at the hospital when you're pregnant, which is mostly about the birth. I've tried to read a lot.

Participant 2. I wish we could have our kids here in prison [for a long duration], because we could learn with them. We could practice this stuff.

Participant 3. If we had longer visits, like a weekend or something, we could learn to be a better mother inside. Maybe if you work hard you could be rewarded with longer visits.

Imagine how overwhelming it's going to be when you go home, with a houseful of kids. They're in a different routine. Four months is a long time. I just have to jump straight into it.

I feel like I don't know my kids.

Participant 2. I felt like I didn't know him. Because my mum does things differently, so he was doing things differently. I feel I have to ask my mum for approval, for how to do things. We're gonna start having conflict between me and my mum. "You can't do this... why are you doing this?..."

Participant 4. Yes it must be hard for you, as he's not even in Tassie.

[Lots of discussion followed about who is currently parenting the kids and how they're coping with separation, new routines, the back and forth relationships. Issues such as expected challenges and conflicts, ranging to potential legal custody issues were openly discussed. Empathic, supportive, empowering responses were heard from other inmates, while also encouraging each other to see it from the outside carer's perspectives and also bear in mind what's best for the child]

I only know people who do drugs now. I want to go to mother's group when I get home so I can meet other mums/kids who are normal.

I want to go to the park and have fish and chips with my son and other kids.

[When asked about whether speech path services would be taken up if available]

Yes – my son is not talking as much as he should.

Yes, it would be helpful to my children

My son already sees a speech pathologist

Yes, if they needed it [not any need so far]

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Appendix E:

These reflective notes were produced by Natalie Leader, COS registered speech pathologist, who facilitated *Just Time's* third cycle of COS.

Now, having freshly completed Week 8, the final part of the program, I can share other reflections:

- I am more comfortable moving through the security processes of the prison complex and aware that these are more stringent and obvious in other parts of the prison.
- It has been a good experience to see inmates face the challenges of their complex situations and to be able to hear that and remain with them, even knowing that I don't have solutions.
- I have appreciated the high skills of the group regarding literacy, but have also anticipated the challenge of access to the program for those without this strength and developed ideas for meeting these needs.
- My awareness has increased of the complexity around family arrangements and the occasional difficulty in talking about these and coming face-to-face with the frustration.
- It has been inspiring to see that despite personal challenges at times, the participants wanted their fellow participants still to get the most out of the program and tried to avoid being a distraction where possible.

I have noted that overall, the terminology from the program was used immediately to start putting to words the interactions with children, both on the video clips and with actual parent/child or grandparent/child interactions. This demonstrates good accessibility of the concepts for the participants and ownership/relevance of the ideas.

I have felt utterly supported and part of a team in delivering this. It is great to have been able to pass on so much information and to present 5 certificates of completion to participants who were keen and appreciative and very deserving of having their efforts recognised.

Sarah and I were trying to add up numbers for all the children that are to be affected by this course [cycle 3]. That was tricky when we got past about 20, which is a good feeling!

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Appendix F:

These reflective notes were produced by Sarah Kay, COS registered speech pathologist, who co-facilitated *Just Time's* third cycle of COS.

What was your initial reaction to being asked to support COS at MHWP?

Privilege and honour. Thrilled and excited to be involved in something different. But not just different....something involving heart and connection, with the potential to have a very positive and immediate impact on others; in this case, those others being at-risk parents – parents who may have previously had little chance to think deeply about or talk about their parenting experiences and challenges.

What were your expectations at the outset?

Having done the initial COS training, I knew that the 8 weeks was well researched, put together with great wisdom, and would 'hit home' to any audience. I had experienced firsthand, the powerful words of COS and ability of COS to put across simple yet vital concepts about relational parenting. Concepts which could be so easily grasped and understood deeply within one's heart – and therefore easily remembered.

I was less sure about the program implementation within a group whose dynamic was still unknown, and within a place which was basically foreign to me. However, I was also spurred on by the nature of the program – because it provided something that was truly relevant to every parent – and indeed, every person who has been parented(!). We were going to be in the privileged position of sharing something we had learned. I knew we were going to be on an even plane – rather than being in a possibly uncomfortable position of top-down power.

How did the whole process feel for you?

