

ANONYMOUS PUBLIC SUBMISSION QPC ENQUIRY INTO IMPRISONMENT AND RECIDIVISM

APRIL 2019

My name is [REDACTED]. I am 31 years old and I have been in prison in Queensland since I was 21.

Since coming to gaol I have received one message, emphasised daily by prison staff. That message is that I am a criminal and a prisoner and that I don't belong in society. Ten years into my fifteen year sentence that is all I have been taught. It is reinforced every day by the way I am treated and the environment I am forced to live in. When I look in the mirror I struggle to see anything other than the criminal and the prisoner that I am told that I am. The only skills I have learnt while I am in prison are how to survive in prison and be the prisoner I am expected to be.

As my parole date draws closer I am becoming more and more concerned that I will not be able to integrate into the community as I have the same low level of work skills and experience that I came in with ten years ago. I tried to study at university but I wasn't eligible for fee help and I couldn't afford to pay for it up front. I desperately want to obtain meaningful skills and qualifications but they are just not available. "If you don't like it, don't come to prison" has become the standard staff response when questioning the logic of their harmful decisions. It is as if those of us who behave and want to do the right thing are ignored in favour of those who are willing to behave badly in order to achieve their goals.

QCS prisons are reluctant to reward or even encourage good behaviour. Those who behave are often ridiculed by staff and inmates and seem to serve no purpose. One thing that has really surprised me since coming to gaol and that is the attitudes of staff on such issues as violence and drug use which from my experience are both rampant. Because of the complex nature of these problems and because they are so widespread it seems to me that the gaol staff have come to accept these serious social problems as simply another daily aspect of life in gaol. I will admit that I have become desensitised to violence and drug use going on around me. I have heard comments from officers such as "that unit is drunk in the morning and on drugs in the afternoon. The acceptance of these problems from both officers and inmates is one of the main factors that contribute to people leaving prison with worse habits than when they came in.

I have noticed that every now and again the gaol tries to crack down on these problems. They impose harsher penalties or conduct massive ramps or searches but the positive impact that these methods have are non-existent.

Prison guards regularly enforce petty rules such as no socks on the walkways, walking in single file, no coverings on windows, no excessive clothes or linens, restrictions on photos, on movies, music and many other rules, all of which they feel help to establish a sense of control over the gaol but all the while the major problems that plague many prisoners that will affect them in their lives in society continue to fester. In short, it seems as if the more tenuous the guards' control over inmates becomes, the more they clamp down on the countless little rules that serve no purpose. This just adds to the tension.

From my perspective as a prisoner, there are two factors that contribute to the ongoing violence and drug use. The first is boredom. All inmates spend long hours in cells and in most secure environments prisoners spend most of the day confined to the common area with no constructive activities to occupy their time. I have seen people actively try and start fights between other prisoners just for a bit of entertainment. Also, many of them feel they are better able to cope with the boredom if they are high or

stoned. If they were given activities or entertainment that they enjoy they are much less likely to spend their energy causing problems.

The second is incentive to change. The majority of prisoners see violence as a way of life and drugs as a source of entertainment. They simply see no reason in day to day gaol life to change their behaviour. If they could be shown that if they could get a job and curb their violence and drug use they could have better living conditions in gaol, then there is a chance that they would continue that behaviour upon release. But those conditions and incentives have to be great enough to drag them away from their old way of life. This, however, is not possible under the current system which is focused on punishing and depriving prisoners.

I was lucky enough to spend most of my sentence in privately run prisons. I moved from SQCC to BTCC a year ago and the contrast was shocking. I didn't think SQCC was a particularly good prison but they had some behavioural incentives that rewarded those doing the right thing and treated inmates like people. Most of BTCC has such poor living conditions that inmates feel like they have nothing to lose. This results in a much more hostile environment especially when having to deal with officers who control all aspects of our lives. Inmates here are really angry that we were told we could get qualifications here but when we got here we found out that there aren't any.

I can tell you from first-hand experience that many people who are getting out of prison do not have the skills and knowledge to become community members again. We learn nothing of use in prison and spend our lives in a place that reinforces how worthless we are. I just want to be able to support myself and live as a successful member of the community. I don't want to just live on the dole and be a drain on society. From what I have seen from those long term inmates who have come before me, I am not confident that I will be able to achieve my goal.

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