

EDUCATION IN A SMALL JURISDICTION

The Tasmanian Setting

Presenter: Sally Dabner

The Mission of the Tasmanian Prison Service is to contribute to a safer Tasmania by ensuring the safe secure containment of inmates and providing them with opportunities for rehabilitation and personal development.

The Mission Statement for Education and Training is to empower offenders to reach their potential as responsible citizens by promoting a culture which encourages learning, and providing appropriate vocational education and training programs .

It is within these frameworks that we have developed and successfully implemented educational programs.

Profile

The Tasmanian Prison System caters annually for 1300 prisoners with a daily average of 370 in custody. The main prison complex is located at Risdon, 16 kilometres from the centre of Hobart. It has a maximum security facility [210 inmates], a medium security unit [28 inmates] and a womens unit [17 inmates and until recently 2 babies]. The prison farm is located 35-45 minutes away and caters for up to 45 inmates at any one time. The Hobart Remand Centre, [commissioned in January 1999], houses 40 with a further 20 at Launceston Remand Centre. The permanent residents of the Correctional Health Facility is 20 males.

This statistical analysis highlights the Tasmanian situation.

Current number of prisoners [375-380 daily]

Gender/ATSI breakdown

- 95% male, 5% female
- Approximately 11% of current prisoners are Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander

Age Breakdown

- Average age: 32 years (same for male and female)
- Approximately 40% of people currently in custody are aged 18-27 yrs
- Less than 5% are aged 60 or over
- Oldest prisoner currently in custody is 87 years of age

Education/employment background

- Less than 1% of current prisoners indicated upon entry to prison that they were tertiary qualified
- About 10% indicated upon entry that their highest education level had been matriculation
- About 30% indicated that they had gone as far as Year 10, and a further 20% indicated that their highest level of education had been Year 9
- Almost 50% of current prisoners indicated upon entry that they were unemployed prior to coming into custody. Almost 25% indicated that they had been employed, with the remaining prisoners falling into categories such as “pensioner” and “student”, or “no

Prior imprisonment

(note that “imprisonment” is a period in custody, which could be a matter of days [fine default; remand] or considerably longer).

- About 35% of current prisoners are here for the first time.

Other “prior” imprisonment data is as follows:

- 1-2 prior imprisonments: 25% of current prisoners
- 3-4 prior imprisonments: 10% of current prisoners
- 5-10 prior imprisonments: 15% of current prisoners
- more than 10 prior imprisonments: 5%
- (no data available: 10%)

The security ratings:

- Maximum Security 55%
- Medium Security 15%
- Minimum Security 30%

Prisoners released 2000-2001

- Total: 1389 people released from custody
- Average time spent in custody (all prisoners, sentenced/remand): 102 days. *This average (102 days) is the highest annual average length of stay in the last decade.*

Management

The last 18 months have seen changes in the management structure, personnel and direction brought on by the death in custody late in 1999/early 2000 of 5 inmates, a number of escapes, a coronial inquiry and an ombudsman's report. These have impacted on the manner in which services have been provided and resources allocated. These crises have resulted in two significant outcomes - the transfer of our Prison Hospital from Justice and Industrial Relations to Health and Human Services, and the Tasmanian Government's decision to build a new prison [scheduled for completion in 2006].

The ongoing commitment of the TAFE sessional teachers, and other trainers and teachers involved in the program is excellent. This wide network includes not only TAFE Tasmania, but Tasmania's Senior Secondary Colleges, the University of Tasmania, the nationally accredited Wooden Boat Building School and Seafood Training Tasmania, [on whose steering committee we have been involved in profiling a literacy based CD]. The strong support from TAFE Tasmania which funds the ALBE program is noted as this .5FTE provides much needed addition to the \$75,000.00 provided by Corrective Services and which covers costs for sessional teachers salaries, materials and equipment.

I will now share with you some of the very positive features of what and how we meet the mandate expected of us.

The Program

The program has a strong VET focus. Computer Studies, Art, Craft and Design, Catering Operations and the Forklift, Chainsaw and Tractor Driving licences delivered at the prison's farm are special features. Also offered are TCE [Tasmanian Certificate of Education] subjects including Maths, Psychology, Sociology, Health Studies and English, and University

studies. In addition community organisations such as Playback Theatre and Prison Fellowship provide musical and debating experiences.

