



# The Learning Chronicles

*The newsletter of the Australasian Corrections Education Association*  
*Edition 2 March 2021*

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## Welcome

***Helen Farley, International Representative***

Welcome to the second edition of The Learning Chronicles, the newsletter of the Australasian Corrections Education Association. The purpose of the newsletter is to recognise the great work of the many educators within corrections who everyday work with prisoners to help them reimagine their lives and those of their family post-release. It will also be a place where we can let you know of happenings within corrections within Australasia but most importantly, it is a place where you can have your say, ask questions and celebrate your successes.



We look forward to hearing your comments, reading your contributions, and asking your questions. At the end of the newsletter, we'll let you know how you can contribute. In the meantime, we hope there is something of use to you in these pages.

## ACEA President's message

***Ron Wilson, ACEA President***

Welcome to the first ACEA newsletter for 2021!

I hope that everyone had an enjoyable time over the festive period, connecting with friends and families in ways we have not been able to do for many months.

2020 will be marked in our calendars and memories as a year of extraordinary challenges. The experiences of coping with lockdowns at home and at work, dealing with keeping safe and looking after family and friends challenged many of our work, family and community priorities.

Many will say that we, in Australasia, fared so much more comfortably than our colleagues in the U.K., Europe and the U.S., however, we all share the challenges as COVID 19 impacted on our students in adult and youth justice settings.



Once again, corrections educators in Australasia brought their capacity to be innovative and resourceful to the fore, to ensure the best possible service can be provided given the circumstances. This resourcefulness and innovation will be needed as we cope with new and emerging COVID challenges in 2021.

The ACEA Executive is exploring ways to strengthen our contact with our international colleagues; to share new strategies, revisit old approaches that may have become more relevant, and examine the opportunities that new technologies bring to enhance the incarcerated student learning experience.

I thank all of ACEA Executive and Advisory Council members for their guidance and leadership in 2020. The executive is delighted to welcome our new secretary appointed at the 2020 AGM. Stephen Seymour brings a wealth of knowledge, contacts and corrections education experience into the executive. Stephen's appointment lessened the significant load carried by Paul Barnes who doubled up in the secretary and treasurer's roles for most of 2020. The Executive greatly appreciated Paul's extraordinary work and professionalism in taking on both these roles and the significant achievement in leading the revamping the ACEA website. I know Paul is now keen to focus on the Treasurer role.

Best wishes as we approach a new year which carries some degree of certainty but also many opportunities for rethinking the ways we teach and train our students.

Ron Wilson  
President ACEA

## From the Treasurer ...

***Paul Barnes, ACEA Treasurer***

### ACEA website update

The hard launch of the ACEA website formally coincided with the first virtual ACEA AGM and included ACEA's first webinar conducted by Professor Emma Hughes and hosted by Dr Marietta Martinovic. As we progress through 2021, the ACEA website will be populated regularly with new content including regular webinars and this activity will be undertaken by the Information and Content Representative.

In the meantime, the ACEA Executive Committee is now seeking a person to fill the Information and Content Officer position that was recently endorsed at the ACEA AGM. The ACEA Executive Committee would formally like to invite nominations for the office bearer position. If you or you know of someone who would be willing to work in the position, please have them submit their nomination in writing which includes a seconder and send to the [secretary@acea.org.au](mailto:secretary@acea.org.au). All parties to the nomination must be financial members.

All members are now able to contact officer bearers directly through the newly created email accounts and the emails accounts are as follows:

Dr Ron Wilson PSM  
[president@acea.org.au](mailto:president@acea.org.au)

Stephen Seymour  
[secretary@acea.org.au](mailto:secretary@acea.org.au)



Paul Barnes  
[treasurer@acea.org.au](mailto:treasurer@acea.org.au)

Helen Farley  
[international@acea.org.au](mailto:international@acea.org.au)

Stavroola Anderson  
[youthjustice@acea.org.au](mailto:youthjustice@acea.org.au)

### Calling all sponsors ...

ACEA is seeking suitable sponsors to contribute financially to the development of the association. If you know of a potential sponsor who would be willing to support the work undertaken by ACEA, please contact the [treasurer@acea.org.au](mailto:treasurer@acea.org.au).

