

I did send and apologise for the lateness of a submission to the inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism in Queensland. I have reread what I did submit with some corrections and now a few additions with less haste.

1: RELEASE: Timely advice is needed regarding prisoner releases back into community. Examples are: In his last week of incarceration, a person was released from prison and the Community Justice Group had less than 24 hours' notice. It meant he came to Mount Isa and had to be transferred to Mornington Island by air on a public holiday. It does not give much time to source options for transport and what is needed locally for him. A mother called me on a Saturday to say her son was released from Woodford Prison and was at the Bus Depot in Brisbane and did not have money to come back to her now in Townsville.

I understand that there is more to it than the surface issues we deal with and indicate and here. We don't always have all the facts as well. However, this highlights the need for greater local input into transition plans surrounding prisoner release. Ideally, there would be a week or two within the transitional plan where appropriate placement and support options are explored, particularly key re-offending risk factors such as the realities around family and accommodation circumstances. Ideally, being in their town where they will live for a week or more in preparation for reintegration into the community and family life would be best from our standpoint.

From our experience, reintegration planning needs to consider: Mental health; Centrelink; work or pre-employment issues; fines to be faced; licences and identification documents; DV awareness, especially of possible breaches that may be incurred; NDIS provider; financial issues and bank debts; gambling addictions – pokies, cards & betting; the cycle of poverty; programmes to support release and normalisation of the new family life; Persons being released without any prior or concurrent exploration of these issues are most certainly at risk, including the development of cyclical behaviours contributing to re-offending and recidivism.

Reintegration plans also need to be shared more broadly (as appropriate) with relevant support agencies beyond Probation & Parole. Local Probation & Parole staff often have good relationships with local support agencies, relying on them or referring to services such as the Community Justice Group provide as the prime mechanisms in the support of, or services offered to, offenders. Sharing of information is critically important to help the individual successfully emerge back into society in a pro-social manner. Locally there is a good relationship with the Probation and Parole Office, but I think that there needs to be a more structured way this is enabled and not dependent on the good will and support of local officials.

Most of these issues are also important in dealing with offenders in Court who are immediately released into the community and serve their sentence in a suspended manner. Disappointingly at times, there is a temptation to overlook substantive issues, including those which may not have contributed to the original terms of incarceration, but emerge later as very real risk factors in re-offending. Some of the issues above, as well as others below here, are important factors for addressing recidivism.

A suggested support component is the need for a Men's Place in Mount Isa and surrounding communities. With no place for men to go when in trouble, as well as on release, there is an important and high need to establish specific places upon release or even pre-release, as well as when men are facing difficult issues at home. A well organised house that has the capacity to deal with the issues men are confronted with is an urgent need. Inequity in such arrangements, a place for women but not for men, does not decrease the occurrence of DFV or show the need for other supports for men with offending patterns. There is also a negative or misguided stigma in how people may attempt to self-manage behaviour, such as placing themselves at risk by sleeping rough and drinking in the local riverbed. Unfortunately, there are significantly disproportionately fewer supports or placement options for men in need. This often leads to the creation of additional issues such as family overcrowding in public housing, or other social tensions.

The issue of anger in men is also important. There seems to be at least a murder a week in Queensland, apart from any DFV offences. We can change legislation all we like but the underlying issue of anger in men needs addressing

quickly. Whether it stems from: loss of identity as a male, broken family relationships from childhood, appropriate employment available, dealing with the rise in the status of women, lack of any male role models when growing up, men need support to enable them to be productive in our society with prospects of future long term employment. The resultant issues also from 'Working With Children Checks', and after many years of incident free life, as well as little education and poor documentation on release in general, all make it very difficult to sustain or even gain meaningful employment.

2: MENTAL HEALTH:

There are a number of studies that indicate that a high number of people imprisoned are there because of mental health issues. Some suggest 50% but a consensus suggests 30%. Most it seems would be undiagnosed. Added to this is the issue of client confidentiality and access to the reality of their health records. NDIS offers an opportunity to recover some reality while in prison. It means that services could then work with them when released and share in the reality of the lives of the men they are dealing with.

It would seem that with the huge numbers in prison at present that this would compound a person's mental health issues with less personal space available and few options for diagnosis and treatment to begin.

