

from Jenni Pack, former UCA Chaplain to Townsville Correctional Centre (2008-2015)

The problems that result in criminal activity are so complex that there are no simple solutions. I know that the current Judicial System attempts to put 'band-aids' on the problem, and I welcome the opportunity for many stakeholders to make submissions to the government as it tries to reduce imprisonment and recidivism.

Government could gain insight valuable in reviewing the current justice system from papers presented at IPCA (International Prison Chaplaincy Association) Conferences. See website Sydney, September 2015 for reports on transforming the justice systems in South Africa, Scandinavia, Germany. Prison Fellowship Qld can also be contacted for information on their current Restorative Justice programs in Queensland Correctional Centres.

Government support, endorsement or promotion of existing initiatives, could have a beneficial outcome in preventing crime. Addressing core issues which lead to the break down in society began being addressed in Toowoomba 13 years ago. The CityWomen initiative began with a self esteem program for teenagers girls, which has now been extended into programs being offered to both male and female teenagers in 30 State Schools, to a pregnancy support network being established, and more recently into a citywide anti-pornography drive. The initiative has been picked up recently in North Queensland, with CityWomen Townsville being launched on 13th October, 2018. Details on websites.

My experience is that some members of the public, some legal representatives, some psychologists and psychiatrists, some custodial officers and parole officers, and some other Queensland Corrective Services staff, display the attitude that prisoners are unworthy of being treated as human beings. Mistreatment just adds to prisoners' feelings of shame, and bitterness toward the justice system. In the course of providing pastoral care to inmates, both male and female, I've heard many instances of bullying and abuse of power by Correctional Services Officers and Parole Officers. Those in custody can write Blue Letters with any complaints about their treatment or the system. However, I know that many prisoners don't, because they lack the literacy skills, or don't trust in the confidentiality of the process. On the occasions that I've seen bullying/ abuse of power first hand, I've reported it, and action was taken, I believe. On the outside, I've been permitted to attend Parole Office appointments or Legal Aid meetings with ex-prisoners (sometimes even having the officers or lawyers speak to me afterwards) and all parties agreed that it was beneficial, with ex-prisoners stating that they felt as if they were listened to when I was present, but that the attitude of the officers or lawyers reverted to patronising within a short time of the meeting. One suggestion would be to enlist Advocacy Officers for QCS clients with multi faceted lifestyle issues, just as Queensland Health employ Nurse Navigators to oversee the treatment of clients with multi-faceted health issues.

From my experience of seeing women go to prison for driving without a licence, or repeatedly not paying fines, I believe there has to be a better course of action than imprisonment for some crimes. One case I encountered was where a woman was imprisoned for the above, and she told how she'd driven without a licence to get her disabled son to school because taxis or buses had not proved satisfactory to her. Her imprisonment meant her son had to go into care, and when she got out she would have nowhere to live and therefore no way of getting her son out of care.... From this I believe that types of crimes attracting a prison sentence needs to be reviewed. Community service could be a better option than incarceration in some instances, so people don't lose jobs, accommodation, custody of children, currency of licences, Medicare Cards and ID, thus increasing their risk of recidivism. If prisoners could be assisted to ensure they have a current Driver's licence,

Medicare card, ID (Birth Certificate) and as many Certificates for courses completed whilst in prison, this would go a long way toward reducing recidivism.

As well as the justice system needing to be reviewed, the length of time on remand needs to be investigated, so that prisons can warrant the title "Correctional Centre" I have seen many prisoners not being able to access courses or reintegration programmes because they have not been sentenced. When they finally get to court, they are released (time served) with nowhere to go, no job, no money or support worker. I know of prisoners being released into the community or the local QCS accommodation facility at 5pm on a Friday afternoon, on a curfew, with no furniture, food or transport, other than what an existing 'housemate' could provide. This could be avoided if courses and programs were available to all prisoners, and there were staffed half way houses, along the lines of successful initiatives in the Ipswich area in the last 20 years- probably don't still exist, due to burn out. QG property adjacent to Townsville Correctional Centre, the former Stuart State School premises would be an ideal location.

Research shows, recidivism is reduced when prisoners have some kind of spiritual experience, and acquire some life skills / education whilst incarcerated, and have a supportive environment to be released into. To this end, it is imperative that government continues to support multi-faith Chaplaincy, whether in the same format or following the initiative of other states, like New South Wales where Chaplaincy service is more regulated. Other helpful policies would be for government to facilitate Kairos Inside being offered in all Queensland Correctional Centres, as well as promoting Kairos Outside Programs, endorsing Life Skills programs both inside and outside of prisons, (Bible League, International, which has an office in Sydney has excellent material on "Following Jesus in Prison", "Preparing for Release", and" Following Jesus Outside the Prison" which was endorsed by the Administration of Townsville Women's Correctional Centre when it was published in the preface of The Prison Bible (2013)..

Sincerely,

Jenni Pack