

NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF – November 2016

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 17 November 2016. Key issues discussed included:

NSW Office of Liquor & Gambling Justice & Corrections Project

A presentation and resources were provided about this Project which aims to raise awareness of the extent of gambling addiction/problems amongst the prison population. They are also promoting support services available whilst in and after leaving custody. E-versions of the resources provided were circulated to Forum members after the meeting.

Inspector of Custodial Services

The Inspector gave an overview of three inquiries they are currently working on: Clothing and Bedding in Adult Detention Centres (including police cells), Management of Radicalisation in Adult Prisons and Use of Force in Juvenile Detention Centres. Whenever an inquiry commences the terms of reference is published on their [website](#) and then the resulting report once they are tabled in Parliament.

Work and Development Orders (WDOs) in Prisons

An update on the Work and Development Order Service was provided. Since 2012 \$71m in fines debt has been cleared through 60,000 WDOs. There are now approximately 2,000 WDO sponsors. All Correctional Centres (CC) are now signed up as sponsors and relevant staff have received training from Legal Aid WDO teams on the new CSNSW WDO guidelines. The standard practice is now to screen for fines debt on induction as well as other key points while in custody. Daily data exchanges with Office of State Revenue (SDR) are due to take effect in December 2016 which will greatly assist in ensuring CC staff are aware of fines debt to ensure prisoners are offered opportunities to undertake WDO activities.

Legal Practitioners Consultative Group

Information was provided to the recent meeting of this Group about the Corrective Services Better Prison Program and the new rapid build prisons being planned for Wellington, Cessnock, Emu Plains and a fourth site to be identified. In addition the protocol being developed to allow lawyers to access National Security prisoners and the range of Justice Health mental health services being provided in Correctional Centres were discussed.

Prisoner Calls to Law Access and Legal Aid

Both agencies reported significant decreases in prisoner calls since Legal Aid NSW introduced a voice prompting telephone system. Legal Aid noted a 45% decrease comparing Oct 2015 (7,000) and Oct 2016 calls to Reception (3,700). The Prisoners Legal Service also reported more relevant calls requiring advice rather than requests to be transferred to another service.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 23 February 2017.

Richard Funston

Deputy CEO, Legal Aid NSW

Chair NLAF Prisoners Forum, November 2016