

## NLAF Prisoners Forum Report to NLAF – February 2018

The NLAF Prisoners Forum met on 22 February 2018. The theme of the meeting was women in prison. A number of guest speakers addressed this issue including Kelly-Anne Stewart, Principal Advisor on Women Offenders, Corrective Services NSW; Mahashini Krishna, Commissioner on Victims Rights, Victims Services; Nadine Miles, Chief Legal Officer, Aboriginal Legal Service; Deirdre Hyslop, Miranda Project and Laurie Callinan and Marlee Bower, from the office of the Inspector of Custodial Services. Key issues discussed at the meeting included:

### **Women Prisoners in NSW – key statistics and issues**

The Mary Wade Centre, which is a remand centre, is now open. Ideally, correctional centres for women should be women only, but many are mixed, that is, they house both men and women. Currently, there are 1046 women in custody in NSW. 44% of those women are on remand. 32.5% of those women are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Women make up only 7.8% of the prisoner population in NSW. The average time spent on remand for women is 50 days, but it varies from between one to 362 days. 46% of those on remand will end up with no custodial order. The main offences committed by women include possess drugs, possession of goods suspected of being stolen, larceny/shoplift and breach parole. There are high rates of mental health interventions and notifications for women in custody. One issue raised was that mental health units within mixed correctional centres are sometimes located in with the general population – Kelly-Anne said that this issue is being looked at. Challenges include the transient nature of the remand population; movement of women across the State, the length of time that Corrective Services have to work effectively with the cohort and the complexity of the cohort.

### **Victims Services Counselling for prisoners**

Victims Services administers the Approved Counselling Service (ACS), which provides face-to-face counselling to eligible victims of violent crime. The service is one of the responses available to victims of violent crime in NSW to assist them in coping with the adverse symptoms arising as a direct result of an act of violence and to reduce the impact of the crime on their lives. As part of a partnership between Victims Services and Corrective Services NSW, prisoners who were victims of crime before they entered custody are now able to access counselling through Victims Services. Counsellors now attend a number of Correctional Centres to provide face to face counselling to prisoners. While Victims Services' counselling is generally for 22 hours maximum, there are no limits in prison because the idea is to encourage prisoners to keep seeing someone upon release. The only eligibility criterion is that the crime against the prisoner must have occurred prior to going into custody. The pilot of the counseling service has been evaluated, and a copy of the full evaluation report is available [here](#). Individuals can be referred by psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as the Services and Programs Officers (SAPOs). The service is being rolled out in all women's Correctional Centres (Mid-North Coast and Broken Hill are last to roll out), and there are plans to roll out the program to all men's correctional centres also.

### **WDOs in custody and Victims Restitution Order (VRO) Debts**

We have been advised that WDOs cannot be undertaken in relation to VRO debts in custody. The NLAF Prisoners' Forum Chair will send a letter to Corrective Services regarding this issue, as a number of members had concerns about this issue.

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is 24 May 2018.

**Camilla Pandolfini**

Chair NLAF Prisoners Forum, February 2018