In my co-facilitator role, I felt:

- Initially, a sense of uncertainty about how the group would gel, and how the initial sessions would be accepted. This was quickly replaced by many positives.
- Quickly my nervousness about the setting vanished. It really was just the passing through so many gates and security checks that had provided any initial misgivings. Once 'inside', I felt like I was relating to mothers, daughters – women.
- I was also slightly nervous as to whether the participants would, or would not, appreciate my noting down their reflections and observations. This was another feeling that soon abated as my jottings became commonplace – in fact, I wondered perhaps whether individuals felt like they were being all the more listened to in the process.
- A sense of anticipation at how the information might be understood and processed by individuals each week.
- A sense of increasing excitement and satisfaction as the women opened up, shared, became increasingly reflective, started to use the concepts and language of COS within their own 'speak'.
- I found that the balance between the DVD, Natalie's presenting, and the talk time was excellent. The DVD examples were powerful and always provided much to discuss, and relate to.

What did the participants say or do that was enlightening to you?

- During week 1 and 2 there were some comments that the major idea of the 'Circle' (where your child 'comes back in') made them feel guilty or helpless as they were currently in a position in which this natural re-connection could not take place. These kinds of initial comments soon gave way to reflections on the way the participants themselves were

brought up, and the beginnings of reflection about their own parenting prior to prison; and their hopes about parenting after being released.

- I was reminded again and again how difficult it was for these women to be away from their children. I could feel the ‘tearing away’.
- I heard and FELT how much they were missing out on. I heard how they had to relinquish their ability to directly parent their children. I heard how they were nervous or scared or had ‘shark music’ about seeing their children again because it meant trying to find their way amongst newly formed routines and bonds. I heard how they, for the most part, appreciated those who were currently caring for their children, but how they would have to re-slot into mothering whilst being mindful of these other relationships.
- In the final discussion, I heard how much each participant was looking forward to being able to re-connect with their children – when returning home, or at the next visit or Kids’ Day. This was despite their misgivings. They all shared with great emotion and expression how much they were looking forward to being WITH their children and being able to do that armed with their new understandings.
- It was a thrill to see one participant who deeply grasped many of the concepts, then apply them directly to her family and express them to the rest of the group. She was able to describe how at a recent Kids’ Day, she was briefly concerned that her little boy was ignoring her. But then, with her new-found understanding, she realised that he was just ‘going out’ to explore on the circle. This was SO encouraging for her, and she was able to wait and watch him ‘come back in’ to her.
- It was lovely to sometimes actually HEAR the ‘aha’ moments. An example I recall is: “OH, I never knew that that’s what I was feeling. Now I have a name for that and I can help my daughter to understand it too”.

Tell about your observations on the quality of the relationships formed during the program.

As to the relationships between participants, this was possibly something that should NOT have surprised me – but it did. The women were all remarkably supportive of one another. The group dynamics were truly, beautifully supportive, fun, understanding, kind, and generously spirited. Some of the women had known each other prior to prison. This was a positive as they bounced ideas and reflections about their children and understandings of parenting around, and these ideas could be added onto and further supported.

Because all of the participants knew each other to some extent, there was a pre-existing support network. Older women supporting younger women; younger mums – and not-yet-mums – listening to experienced mums. There was an ease of interaction, an ease of asking each other questions amongst themselves, and a softness towards each other which no doubt underpinned the success of this particular group.

Regarding the relationships formed between ‘us’ and the participants, I suspect that the positive vibe was simply extended out to us. And the nature of the program, which was simply to share and gently ‘draw people out’, enabled a lovely connect.

What were your observations & impressions of the prison system?

As a person relatively unfamiliar with this environment, I really noticed the slight ‘tension’ and ‘level of alertness’ constantly in the air. The protocols and procedures were quite daunting to the uninitiated. However, once accepted, they became something that sat more in the background.

We met and spoke with the superintendent after the final session. He remarked on how he had appreciated the ease with which the program was run – we had not tried to make changes and ask

for different things or privileges along the way – and it was very obvious that we would be welcomed back simply because of this.

What have you learned?

COS works. It's a simple and effective program with benefits for all families within our society. Unequivocally and unquestionably do not withhold this from at-risk parents.

What responses did you observe from the women in relation to the teaching style demonstrated?

Very accepting. They were happy to be part of the 'sharing' atmosphere that Natalie enabled.

Was there anything which felt uncomfortable?