Volunteers

In this the International Year of Volunteers we celebrated the long-term and ongoing commitment of seven tutors from Prison Fellowship and the University of Tasmania who provided much appreciated services in the areas of craft and literacy. Although the University of Tasmania program did not eventuate in 2001, for the past 3 years we have offered teaching placements to adult students in the Bachelor of Adult and Vocational Education degree. Three recently graduated, and one has conducted research which has supported our understanding of learning particularly in a prison environment. Their involvement has been vital to ensuring that we never forget who are our 'clients'. We are currently working with the Departments of Law and Sociology staff and mature aged students who will be researching post-release employment attitudes and opportunities.

Peer Tutor Program

Because we are a small team whose role is to organise, coordinate and support inmates, we rely very much on those inmates who are selected [or choose] to be peer tutors. The group assists mainly with literacy and maths, and with assessment in some of the vocational and computer studies courses.

Special Projects

Many of our courses are conducted through special projects planned, implemented and evaluated. We have found that this method of delivery has a defined purpose and end-product whilst at the same time maximising the learning process for inmates. It is easy for teachers to work with inmates and apply the adult learning principles with which we are all so familiar. In this way too we can so easily engage with and keep the commitment of custodial staff on whom we rely as support personnel. We also acknowledge the diversity of teachers' skills and inmates responsiveness. It is an exciting way of delivery.

Over the past 12 months special projects have included:

Diploma of Art, Craft and Design - TAFE
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Offered to both protection and mainstream inmates were modules especially selected by myself, the teaching team and the Program Manager from TAFE. These included silk screen printing, art history, painting and drawing. The outcomes included paintings, drawings, magnificent T-shirts and table mats. Although not accredited, Ceramics was also offered as part of the project and items created were of an exceptional standard.

One of the teachers, Lynne O'Malley, was required to present a project paper to her university teachers. The paper highlighted the practical difficulties with which we are all familiar - waiting at the gate, lack of materials, late arrivals to and early departures from classes, interruptions to classes, having to act as behaviour expert, [as well as a teacher], having to quickly assess a group and the individuals in it]. Her summary is an important contribution to our operations and understanding of a visiting teacher's role.

"During the project I not only used my teaching expertise, I also had to use my intuition, life experiences and motherly instincts. The project as a whole, as I view it, was successful, because it created some positive thinking, patience, and the two main things essential in my

opinion for these students, confidence and self esteem boosts. It was also, in my view, a good idea to have three teachers cooperating together and culminating in the assessment. This enabled students to experience different personalities, strategies and skills which they will encounter on the outside.”

The inmates were very honest and here are some of their comments.

“As this course was the first one I am of the opinion that a lot of time and effort was put into planning it. I believe this as the drop off rate was very low and usually they had other commitments. I would be in line to sign up again as I loved and enjoyed all the different mediums even though I new what I liked but was converted. This was one of the best courses that I have ever attended”.

“Organisation was reasonably good taking into account the circumstances and environment. Bonding between students and students/teachers was very good. A personal difficulty was not being able to be in two places at one time. I didn’t feel there was enough time for the various topics and demands for tutors’ attention meant that some individuals were left behind at times. I enjoyed the course and it gave me an appetite to learn more about art, but I would be particularly interested in using computers and associated technology in the drawing field. Thanks to all concerned”.

From my perspective there is a real difference in the manner in which inmates now view the teaching of the ‘Arts’ and its place in formally accredited training and employment prospects [even though, as a group, they have always enjoyed their creative pursuits]. Their evaluation has given us as educators a pathway to 2002!

The project is ongoing but in the first half of the year our target was an Exhibition held in a community centre during Adult Learners Week. Entitled “Framed!” it was opened by the Minister for Justice & Industrial Relations [Dr Peter Patmore] and attracted 200 people over its 12 day showing in August - September.

Horticulture

Horticulture has always been a strong favourite with inmates. Two projects at the Womens Unit enabled not only the accreditation of competencies but an ongoing therapeutic program for those disturbed by the reality of long sentences. We shared publicity with Malawa in an edition of Gardening Australia’s “Organic Garden” magazine. A further project was conducted at our medium security prison and this is currently maintained by an interested group of inmates.

