

Preface

In the 1990s the first substantial studies started to appear documenting high rates of acquired brain injury (ABI) among prison inmates. At first the figures seemed to be too high to be believable, but as further studies have been published, the full extent of the problem has become clearer. The results from these studies gives rise to the challenge of how to respond to remediate this substantial and thorny social problem. Part of the complexity arises from the mismatch between knowledge and skills across service systems that need to work together if the overrepresentation of people with ABI within the criminal justice system is going to be resolved. Traditionally, the ABI disability service sector has had limited knowledge about the working of the criminal justice system. Similarly, the criminal justice system has had limited knowledge about ABI and the disability service sector. And between the two, people with ABI, their families and broader social networks may know little about either.

The current resource represents a substantial, ground-breaking step in addressing this problem. The provision of information is a central strategy in helping people to be more knowledgeable and thereby empowered if caught up in the criminal justice system. Previously, people with ABI have had no easy access to such information, written with their particular needs in mind. Furthermore, the criminal justice system comprises a set of linked elements, each with a unique set of processes. Each element is addressed in the book, so whatever point a person might be at within the system, there is information to assist. The book will also serve as an invaluable resource for disability service providers, helping them to be better informed about the criminal justice system and thereby more effective supports and advocates alongside the person with ABI and their family. Last of all, it can also help staff within the criminal justice system to better understand and appropriately respond to the needs and challenges posed by people with ABI.

Who better to take on the task of pulling the content of this book together than the current authors? Dr Glenn Kelly and Suzanne Brown have developed a deep and extensive clinical experience of the challenges people with ABI face in their daily lives when living in the community. Deidre Griffiths, Hayley Clarke, and Ben von Einem have an intimate knowledge of the challenges faced by people with cognitive impairment (whether congenital or acquired) in navigating the criminal justice system. It is through such collaborations that the challenge of reducing the numbers of people with ABI within the criminal justice system is best addressed. I am sure this book will be an invaluable resource within Victoria and beyond. Hopefully it will be one of a growing number of initiatives that will seek to ensure that people with ABI do not end up in the criminal justice system by default, because human service systems as a whole have not been able to adequately respond to their needs.

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