As previously stated, the 'gates' and clearances.

How did you feel honoured?

I felt incredibly honoured to be there as women shared their hearts. Honoured to be a part of the COS program. Honoured to be alongside others whom I would not usually be alongside.

Would you do it again/like to see it expand?

Definitely needs to be at least semi-regularly run. Many of the participants spoke about it potentially helping others that they knew. They were speaking about the course with others during the 9 weeks that we were around. A couple of the mothers who were also grandmothers spoke about it being beneficial to their daughters who had recently embarked on parenting.

If we were able to 'dream'... it would be something that could connect us back with these same families in their own communities. For example: if participants felt COS was so useful, could they apply to have family and friends go through the course at a later date?

I also wondered if enabling some discussion at the end of the program which highlighted and brought the idea of 'self-reflection' to the fore may have been beneficial. That is, a program or ethos that upheld the positive way individuals had been able to reflect, and how valuable and useful this process is in an ongoing, regular way – and, if possible, together with others within their family/friend support networks. However... I guess the beauty of the 8 week program is that it is concise and simple and encourages the reflection anyway...

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Appendix G:

The following interview took place between Natalie Leader and one of the participants of the third cycle of COS, six weeks after the completion of the program.

What did it feel like at the time to do the course?

At first, I thought 'Uh, god, I've already raised my kids – what a waste of time' and then as it started and you were putting words to emotions and feelings that I had when I raised my kids it answered a lot of questions about the whole circle of life for them.

Was that a mix of feelings?

No. It was relief. It was a feeling of relief because when you first become a parent, as you would know, it's confusing, you know. And no one tells you that it's OK and it's normal to feel these

emotions and kids do do this and kids do do that and this is all part of the hands of the circle thing. And to put all that into one motion and have answers for it all step-by-step which answers why the kids run out and come back, then they go further and come back, like a big rubber-band effect.

Rubber band effect?

Yeah, that's how I see it. Like they stretch out and then they always come back to you. It was really helpful. And it's preparing me hugely I think, for when I get to see my grandkids, because now it's not going to be like..., I'm not going to be so scared. I'm going to know that it's normal for them to not hang on to me and not for me to have to be in their face and show them attention all the time because it can be scary for them, you know, to force myself onto them. So, I've just got to learn to sit back and just let it all happen naturally and that's just the way it goes. And it's normal, it's not so scary.

It's not so scary, having words for everything.

I was actually talking to Shelley the other night about it. She was talking about when she goes home, she's scared about having her little boy back, because she hasn't seen him for so long. And I just said to her 'Well, remember the shark music. Just think about how you would feel and how he would feel and put the shark music to it. And once you get the hang of that you'll be fine. Just remember that the shark music's there for a reason.' And she was like 'Well that's so right.'

Yeah, that it's there for reason.

Yeah, just to listen to it. And that it's ok to have those feelings and that it's OK to feel scared. It's normal and we have shark music. We've just got to learn how to embrace it.

And how is it for you and Shelley to have the same language to talk about that?

It's fantastic. Yeah. Today, if I was talking to someone who hadn't done the course and I'm telling them about shark music, they'd laugh at me. But if they went and done the course, they'd know exactly what I'm saying and we'd be able to hold a conversation.

I can see me using this just in everyday life, not just with kids. Because..

Why do you think that is? What's changed for you?

Knowing that the emotions that I've felt with the fear factor, of the unknown, that that's called shark music. I reckon that's the hugest part of the whole thing that I learnt. Whenever I feel uneasy or not 'in control' or not safe about something, that there's shark music there. You've just got to listen.

....and work out what it's about.

Yeah, and how to use it. So, just stand back and re-think things before I do them. And say, 'OK, before I react, Why am I feeling that?'. And then just evaluate it and then move on slowly.

So you think you might not react as much, hopefully, if you've got that in the forefront.

Yeah. I reckon it's taught me lots. I don't think of it as just for kids, just for whole life in general.

That's good. I hadn't heard that before. I was going to ask how is the program different from any other programs or activities that you've done?

I felt more comfortable in there. I didn't feel pressured to know the answers to things that I didn't know the answers to. And you taught it so well. You answered all the questions before I even had a chance to ask them, pretty much. And I just learnt – I learnt a lot from it. I reckon it's awesome - I'd do it again.