Catering Operations

New staff have joined the prison service as a Catering Officer and Custodial Officer. With their support and commitment training is delivered by TAFE Tasmania’s Drysdale Institute staff and we have finally been able to implement a formal training package in an area where job prospects in the future are high.

Centenary of Federation

Approval was given in 2000 to investigate possibilities for the Justice Department’s Centenary of Federation Project[s]. After a series of unrelated circumstances we were

approved to undertake what we called our “Boat Project” - the construction of a 15' [3.5m] dinghy made from Huon pine and other Tasmanian woods. For all of July and two weeks of August 2001, seven inmates [full-time] built the boat. This exemplary training project involved teachers from the internationally acclaimed Wooden Boat Building School located at Franklin in southern Tasmania. The photos detail the learning process and another successful partnership with a training provider. The boat was named and blessed by one of our prison chaplains and formally launched in August. It was the feature of “Framed!” and is now on public exhibition till June 2002 in a small gallery at the Port Arthur Historic Site. We named it “The Walter Paisley” after a notorious young offender turned adult criminal whose career ended up with him being one of Tasmania’s most endeared and talented shipbuilders. It is important to make the connections between past and present and this project has proven to be a wonderful example of what can be done.

Literacy through Cooking

Introduced by a TAFE sessional teacher in response to Chloe Dyson’s Report, this has proven very successful, particularly with those inmates who were able to understand the connections between reading and writing recepies and following instructions and eating the products!!

We enrolled them in Certificate I in Vocational Access - ALBE. The course was designed to enhance a number of key lifeskills through the medium of cooking. The key lifeskills included written and oral communication skills, OH&S, following instructions, higher order thinking skills, time management, working with others, initiative, attitude and basic nutrition.

Prior to the course commencing each participant was involved in the planning of food and course content. The sessions encompassed preparing and cooking different foods, writing out recipes, learning basic nutrition and analysing the food eaten in terms of nutritional value.

On Site

2000 - 2001 has seen us recommend and approve 10 inmates to study at TAFE or University on site. Successful outcomes have included 2 full-time employment placements. Two inmates who began university studies on the inside [1998-99] will graduate this year.

Recent Initiatives

We have [re]-introduced a formal Pre-release Program and Induction Program which have been able to be accredited through TAFE Tasmania and funded through special "Youth at Risk" funds from ANTA. In addition we have a partnership with the Hobart City Council's JPET workers.

New Initiatives - 2002

New initiatives which may be explored in 2002 include a partnership with the National Trust to maintain/restore colonial buildings and grounds of National Trust properties, accreditation for involvement in community projects [eg Rotary/Lions Clubs activities], post-release employment through pathways with Employment Agencies and work towards Certificate IV accreditation for peer tutors.

Inclusion

The inclusion of Education staff in Classification, Sentence Planning and Case Management, Pre-release programs [group and individual], and writing reports for the Parole Board are features which make for best practice. The actual number of inmates eligible for education is

known to Education staff, and have we believe we an exemplary commitment to assisting them to develop and realistically reach goals they may never have believed possible.

Evaluation

Evaluation has been integral to the Program. In 1993 and 1997 formal evaluations were carried out by Departmental and TAFE staff. In 2000 and 2001 our program was the subject of adult university students' degree and Honours projects. Through this work, carried out as 'action research', we have been able to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in learning in a prison environment.

Records

The impact of information technology has enabled us to keep vital and detailed records of participation both for individual inmates and as a system, in line with the current national data collection standards and requirements.

Conclusion

I believe ours is an exemplary program. Its credibility has been acknowledged in Tasmania three times since 1995- by being the recipient of the Outstanding Program for Adult Learners Week - 1996, 1999 and 2001.

Sally Dabner has worked in the Tasmanian Prison Services for almost 10 years. She has been responsible for the development and ongoing implementation of the Education and Training Program for Tasmanian prisoners. She is passionate about the role which has seen the Program awarded the state's Adult Learners Week "Outstanding Program Award" on three occasions since 1996.

Sally is a life member of IFEPS [IFECSA] and has an ongoing commitment to deal not only with the practicalities of prisoner education, but the philosophical and ethical issues which are inherent in the manner in which we deliver educational services to inmates.. She is a keen promoter of research at state, national and international levels. Sally coordinated and chaired the IFEPS Conference in Hobart in 1995.

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