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Jason McIntosh

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Tēnā koe Mr McIntosh

Thank you for your email dated 30 May 2018 to the Ministry of Social Development asking questions about Work and Income assistance and support for recently released prisoners. Your questions relating to information about prisoners have been transferred to the Department of Corrections for response.

You have asked the following questions:

*"Upon release a prisoner is given a payment of \$350 he/she is then given a two week stand down from Winz. If the prisoner has no help from family or friends (which is often the case) the financial desperation must often cause the prisoner to reoffend. How is one expected to find accommodation, buy clothing and feed oneself while also conforming to the release demands of probation services?"*

It may be useful if I provide you with information about the existing procedures between the Ministry and the Department of Corrections.

We recognise it is important for prisoners to have access to financial support as soon as they leave prison. Typically a one week stand down applies for prisoners applying for a benefit. That is why we have \$350 Steps to Freedom payments available to those leaving prison, to help them with essential costs associated with establishing themselves in the community.

The Steps to Freedom payment is intended to help until they get their first benefit payment. If they have essential costs over and above this amount, further assistance is available through a recoverable hardship payment. Steps to Freedom is means-tested, so depending on income or assets, and relationship status, some prisoners may not qualify for the payment.

We also work closely with Corrections through a Prisoner Reintegration Programme. The reintegration programme supports prisoners who are leaving prison to reintegrate back into their community. The programme operates in every region except for Nelson where there is no prison. The programme is voluntary. The aims of the programme are to support their reintegration and achieve employment after release.

Prisoners are assigned a Corrections case manager and a case officer after they arrive in prison. Corrections case managers work with prisoners while in custody. The Corrections case manager facilitates services and delivers active support to prepare the prisoner to live an offence-free life. Their role is to also ensure a successful transition to the Probation Service or directly into the community.

At 10 weeks prior to release, prisons will provide Work and Income with an up-to-date Curriculum Vitae, complete record of learning, licences achieved whilst in prison and information on their health status, together with a signed consent form. If consent is given, prisons will provide relevant medical information to Work and Income that will assist in determining any income support requirements.

Work and Income will meet with the prisoner and discuss job placement options and opportunities, complete a job seeker profile and create/update Recruit Me. They will also discuss benefit support and obligations the prisoner may require to support them through this transitional phase.

At four weeks prior to release, the prisoner, their case manager and probation officer together with Work and Income will meet to discuss employment opportunities available and the pathway to employment post release. Work and Income will discuss actual jobs available, start profiling and matching prisoners to jobs and where appropriate, set up interviews with employer's pre and post release.

The Work and Income Prisoner Reintegration Coordinator will engage with their region's work brokerage resources to help provide this employment support to prisoners.

As you can see, Work and Income provides a lot of support to people being released from prison to assist them in settling back into their communities.

In addition, if a released prisoner, who has received the maximum assistance through Steps to Freedom, continues to face hardship, consideration can be given to paying financial assistance through the Special Needs Grant, Recoverable Assistance and Advance Payment of Benefits programmes to help with specific costs that need to be met before the first benefit payment is due.

There is also a Transition to Work Grant programme to support people to move into employment by providing financial assistance with costs relating to seeking work, attending job interviews and moving into work.

Thank you again for writing. I hope this information is helpful.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Elisabeth Brunt  
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