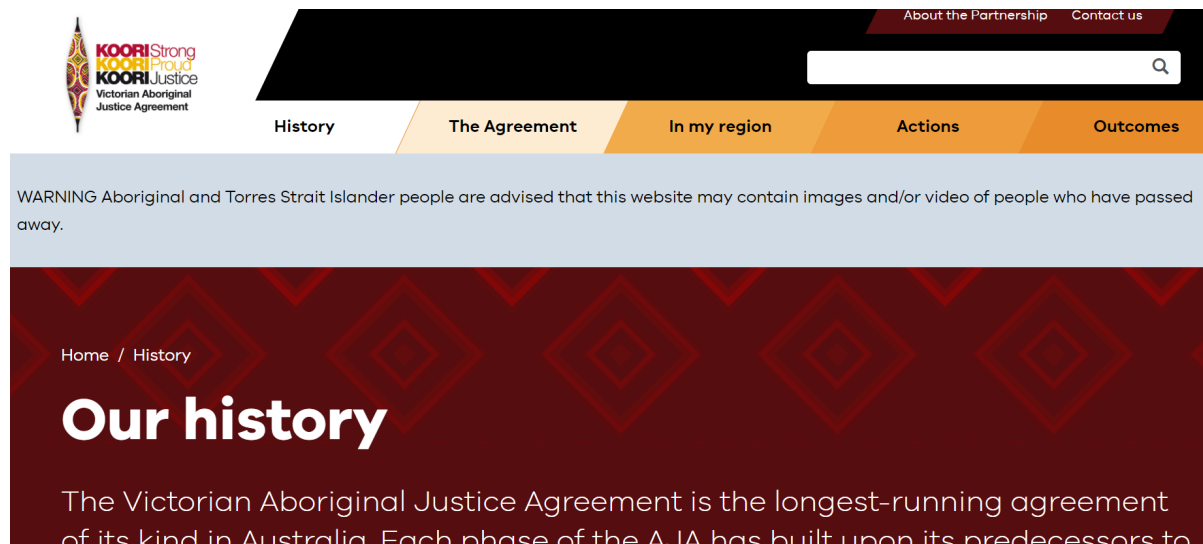
Paul Barnes  
Treasurer ACEA

### A useful link

#### ***Ron Wilson, ACEA President***

The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) is the longest-running agreement of its kind in Australia. Each phase of the AJA has built upon its predecessors to further improve justice programs and services for Aboriginal people.

The link is here: <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/our-history>





## Advance notice of ACEA webinars

***Stephen Seymour, ACEA Secretary***

ACEA, in partnership with the University of Southern Queensland and USQ College will, over the next 6 months, be uploading a series of webinars.

We will post news on content and date/times to you when the webinar bookings go live. So, keep a look out for these news alerts.

These free webinars will share some of the unique characteristics of developing and delivering training and education in corrections contexts.

And how they lead to student successes during and beyond their studies, as well as some case studies of good practice and feedback.



## The positive social and economic impacts of offering higher education in the prison environment

***Marietta Martinovic, ACEA Research Officer***

### Introduction

The provision of prison-based education programs has long been a contentious issue. As with many elements of the criminal justice system, it is often reflective of the socio-political values held at a given point in time. The introduction of more stringent bail, parole and sentencing laws following a number of high-profile incidents in Victoria has resulted in an increase in the state's prison population (Boreham, 2017; Parliament of Victoria, 2013; State of Victoria, 2019). With the ever-increasing rates of incarceration there needs to be a sustainable solution.

Numerous studies demonstrate the positive and long-lasting effects of providing higher education in correctional environments. This paper aims to examine these effects by first considering the impact of offering higher education on rates of recidivism and post-release employment. Following from this, the relationships between education, student self-perception and prison safety are explored. Finally, an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of providing education in correctional settings is presented. Overall, the argument is made that providing higher education in correctional settings is a sustainable approach to creating safer prisons, and safer communities.