Yeah, to make you think twice, about things twice. That's good to know, that even having done it, you think it would be rich enough to explore it again.

Yeah, just to cement it right there. Just in case there's something I might have missed. I really found it very beneficial. Like I said, it wasn't just something that you can use to know about kids and how they are, but you can use it for adults as well. Not every part of it obviously, but things like the shark music. You can learn to use that to know about adults as well, just life in general. It's about learning to know that that music is- or calling it music for a start, whether it's an emotion or a feeling, it's shark music. It's telling you 'Oh, this is unknown territory. Just sit back and watch yourself. How to handle that, and then deal with it.

I'd recommend everybody, anybody and everybody to do the course, especially the ones having kids.

I thought we were really lucky to have somebody that was interested even without having children yet. It was really good to have her perspective and know that she was getting something we all thought was valuable.

Well Jenny's planning on having kids soon. She just got out and she was planning on trying to have kids as soon as she got out. It'll do her good too, I think. But she's still got a lot of growing up to do, but she'll learn that, like we all do.

Doing the course before you have kids, I think that's a brilliant idea.

And how did you feel, on it, yourself, within the COS program?

I felt like when I looked back on when I raised my kids, some of the emotions that I went through, some of the obstacles that you have with kids, I know now that I've experienced it not on my own, that other parents would have experienced the same things and went through the same emotions, it was normal. So, that was good. That was really good to know, because for a long time I thought, "God, was I the only parent?" Even now, with my kids being so old – Emily's nearly 24 - I think, Uh, God, am I the only one that's got an idiot for a kid? [laughter...] When is she gonna grow up?"

I know I'm not the only one – there are other parents out there. Some parents are unlucky enough to have worse kids than mine. So, .. I know i'm not the only one out there that's gone through.. ripples of parenting.

Ripples?

The ripple effect, I've always called it.

...of something happening and then?...

It's not always smooth sailing when you raise kids. There's always ripples. You have your highs and your lows. It's not all perfect. Nobody's perfect. No kids are perfect. No parents are perfect, no matter how hard you try. And kids don't grow up and be what you have raised them to be, no matter how hard you try.

...and that idea of 'nobody's perfect' was in the course as well. Was that something you thought was good?

Yeah, that made me open my eyes up to Emily, why I'm having trouble with her, and not talking to her. And I used to blame myself for how she turned out, the things that she's done, the things that she's doing. I blamed myself – Where did I go wrong? What did I do wrong? Now I don't, because, nobody's perfect. No parents are perfect, no kids are perfect.

Do you remember bits about blame from the course as well?

Bits and pieces, yeah. I did blame myself. I've had my mum growl at me, my partner, my youngest daughter. They've all growled at me because I've blamed myself, took the blame for everything that's gone wrong with Em, cos Emmy's my problem child. And I don't now.

How does that feel?

Relieved. Very relieved. I don't feel stressed about it at all, because I'm not blaming myself about it. I'm not taking responsibility for her any more. I'm already in jail for her. She needs to grow up and take some blame and responsibility for her own actions. She will one day but that's not my problem to deal with— she's an adult now.

But yeah, the blame game. I've blamed myself since she was a teenager, and felt guilt for how she's turned out, when it wasn't my fault. I tried my best. I done my best, and maybe I tried too hard.

You did what you thought was right at the time.

Yeah, I think a good parent is somebody who does their best. You do the best you can as long as you try. If you don't try and you don't care then I don't think you're doing the best job. Then you're not being a good parent, but when you are being a good parent, you try the best that you can.

I tried the best that I could, for as long as I could, and now it's her turn.

She's got her own kids now and she's got to learn to be a good parent to them now. Otherwise, she's going to grow up and have her kids blame her for how they turned out.

And, was there anything that you felt uncomfortable about being part of the program?

I think the one circle thing there that we had to do. What did you call it?

Being with, and with the emotions.

Like from our parents who weren't our safety, was it? Like how we felt if something bad went wrong with our life or something?

It made me think about when I was molested, and my paren... my mum... when she.. she didn't know about it. So I didn't feel safe, I didn't feel secure or anything. And I didn't like that part about it, because it made me think about a part of my life that I don't think about. That I don't want to think about. It's where it belongs, in the past. And I didn't like going back to that emotion of when mum.... it's like I was blaming mum for something that she didn't know anything about. I was a horrible kid, really horrible, especially towards my mum, because she wasn't there for me. But I was being hurt while she was at work, or at bingo.

