

Prisoners Forum Report Quarter 2 | April to June 2021

1. Meeting of members of the Prisoners Forum

The Prisoners Forum met on Thursday 20 May 2021. Members of the following organisations participated in the meeting: the Aboriginal Legal Service, Community Legal Centres NSW, Community Restorative Centres, Corrective Services NSW, Inspector of Custodial Services, Just Reinvest, Just Connect, Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health Network, Kingsford Legal Centre, LawAccess, Legal Aid NSW, NSW Ombudsman, Revenue NSW, Weave Youth & Community Services and Youth Justice.

2. Presentation on the SBS Documentary Project “Life on the Outside” by Gia Frino ITV

Gia is a Freelance Producer with an interest in social impact and justice stories. Gia was drawn to this project through research into the impacts of livelihood on recidivism, which had recently been explored in the USA, through a program called “Homecoming”. The concept commenced as an inquiry into the number of empty rentals or spare rooms in a house and the release of prisoners.

Gia outlined the various processes of producing the documentary including access to prisoners, research and assessments, matching participants to households, social support through case workers and filming. The project runs for 100 days in which time the participant has time to concentrate on life matters such as engaging with services and undertaking any parole requirements without the worry of accommodation. The participants also receive a further 3 months of support from a case worker.

Gia highlighted that the program was about providing a secure foundation for inmates, noting that having housing on their release is a pivotal point for them to stop reoffending. Gia advised they do not film all the time and it is the pivotal moments they are trying to capture to show the audience the difficulties, barriers and discrimination endured by these people. The hope being that the community revisits how they think creating a momentum for change.

Gia confirmed they will look at five (5) inmates in this first series with three (3) already engaged, and two (2) having already shown significant progress in moving their lives forward, including employment and long-term accommodation.

3. Update on the Inmate Early Assessment Scheme

Martin Crockford from Housing Statewide Services at DCJ Housing provided an update on the scheme. Martin emphasised that the scheme was not so much about creating a new product, rather DCJ and Corrective Services working better together.

Martin advised the key changes were:

1. A dedicated phone line to DCJ Housing’s contact centre enabling inmates to complete an application over the phone. Martin advised Corrective Services divert people on parole to the number, and this can commence from three (3) months prior to their release.
2. Correctives Services now completes the case plans with Housing, two (2) to 23 days prior to release, ensuring the plan is current which enables Housing to provide greater assistance.
3. DCJ Housing is now included in the first meeting with the inmate and their Parole Officer.

Martin confirmed that since the implementation all community partners are now on board, including social housing services across the state. Martin advised to date the numbers have been lower than anticipated, however it has started to pick up now that the scheme has moved from a pilot to state-wide.

4. Update on the Free Birth Certificate for Prisoners Initiative

Brett Cunningham from Births Deaths and Marriages provided an update on the initiative. Brett provided an overview of the current data from the pilot, which is approaching the review stage. Initially 3000 birth certificates were flagged for issue between Corrective Services (2600) and Youth Justice (400).

- Corrective Services has issued 1614 birth certificates to people in custody or transition. A further 1092 remain available under the pilot with around 100 having been processed in May 2021.
- Youth Justice has issued 279 birth certificates with around 40 currently being processed, leaving about 82 available under the pilot.

A breakdown of the applications was also provided showing 100% were in financial hardship (mandatory requirement), 43% of clients were ATSI, 50% were homeless, 22% had low literacy and 3% had a disability. Of the cohort 13% were under 25 or over 65 and 7% lived regionally or remote.

5. Prisoners Legal Information Team update

The Prisoners Legal Information Team (PLIT) has provided a copy of the draft minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021. Julian Togle from Corrective Services attended the meeting and provided an update on the In Cell Tablets project. Julian advised the tablets are currently only available in John Morony and Dillwynia Correctional Centres however, in June a further 10 centres will be rolled out and this will continue as funds come on board until all Centres have them. Julian went through accessibility and restrictions and advised all staff and inmates have been trained under a super user peer model. Julian advised that there is also a tablet available to look at in the Henry Deane Building Foyer for those interested.

The PLIT is continuing to work with multi-media agencies regarding the development of promotional materials, access to Legal information in privately run Correctional Centres and the promotion of the Legal Information Portal.

6. CLSD update

The CLSD group provided information on resources for defendant AVDOs.

7. CSNSW Practitioner Group update

The CSNSW Practitioner group provided an overview of responses given to the group regarding phone incompatibility and the movement of inmates to Regional Centres. The group noted that there is an issue with the phone system to some Legal Services and whilst there is no easy fix they are happy to provide a referral pathway for resolution when issues arise. Regarding the movement of inmates to Regional Centres they advised that an application to request retention in a Metro centre must include an explanation with relevant information provided. Applications with insufficient information will be dealt with accordingly.

8. Next meeting

The next meeting of the Prisoners Forum is on **Thursday 5 August 2021, from 9:30am to 11am.**

Nadine Miles | **Chair, Prisoners Forum** | February 2021