### Findings

**Participation in prison-based education is linked with reduced recidivism rates, and an increase in post-release employment outcomes.** Based on the findings of high-quality rigorous studies including

Davis et al's (2013) report, incarcerated individuals who participate in education programs are 43 per cent less likely to reoffend than those who did not. The researchers also found that for incarcerated individuals who had participated in either academic or vocational education, the likelihood of obtaining post-release employment was 13 percent higher than for those who had not. Looking specifically at vocational programs, the chances of obtaining post-release employment were 28 per cent higher than individuals who had not participated in these programs. Cho and Tyler (2010) found academic educational programs to be even more effective than vocational or life skills programs at reducing recidivism.

An inverse relationship exists between educational level and recidivism rate (Prison Studies Project, 2020). For example, a report by the American Correctional Association revealed that in Indiana, the recidivism rate for GED or high school graduates (Australian Year 12 equivalent) was 20 per cent lower than that of the general prison population (Prison Studies Project, 2020). More specifically, a study conducted in Western Australia found that the more education an incarcerated individual completed, the less likely they were to be re-incarcerated (Giles, 2016). Additionally, with each successfully completed class/subject, incarcerated students became less likely to increase the seriousness of their offences, and less likely to access unemployment benefits (Giles, 2016). A study of incarcerated individuals in Minnesota similarly found a positive correlation between the completion of a post-secondary degree in prison and higher earnings, as well as more labour hours available to these individuals (Oakford, et al., 2019). The researchers predict state savings of up to \$365.8 million per year, as individuals leave prison with the necessary skills and qualifications to find stable, well-paying employment, and recidivism rates decline (Oakford et al., 2019).

The intergenerational effects of education should not be discounted when assessing the benefits of prison-based education. The provision of tertiary education in prison provides a vital opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration, as a parent's completion of tertiary education increases the likelihood of their children doing so also (Vera Institute of Justice, 2017). This fact is of equal, if not more, importance to incarcerated persons who are also parents.

**Through improvements in student self-perception, the provision of higher education creates a safer and more manageable prison environment.** According to Martinovic and Liddell (2019, p. 45), engagement in education programs provides an opportunity for students to 'minimise the negative impacts of their incarceration.' Baranger et al. (2018, p. 490) found that there was a correlation between participation in higher education and 'reduction in criminogenic attitudes and behaviours' as well as improvements in self-perception and self-esteem. Fine et al. (2001) also report that prison staff documented positive changes to the prison environment. Staff reported that students were 'more likely to be respectful and rule-compliant' (cited in Baranger et al., 2018, p. 493).

Baranger et al. (2018, p. 502) conducted a series of interviews with students and university staff of the Boston University's Prison Education Program. This study found that there were fewer fights reported for students who had otherwise fought regularly. Patricia, an incarcerated student, explained that prior to her engagement with higher education courses, she was constantly getting into trouble while incarcerated. She stated that while studying, she did still have small disciplinary issues, but that they were 'nothing like before' and that her 'behaviour improved dramatically.'

Similarly, Sean, an incarcerated Open University (OU) student credits correctional education for his disinterest in prison drug-culture by keeping him focused and motivated (Hughes, 2013, p. 86). He states:

Education's kept me motivated, kept me off drugs and kept me off everything else...but the education has kept me busy and kept me occupied... where people will be bored and that and they'll start smoking heroin or whatever and they'll just get stoned.

**The sense of belonging to a cohort other than 'prisoner,' that education creates for students has a compounding effect on increasing prison safety.** According to the Vera Institute of Justice (2017) prisons that provide tertiary education programs have fewer violent incidents, creating safer conditions for both staff and incarcerated individuals. An education director in New York State reported a decline in disciplinary infractions of his students over the course of the semester, while another director described how incarcerated students policed themselves out of concern that they would otherwise lose access to their programs (Prison Studies Project, 2020). A survey conducted in the 1990s in an Indiana prison reported a 75 per cent reduction in infractions for incarcerated individuals who were enrolled in college classes, compared with those who were not (Prison Studies Project, 2020). According to the Correctional Association of New York, prison officials often recommend reinstating higher education programs based on the incentive that they provide for good behaviour, their ability to produce 'mature, well-spoken leaders who have a calming influence on other[s]' and their way of evidencing the respect that society holds for 'the human potential of incarcerated people' (Prison Studies Project, 2020).

