

JEANETTE CUPITT
SENIOR EDUCATION OFFICER
LITHGOW CORRECTIONAL CENTRE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIVE SERVICES
NEW SOUTH WALES

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN A MAXIMUM SECURITY
CENTRE

In my presentation on Vocational Programs in a Maximum Security Centre I will be giving you a breakdown of our inmate population, the challenges and constraints that we experience and how we have gone about overcoming these with the introduction of the Certificate in Vocational Education and Training.

To conclude a short video of the students work and achievements will be shown.

Lithgow Correctional Centre is a 337 bed maximum security facility for sentenced male inmates and is a two and a half hour drive west of Sydney.

The centre is divided into a number of areas for security reasons. An interesting new development is our aged care unit.

A significant number of inmates entering our institution have left secondary school early, have never sort employment or have few employment skills and do not have defined goals. They have little or no self esteem and motivation, and are displaying anger in regard to their sentence, whilst some experience difficulty in settling into their new environment.

Our inmates fall into 3 main categories :

1. Long term – those people serving up to 10 years plus and remaining in a maximum centre for 5 years plus.
2. Medium term – those people serving 3 to 10 years.
3. Short term – those people serving up to 3 years due to breach of parole, awaiting court decisions or record of escape.

Approximately 30% of these people are Aboriginal and 15% are from non English speaking backgrounds.

In the delivery of vocational programs we experience a number of challenges and constraints.

With security being the number one concern in a maximum security centre, programs are restricted due to the types of resources required and the availability of suitable areas for program delivery.

Before a program is approved a list of resources is required and approval given for purchase and entry into the centre, for example, areas of Horticulture are restricted due to tools, machinery, chemicals and plant types. Any tool or machinery that is deemed for use as a weapon or aid in an escape will not be approved.

Availability of overseers in restricted areas is another area of constraint that impacts on program delivery. This can result in no access to the area and creates a problem in the continuity of on the job training.

Custodial staff shortages result in frequent unplanned lockdowns making the time frame for programs difficult.

Inmate access is restricted with lockdowns on alternate Mondays, Protection Unit has access one day per week and three days access for the mainstream population.

Industry hours from 8.30am to 1.30pm restrict some inmates from attending programs as they rely heavily on bonus money to support themselves. Program access times are 9.00am to 11.45am and 1.15pm to 2.45pm.

In introducing the Vocational Certificate into our system the inmates can benefit in number of ways:

They have the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge through the provision of a flexible framework.

All participants are able to identify their existing skills, strengths and weaknesses.

They are able to explore a range of interests with the introduction of one or more industry areas or vocations.

It assist the individual in moving towards developing and defining vocational goals.

It provides greater opportunities for the development of general and vocational skills.

It enables the development of skills that are relevant to work or will complement or lead to further study.

At present in Lithgow Corrective Services Industries (CSI) operates two workshops . These workshops have limited training opportunities and in reality no prospect of employment on the outside.

The Timber Workshop produces bookcases, cupboards and desks made from pre laminated panelling. The production process will not support on the job training in areas of shop fitting or cabinet making.

The two Textile Workshops produce a number of items for the public hospital system, inmates' greens and shirts for prison officers. Inmates are trained on an assembly line and rarely trained in seeing an article through from start to finish.

With courses such as Machine Techniques and Clothing Production only being available at a few selected TAFE colleges in NSW training is not available at Lithgow. Also employment prospects are very limited in the Clothing and Footwear Industry with a number of companies going off shore.

To develop and implement successful vocational programs we need to look outside the CSI workshop square. We have looked at areas of Horticulture and with our grounds comprising of grass and concrete we have taken the modules involving Turf Care and Maintenance and linked in a module in Small Motor Maintenance. This is offered to those inmates employed in the area of Ground Maintenance. For those inmates who are employed as cleaners in the centre modules from the Asset Maintenance Training Package are offered relating to all aspects of cleaning that are required in the centre. Painting and Decorating is offered to those employed in Building Maintenance. The video will show details of this course. With the assistance of the Manager of Industries we are endeavouring to initiate these courses as a condition of employment in these three areas. To gain maximum benefit for medium and long term inmates we have focused on areas of employment in the various centres down through the levels of classification for pathway progression with the possibility of Traineeships and New Apprenticeships being on offer at these centres.

It is also important to check that a person with a prison record can be employed in these areas on the outside. Today a large percentage of employment areas require a security check to be carried out prior to commencement of employment.

Certificate 1 in Vocational Education and Training requires 2 Generic Modules to be completed. Workplace Communications and Job Seeking Skills have been chosen as they form core modules in most TAFE courses and are integrated into our Pre-release Program. 3 other Generic Modules are offered, these are Writing Skills for Work, First Aid and OH&S.

There are 7 endorsed Mayer Key Competencies with 3 levels in each, these are linked to both the Generic and Industry Specific Components. Certificate 1 must align with 4 Key Competencies at any level.

The student is required to complete 3 Industry Specific recognised modules or units of competence.

For inmates serving a short term this Certificate articulates into traineeships and specific vocational fields.

For those serving medium and long terms the Industry Specific Components have been customised to meet the needs of our centre with the Key Competencies and Generic Components being transferable from centre to centre.

The Industry Specific Components that we have chosen fall into the areas of Building and Ground Maintenance. Areas of focus are Painting and Decorating, Turf Care and Cleaning.

In the delivery we have commenced with the Industry Specific Components to enable students to experience a non threatening learning environment where they are able to experiment and develop their strengths and weaknesses and begin to enjoy learning as a total new experience. At this stage we introduce them to a more formal learning environment to commence on Generic Components.

For those people whose interests lie in the Arts we conduct sessions in Pottery, Art and Leathercraft. Using all of these available resources we are currently putting together a package using modules from the Certificate 4 in Fine Arts. This will give students an entry into TAFE or possibly University in a Fine Arts course during Works Release or once on release.

Each student will be required to complete a portfolio of their work and will be encouraged to commence a course in Small Business Management.

In choosing these vocational areas we believe that all inmates are being given equal opportunities regardless of their background or culture.

Please enjoy our video presentation.