



Department of  
Corrective Services

# “When the Data Doesn’t Add Up”

Dr Shona Hyde  
Senior Research and Evaluation Officer  
Department of Corrective Services  
Western Australia

Friday 12 September 2008





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## Introduction

- **Impact evaluation of the Central Breach Unit**
- **Unreliable statistical data**
- **Flexibility and role change**
- **Making feasible recommendations**





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## What is the Central Breach Unit?

- **Established 2004 to centralise the breach process**
- **Prepares breach cases for prosecution for all WA**
- **Timely breaches**
  - = less likely reoffend**
  - = more likely to re-engage**
  - = less likely to have relocated**





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## The Struggle Begins...

### Quantitative Questions:

- How many breaches/ how long to process?
- Breach rates: re-offending/non-compliance
  - male/female
  - Aboriginal/non-aboriginal
- Breach Outcomes:
  - new orders
  - finances
  - custody





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## The Struggle Begins...

A new database is introduced...

**Community Business Information System  
(C-BIS)**

... so too is a significant margin of  
error

**Expected annual change = 2-3%**

**Margin of error > 2-3%**





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## Zeroing in on the Problem

35 data fields (e.g. offender ID, gender, dates, type of breach, ethnicity etc)

- two different data entry screens
- two different data entry times
- two different sets of data entry personnel

= inconsistent/ incompatible data





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## Why Am I Doing This Anyway?

- A practical 'on the ground' contribution
- Promote good governance
- Public accountability





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## I'm Nothing if Not Flexible

### Re-thinking my evaluation strategy:

- From quantitative to qualitative
- From *impact* evaluation to *process*
- Expanded scope
- “Client” consultation







Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## Communication is Everything

- Logical in isolation
- Nobody looking at the whole
- A symptom, not the cause





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## I'm Not the Expert Here

- The best solutions are often home grown
- Brainstorming solutions
- Have the *debates* before you make the recommendation
- Consulting up as well as down





Department of  
Corrective Services

# When the Data Doesn't Add Up

## What's the Moral of the Story?

- What if it were my program being evaluated?
- What if it were my workplace?
- What if I was on a community corrections order?
  
- Will the evaluation make their lives easier or more difficult?

... Thank you