Continued support for tertiary education has recently been demonstrated in the United States, with bipartisan support for the expansion of the Second Chance Pell experiment. Although the program, which was introduced by the Obama administration in 2015 remains in experimental stages, the US Secretary of Education announced just last month, the introduction of a further 67 post-secondary institutions, bringing the total to 130 colleges/universities. The expansion will vastly improve access to higher education for incarcerated students, as it goes from operating in 26 states to a staggering 42 states (US Department of Education, 2020; Vera Institute of Justice, 2020).

**Correctional education is cost-effective.** Very reputable RAND Corporation study by Davis et al. (2013) estimates the *direct* costs of providing higher education to 100 incarcerated individuals to range from USD\$140,000 to \$174,000, or \$1,400 to \$1,744 per individual. The three-year reincarceration costs for incarcerated individuals who did not participate in correctional education are between \$2.94 million and \$3.25 million, compared to between \$2.07 million and \$2.28 million for those who were participants. Thus, a difference of \$870,000 to \$970,000 was reported for the *direct* costs for reincarceration between these groups. Davis et al. (2014) in a follow up study report that every dollar invested into higher education for prisoners yields five dollars of savings on re-incarceration costs.

Looking beyond the *direct* savings, research has demonstrated a positive association between the number of higher education classes successfully completed in prison and a reduction in welfare dependence (Giles, 2016; Prison Studies Project, 2020). Further, a survey conducted by the Institution for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) in 2005 found that in every US state, individuals whose highest educational achievement was a high school diploma were much more likely to be dependent on governmental support than individuals who had completed a bachelor's degree. The survey also found that in 28 US states, no one with a bachelor's degree reported receiving welfare in the year prior

(Prison Studies Project, 2020). Post-secondary education in prisons yields multiple financial benefits including savings on re-incarceration costs, increased tax revenue, decrease in welfare dependence and greater societal productivity (Prison Studies Project, 2020).

## Conclusion

**It is evident that offering higher education in prisons has positive and long-lasting social and economic effects.** Firstly, the impact of higher education on recidivism rates was discussed, with reference to the increase in post-release employment prospects. Following this, improvements in student self-perception were explored, highlighting the reduction of antisocial behaviour experienced by incarcerated students, and the positive effect of this on the safety of incarcerated individuals and prison staff alike. Finally, the cost effectiveness of offering higher education was demonstrated through an analysis of the direct costs of providing it and reincarceration costs over a three-year period. It is concluded that prison-based education is a sustainable approach to ensuring safety within prisons, as well as in the community post release.

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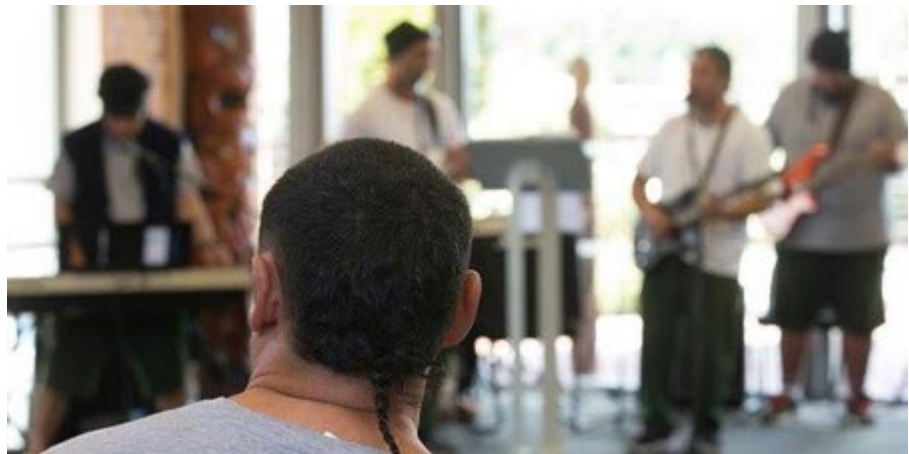
## Journey through the arts to a productive future

### ***From the Arts Access Aotearoa blog***

Kia Ora. I am a member of Redemption Performing Arts. I am a father, a son, a brother and an uncle. I am Māori and I have served seven years of a nine-year sentence. I am also a practising artist, musician and songwriter – skills I learned and developed during my time in prison, mainly through the five years I have been with the Redemption Performing Arts group in Northland Region Corrections Facility.