But yeah I didn't like that part of it. It was just... we had that circle there and we had to write ..

Write the emotions in.... fear...

Write them outside the circle

... and shame, and joy, and curiosity...

Yeah, that one. And I instantly went straight to that emotion of when I was molested.

It brought it right back...

Yeah and that was the only time I felt uncomfortable and wanted room in the course.

Would you have thought it would be better to not have that in there, or done a different way, or do you think actually there's no other way to bring it?

I think maybe for me it would have been better to have not had it there, because it made me feel uncomfortable and I think it did with Tanika as well.

Yeah I think it was difficult for everybody. It's a very thought-provoking exercise. You can't bring it to the front of your mind without experiencing some feelings.

And I think that's the only thing out of the whole course. That. I didn't understand the purpose of that for the course that we was doing because all that done was 'Ooo, shark music. Drown me in it'.

Cos that's where it took me straight back to, drowning in fear, horror.

I think it might be an illustration, like an example, it's very in-your-face kind of example, of how there might be that behind you, but what do you want to put in front of you?

Yeah, I'd like to put that right behind in the back.

Leave it where it was.

Right buried. I don't like... I know it happened. And every day of my life I live with the effects of what happened to me because the result of that being I got cervical cancer, which gave me

lymphodaema and menopause and everything that goes wrong with me now health-wise all stems back to my cancer, which stems back to being molested. So, it's like every day of my life I live with that effect.

Sounds heavy.

So, to remember it and to go back that far and remember how I felt - alone and not safe, and shamed, and... And to just feel all that again, I think I went back to my room and cried that day. Cos they were emotions I didn't...

... don't want to relive.

Yeah, I don't want them out here cos I'm no victim. And that's... And I'm proud of that. I'm no victim.

But that made me feel like I was victim all over again.

That's.... that's happened.

Yeah.

Thank you for that. That's really good to know. And I was going to ask has it changed the way that you are with your family?

No, cos I still don't talk to my daughter. I'm still very headstrong with that. Because while she's with the boy that she's with I don't want to speak to her. But I believe that.... well, she knows that I love her, and when he's gone, that my arms and my door, my whole world will be open to her again. No questions asked.

Oh, I suppose when I speak to mum now and I talk about things... like I've tried to explain to her about shark music and that, and she's actually sat and listened to me. She hasn't laughed at me. And my youngest daughter too, she's noticed a difference in how I've gone from... I'm not so scared about the thought of seeing the grandkids now, and of meeting my grandson, cos I haven't seen him since he was an hour old.

She noticed that?

Yeah, and she can see and she can tell in the excitement in my voice, I suppose.

I wonder how that feels for her?

I'm sure it feels good for her because I can see it in her face, like she's excited for me. She's now saying to me, like the other week, my eldest granddaughter's been hitting my youngest granddaughter, and Sarah isn't even three yet and Chantal's eight. So, she said, 'I think you'd be the best one to try and talk to Chantal about it, Mum' whereas before she wouldn't have asked me because I would've handled it differently. I don't know how much different. But I ended up, when I wrote a letter to Chantal, I wrote it with the idea of what I learnt from class, so as not to scare her. So I sort of put it down in the sentence of "When your mum and Aunty Hazel were little, I remember when your mum used to hit aunty Hazel and Aunty Hazel use to hit your mum. Oh, I didn't like that - I used to think that was just so horrible'. I reckon when I read the letter, I re-wrote it several times

and I think I read it a hundred times before I sent it, because I wanted to make sure she wasn't feeling like I was blaming her or accusing her or anything like being a bully of any sort. I just wanted her to read it and sit back and think 'Oh, I've been doing that to Sarah'. Cos she's a smart girl.

So rather than pushing her away, you wanted to make her reflect?

Yeah, to see if she could see for herself that she's doing that to Sarah, without me [saying it]. Cos, I know she'll have the caregiver... the caregiver, her step-auntie's are having trouble getting through to her. But also letting her know that it's ok for her to be angry. She's been through a lot. She's been taken from her mum, and me, and her aunty. It's ok to be angry and lash out, but it's not ok to hurt your little sister, because little sister needs a big sister.