3: LOCAL ISSUES:

- a) Youth DFV is becoming a much bigger issue. The number of young people, under 18 years of age, in relationships with DV issues is now up to 15% of the local DFV High Risk Team workload. This is higher when you also add young girls with men over the age of 18 years.
- b) There is also the issue of young girls being promised to older men in Traditional Customs. This applies particularly to women and men from the Northern Territory. We have an increasing number of people coming to Mount Isa for varying reasons: Alcohol and drug access, ease of access to facilities, away from Centrelink cards,
- c) Pornography that leads to Violence has been identified as another issue not dealt with in people's lives. This is a much wider issue than a local issue. It comprises attitudinal and behavioural issues that are not properly addressed nor understood but yet relevant to particular types of offending. Living in today's highly sexual world, this needs to be addressed.
- d) Unlicensed driving and drink driving have been identified as pointers to eventual DV issues and issues in family life. Victoria has statistics on this and I have been given some Youth Justice material to back this up.
- e) Centrelink payments: People have the ability to nominate the days they want to receive unemployment of other benefit payments. This means groups of people can coordinate individual payments to continue negative patterns of combined alcohol and drug consumption. The previous system of 'one Thursday a fortnight' for all payments, meant that binges occurred, but that during this time significant fortnightly periods were free from alcohol and this enabled services dealing with consumption and their health issues to have a more appropriate way of supporting people addicted. Personal choice and individual rights are acknowledged, but there is currently minimal 'alcohol free' space in some people's lives to help with recidivism and health issues.
- f) Most issues have been identified as having a beginning in the breakdown of their family life. The local High Risk Team for DV and the recently opened 'Community Connect' for youth have both identified this as the number one issue. For most men there has been little male role modelling and opportunity for men to be supported in a parenting role. The rise of female rights and roles is undoubtedly positive, but equally important is examining societal male roles as well and is indicated above. Increasingly, parenting programmes and offerings for fathers' and Men's Sheds, are important strategies in helping men come to grips with contemporary realities.
- g) The costs involved in transporting prisoners to jail in Townsville, or Mareeba, by QPS and then having them come back to Court in Mount Isa, is enormous. Some local figures advanced by QPS are \$30,000 for the flight from Mount Isa to Townsville for people incarcerated.

- h) The costs for running a low risk incarceration facility in Mount Isa should be investigated as a high priority. It has been suggested that this would be much lower cost facility to run than placing a good number of people in high risk facilities on the Coast.
- i) With jail facilities being located on the Coast it means that there is little access for family to have an ongoing relationship, apart from the phone. There is also little opportunity for those who work with them in North West Queensland to be in touch and follow through as well as be involved in any release plans.
- j) There are three Magistrates who work in the North West at any one time. One permanently based in Mount Isa, another circuiting (or by video link) 1 day a week for Mount Isa DV Court, and thirdly, a Magistrate circuiting each month to Lower Gulf centres (Gulf Magistrates shared a three month rotation schedule). I would suggest we could obtain better results by placing two Magistrates permanently at Mount Isa to service the region. A preferable model would be one male, one female. This would allow for both male and female cultural issues to be dealt with appropriately. There is a growing influence by culture through an increasing number of Northern Territory persons appearing in the Queensland Court of Mount Isa. Consistency is also needed regarding Gulf Court magistrates and clients, which could also be achieved through a two Magistrate model in Mount Isa.
- k) The Murri Men's and Murri Women's Groups run here in conjunction with Murri Court were reviewed by James Cook University here about five years ago. The results of that review showed that roughly one third never offended again, one third reoffended two or three times and one third were heading to be habitual offenders. It points to the need for more specialised support for some men and women to prevent long term incarceration. This is a real need to reduce the numbers who eventually serve long term sentences.
- l) If education is the key to future success, employment and less incarceration, then the high number of youth not enrolled in any school becomes an important issue. In 2016 QPS in Mount Isa found at least 160 youth were not enrolled in any educational institute. At the time Ed Queensland refused to see it as there issue. In 2019 QPS established 'Community Connect' to enable the various State Government agencies to co-locate and work together on important issues such as this as well as youth crime in general.
- m) Diversion from custody seems to work well with Diversion Centres being established after 'The Black Deaths In Custody Report' for alcohol related issues. This gave QPS a genuine alternative instead of imprisonment and Court. There could be other opportunities where the Law could be extended to cover occurrences that could reduce QPS arrests.
- n) Victims of Crime are seemingly being covered minimally here. Issues which need attention are more to do with face to face meetings and resolution.
- o) There is a need to offer great websites with supporting documentation and educational materials for specific needs in this area, e.g., pre-release plans, post-release supports and stories, facts and figures on incarceration, Murri Court ideas, - you name it, we could do with being in touch with other places and even countries. Ideas that could stimulate us in remote places as well as help the smaller agencies to gain more traction.

Thank you for being able to offer some ideas.

Mick Lowcock