I joined the group in 2016 as part of the band. We helped to bring some musical elements to performances but really, it also gave us somewhere to perform what we loved doing, which was music.

Back then I could never have known how much a group like this could change not only my life but my perception, direction and outlook on life. I know it sounds



clichéd but if you knew the downward spiral my life was heading in at that time, you would understand why this is so important to me and the brothers who have been lucky enough to experience what I have.

Over the years my journey through the arts and performing arts has given me a new love and appreciation for the creative world and what it offers on the outside. Through these programmes, I have also had the privilege and opportunity to be involved in creative workshops for music, art and theatre; and community events where we have performed original plays, songs, poetry and haka for family, members of the local and wider communities, politicians, Army veterans, dignitaries and multiple theatre groups.

### ***Amazing opportunities to exhibit artworks***

I've had amazing opportunities to exhibit artworks in multiple exhibitions in well-known galleries such as Mairangi Arts Centre, Whangarei Art Museum, The Geoff Wilson Gallery, Village Arts in Kohukohu, Studio One in Ponsonby and, most recently, the Quest Art space in Whangarei.

All of these experiences and more have been instrumental in changing my mindset and behaviour. Prior to joining Redemption Performing Arts, I was angry and depressed, had issues with authority and thought the only way to make it through my time in prison was hardening myself to reality and burying whatever feelings and emotions I thought could be taken for weakness.

This mentality was my normal mindset for years. I couldn't even speak in front of a group of people, let alone perform.



That's why all the arts experiences are important: not only performing in front of all these people but also interacting and have normal conversations with people from so many different backgrounds and walks of life.

That's been hugely positive in breaking down those mental walls I put up to protect myself. Also, the support network we have within the group has

helped me stay positive. They are always there to remind me what is important and how far I've come.

The highlight of my time with the group is when we performed our play about the 28th Māori Battalion to a group of art students from Penn State University in America because one of them came up to me afterwards and said she'd never written before but I inspired her to write a song.

### ***Inspiration***

I don't know why that moment stuck with me, but I wrote down my thoughts that night and below is a copy of what I wrote. It was written on 15th May 2019 and is called "Inspiration."

"I didn't really understand how powerful the written word could be until today.

"I never really thought something I wrote could ever inspire anyone. Especially someone from the other side of the world.

These forms of expression help us deal with what life throws at us but also provide opportunities in the creative industries when we are released such as art commissions, tee-shirt designs, whakairo and music. And even growing opportunities in our gaming and film industries are possible.

I am just one person out of many who have made positive changes through the arts and being a member of Redemption Performing Arts. Thank you for listening to my story: I have always hoped that my journey and my progress would speak for me.

And thank you to all the RPA team and Beth. I will always be grateful for your support and the changes you have helped me make. Arohanui.

"Seriously, what were the chances of a university art student from a school somewhere in America being inspired by a prisoner from a rural part of New Zealand that no one's ever heard of. I don't even know her name but this will always be an experience I won't forget. You see, words like inspiration are rarely used in the same sentence as people like us.

"I remember every inspiration for every poem and song I ever wrote; that feeling you get when your thoughts just flow on to the page, line after line of self-expression. I can only describe it as magic.

"I still struggle to find the words to explain where the words come from. it feels like they just fall out of some unexplainable dimension. I call every word a gift from the gods because how can something as simple as words, inspired by feelings, have the power to influence and reach people divided by oceans, cultures and class.

"Magic in its simplest form is inspiration."

### ***My pathway to a more positive and productive future***

I am proud of everything I have achieved over the years and I know I'm very lucky to have had these opportunities. My journey through the arts and creative industries is my pathway to a more positive and productive future. I feel the arts and creativity will always have a place in prison. There is a need for it. I NEEDED IT!

These forms of expression help us deal with what life throws at us but also provide opportunities in the creative industries when we are released such as art commissions, tee-shirt designs, whakairo and music. And even growing opportunities in our gaming and film industries are possible.

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