I haven't heard anything back yet.

How long's that been?

About three weeks. I've been sitting there thinking, 'Oh god, I hope I didn't write that wrong'. So, the shark music's been 'doo, doot, doo, doot, doo doot' the whole time with me. And I'm like, no, I'm pretty sure I wrote that as fairly and as just as I could, because I was trying to be as fair and as thoughtful to Chantal as I was trying to be protective of Sarah-Jane at the same time. Cos where they live there's big stairs, and if Chantal pushes Sarah-Jane at the top of the stairs, she could go down. It could kill her. So, there's fears there.

Yeah, so you need to balance out their needs, what needs they have.

So, after that I've made cards, and sent them cards to say 'Your nana loves you. I'm so proud of you'. So, yeah. Still waiting. But, I've learnt.

So it changed the way you did that?

Yeah, it did.

... and your chance to actually DO that. Someone wanted YOU to do it.

Yeah, it has. It's changed a lot of the ways that I think and that I react, with a lot of things.

Did that even answer the question? I'm having trouble remembering

Yes, absolutely, that was a huge answer. That's fantastic. That was like, 'Well, my daughter asked me to do something that she wouldn't have asked me to do before.'

Yeah.

That's huge. I think so, anyway. Yeah, it's really... it's very powerful. And I was going to ask you how do you see yourself as a parent now. You've said a lot about that already!

Yeah! I'm a proud parent. I'm proud of my parenting – I think I've done a good job. I don't blame myself, like I said before. I don't take responsibility any more. And I definitely don't blame myself for

anything that's gone wrong with my daughter, which gives me the opportunity to sit back and reflect and think 'Yay me. I did do a good job'.

It's good to do that for yourself isn't it?

Yeah, pat yourself on the back, it's 'Yay me'. Cos I am a loving, doting, caring mum. And, yes, I've spoilt them a bit. They've both told me, one of the downfalls with me was, that they knew, I've never said 'No' to them. Anything they've asked for, I've gave to them. But when I do say 'No', well, I can't even say they listen because they don't! They know they can get around me! [laughing] But they think I'm a good mum.

I don't care what Emily says when she's angry at me, but I just know that Penny has said to me, regardless of anything, I've been a good mum. And the best part out of everything I've given them is love, unconditional love. So, yay me.

And how do you feel about the way your child or your children reach out to you now?

Proud. My youngest daughter, she's been working hard. She got her second job three weeks ago. And she said, just before she took the second job, that she was going to say to the potential boss, 'I only ask that have Sunday mornings off because I like to visit my mum.' And when she told me that she was going to say that, I went 'No, no, no. If you've got work, you take work before you come to see me. That's priority number one, cos this is your future.' She want to buy a house and things like that. Well, she can't do that if she's not showing priorities. So, mum come and see me yesterday, and she said 'Pen's real, sorry. She was crying and all', cos she hasn't seen me for three weeks. But she said "Mum did say that if I had a chance to work, then that took priority.' And I said 'Most certainly.'

Yeah, that's really powerful for you. Not easy, but it's very respectful.

Not easy. And I know it's not easy for Pen, because she's my baby. She's 22, but she's my baby and she needs to see me every week to get her cuddle, so she can get on with her week. And she hasn't had a cuddle for three weeks now. So, she's ringing mum up more and mum's said she's quite needy! [laughing]

She's got a short rubber band!

Yes. I said there's a lot of reasons for her rubber band. So if she can't get what she needs off me, if she can't ring me, and I'm a scrooge, I won't ring mobiles all the time, but if she can't ring me like she usually does, now she's ringing my mum. So I said to Mum, 'You're just going to have to step up and take a little bit of my role. And see what it's like for me, til I get out.' Mum's happy to do that, so Pen now rings Mum randomly and Mum just passes on to her how much I love her and miss her and that gets her through. At least for a couple of days, and then she rings Mum again [laughter].

If she needs a cuddle, then she'll just pop over the bridge and give Nan a cuddle. It's not the same as cuddling me, but it's just as good I reckon. Cos I need a cuddle with my mum – it gets me through.

So she's only getting it from the greater mum, isn't she, the grand-mum?

If there's anything else you want to add, now's the time.

Are you doing another course?

Oooo, good question. Well, this is all in train so that we can hopefully do.....

I think a lot of girls out there, in here, could.