

Violent Offender Therapeutic Programs (VOTP)

WHAT IS VOTP?

VOTP stands for the Violent Offender Therapeutic Program. The VOTP is a program for men who have a history of violent behaviour.

The VOTP is facilitated at the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (MSPC) located at Long Bay Correctional Complex, within a residential Unit (the men live and attend group within the same wing). At the South Coast Correctional Centre, there are two additional mainstream VOTP groups for offenders/participants with a minimum security classification. VOTP South Coast is not facilitated as a residential unit, which means that the participants come from a number of units/wings within the gaol and attend the group rooms to complete program modules. Participants cannot select which centre they complete the Program at; this is determined by the VOTP Senior Psychologists based on program availability.

The overall goal of the VOTP is to reduce the likelihood that treated individuals will continue with violent behaviour upon their return to the community (i.e., reduce violent re-offending/returning to gaol).

The VOTP is approximately 10 months in duration (for both mainstream and Protection or SMAP status participants). There is also a Self-Regulation Program

(SRP) for participants with an intellectual disability or other cognitive impairment which is up to 18 months in duration.

The High Intensity Program Unit (HIPU): VOTP was developed to deliver treatment services and programs and enhance release planning to inmates serving short sentences. This program is still designed for men who have a history of violent behaviour but that may only have short sentences to serve (non-parole period of less than 2 years with less than 12 months to serve).

All VOTP group sessions are held in private group rooms. At the start of group, group members make/develop and agree to keep to a set of rules. This helps our groups become a safe space to share difficult things in confidence.

Prison-based residential therapy programs are run as modified Therapeutic Communities (TC). In a TC, residents and staff participate in the management and operation of the community, contributing to a psychologically and physically safe learning environment where change can occur. The TC is a unique way to provide therapy that allows for real-life application of working together, relaxing together, decision-making, problem-solving, empathising, reaching out, helping and teaching to build a prosocial and positive environment.

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Participants learn different, healthy ways to communicate, they are encouraged to develop supportive and meaningful relationships and explore how they can better understand and control their emotions to reduce the need to turn to aggression to solve problems. As they progress through the program, they learn how to problem solve and set achievable goals and how to set things up so these goals can be reached.

For many of our participants, these skills are new and take time and practice to develop. VOTP is the beginning of the change journey.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP WHILE MY LOVED ONE IS PARTICIPATING IN THESE PROGRAMS?

The participants want to know that the changes they are undertaking are being noticed and appreciated, especially given how hard change can be. Words of encouragement and support through phone calls, letters and visits can make a huge impact while participating in the VOTP.

One of the key things that participants learn is different ways to talk about themselves and their emotions, and different ways to act/ behave. One of the best ways you can support your loved one is allowing them the space to

practice these skills with you. Many of the participants may feel guilty for what they have done and struggle with the extent/enormity of the things they need to change to lead different lives. They may be afraid that if they make these changes they might not have connections anymore with family and friends and they have to manage the fear of failure (what if I stuff up and hurt someone again or come back to gaol?)

During this process of change your loved one may experience lapses, where by old behaviour (e.g. anger, aggression) may be present. A lapse is a short-term return to old patterns of behaviour (e.g. using aggression solve/avoid problems, increased drinking), that stops again quickly, but the person is still motivated to change or improve. During such times you can play a key role in encouraging them to keep trying, letting them know its normal to have lapses and that you remain available for support. We also encourage you to share the changes you notice in your loved with other friends and family members.

Please help us keep contraband out of our gaols. It may seem helpful at the time, however contraband, especially drugs, can pose serious health and safety risks and can cause your loved one to stop progressing in the program. They can also face serious penalties that will stop or reverse their progression in classification. Help others to understand how unhelpful and dangerous behaviours like this can be for your loved one in gaol.

ARE YOU A VOTP GRADUATE?

The VOTP Maintenance Program follows up and supports you once you have completed prison-based VOTP. This support can begin whilst you are still in prison and continues into the community.

All participants of VOTP (SMAP, mainstream and SRP: VO) can be referred to this program. You will need to be in prison or under the supervision of Community Corrections in order to receive services from VOTP Maintenance.

The Program aims to help you build on therapeutic gains, and monitor your self-management plans as you leave the VOTP wing and progress back to the community.

VOTP Maintenance is usually conducted in a rolling group format, by a psychologist. The groups are semi-structured groups designed to provide each person with an opportunity to discuss any problems or events which occurred between sessions as well as revisit treatment skills.

The maintenance psychologists may also provide support by phone and individual sessions to you on a needs basis.

