

Qualitative Research

The visitor experience in detention centres Government department

Project Outline

A government inquiry into detention centres had recommended that improvements be made to the visiting procedures at a number of detention centres. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs felt it needed a clearer understanding of the issues surrounding visits to centres, and commissioned ASR to assist.

Research Strategy

ASR was engaged to focus on two facilities, and to identify issues affecting a range of visitors (friends, family, professional visitors and community workers), as well as issues detainees had with visits and visitors.

More than 80 people were involved in the research. The study involved:

- Reviewing the information on the Department's web site for visitors
- Identifying the different types of visitor
- Conducting discussion groups with visitors
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews of visitors
- Face-to-face and telephone interviews of detainees
- Discussions with staff at the detention centres.

Outcomes

Participants raised many issues and made a number of suggestions for improving visits to detention centres. Most issues were consistent across all types of visitor, but regular professional visitors had some additional concerns.

Our findings were presented as a series of themes, and verbatim comments were provided to support each conclusion. A number of debriefing sessions were conducted with relevant staff and key external stakeholders, including the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

A wide range of initiatives have commenced as a result of the ASR report concerning detailed procedures used to control visits, the treatment of visitors, the information provided to visitors, and the facilities on site made available to visitors.

“ Obtaining actionable results within a sensitive policy area ”