CSI in focus

the nsw corrective services industries magazine
The songs and ceremonies of the Girrawaa ensured the preservation of culture and identity in harmony with the land and each other. The Wiradjuri shared their land and culture and traded goods with their neighbours. Girrawaa means ‘goanna’ in the Wiradjuri language. The Wiradjuri are the Aboriginal people of the Bathurst area and the goanna is their totem.

The Girrawaa Creative Work Centre offers new teachings to Aboriginal inmates which enhance the well being of the individual to take their peoples' opportunities in the commercial world.

The Girrawaa Centre produces a standard range of Aboriginal artefact and craft items and can also produce unique products to meet specific customer requirements. These can be developed for use in company promotions and for special events. All Girrawaa craft products are designed and produced by Aboriginal inmates.

Please contact our Centre for more details.

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The Girrawaa Creative Work Centre - CSI was a finalist in the 2001 NSW Tourism Awards for Business Excellence.
Editorial

Corrections is unique. With inmates for clients, the surest sign of success is a back walking out the door never to return. Big money is spent. Governments and community want results. But none of that can be done in isolation.

Much depends on the quality of people working and driving the system. If inmates are treated as human by officers and overseers, they feel better about themselves and the world in general. On release, they’re more likely to find work and stay away from the system.

CSI Director Wayne Ruckley puts that issue clearly.

He says 'The task for us is no greater than to take an interest in the people who come into our care.'

But that's not where the buck stops. This magazine is about how CSI helps people earn their right to work for a living. But because a few offenders arouse our fear and loathing, all inmates can easily fall in the same general category. Out of sight is out of mind. Such antipathy only compounds the problem.

The intention of this magazine is to put them and the work they’re doing back in sight.

It's the nature of a human story to sit in your mind gnawing at you. A few of these stories might do that. They're about individuals and ideas that help create a system that puts lives back on track.

CSI In Focus can only scratch the surface of a success story driven by people who care. They work within a pragmatic business concept that must remain open and fluid. The essential function of this magazine is to invite you and your industry to understand what CSI is doing and to encourage you to take part in this very human story.

David O'Brien
The Aussie spirit often fools our expectations. We know with laconic certainty anything too ambitious will be a 'stuff up'. When it turns out to be a roaring success, we shrug, grin and tell each other we knew it would be.

We're talking about 'the greatest games ever'. Before the event, we were poised like Y2K (remember Y2K?). We expected total chaos. Infrastructure would collapse, roads would be in gridlock, nothing would work, there wouldn't be enough facilities and those we had would prove inadequate, we'd be over-run with confusion and indecision, swamped with more people than we could handle, public transport would fall apart, there'd be corruption and strife on a monumental level.

But from the moment a sole horse and rider reared at centre stage to commence the opening ceremony, Sydney 2000 would be an Olympic to fill hearts and minds with joy and pride.

We were in the hands of astute risk-takers who shunned cliches and assumptions to define Australian values and ideals.

This was an event created and co-ordinated by the best in the business.

And CSI was there.

We weren't part of the upfront spectacle. Our very nature insists that we're the best of the backroom support. There wouldn't be any gold medals for our effort but we were essential to the way the world saw Sydney.

CSI took on our biggest ever project in a history that began with the first fleet. We helped create a village where the world media could rest and relax between events. For many years, the CSI North West Region watched demountable classrooms come and go at what looks like an abandoned suburb. Nicknamed 'Caravan City', it's in the middle of the bush at Cessnock.

The NSW Department of Education and Training stores its demountable classrooms there and demand is steady for refurbished portable rooms. CSI does the work under contract to the department. The Olympics needed accommodation for big numbers of international journalists. George Hunt, CSI Operations Manager at Cessnock, was keen to grab employment in one area for over a hundred inmates. CSI became one of seven tenderers for a two point six million dollar contract to refurbish two hundred and twenty four modules making up thirty two buildings.
Caravan goes
Winning the contract was the first hurdle in an obstacle course run on pride, energy and good management.

The outcome tested CSI and the correctional system: “Inmates at the site were on tight deadlines and working long hours. They were given demands they’d get on the outside, often working two shifts.” Says former Cessnock Correctional Centre Governor, Kevin Mitcherson.

The contract was a gold mine in personal development and skills training through TAFE courses such as painting and decorating, electrical, plumbing and welding.

“Some officers are very good at getting the best out of people. There’s a fair incentive to do well. A number of inmates took home dogman and crane tickets. We had three inmates accredited as welders. One has left with his certificate, everyone’s hoping he’s got the job he deserves,” comments Troy Jurd who came into the project halfway through as acting manager of the business unit.

The task was to reduce old classrooms to their bare essentials and move them from the storage paddock into a hanger-size workshop. There they got a complete fit out.

With seven years as a building maintenance overseer for the department, Troy guided work in the paddock where carpet and plumbing were stripped. The skeletons of the old rooms were brought into CSI’s new and vast plant for an electrical fit out.

All louvres and metal were taken off, roofs were replaced, bathrooms reworked with lino on the floor. They were painted inside and out and bathrooms were installed with showers and hand basins.

When resources are stretched, innovation is essential. Lifting was strengthened and given greater efficiency by a structural plate with lugs.

The demountables were transported to the Olympic Media Village at Lidcombe.

CSI Director Wayne Ruckley called the project “our Snowy Mountains scheme”.

The project needed personal initiative that could work against all odds.

Overseers and inmates faced the tightest of deadlines as well as logistic, systemic and human problems. Up to a hundred and twenty inmates worked double shifts.

Driven by pride in their work and production bonuses, there were the usual hurdles like lock downs and an unavoidable turnover of workers.

George saw five entire turnovers in personnel through the year-long project.

Unskilled labour would reach a level of competence only to be reclassified or moved off the project.

Says Regional Business Manager, Derek Brindle “It’s always the best who go first. We were getting a high degree of accuracy from unskilled labour. But you get the guys trained up and they’re moved out.” There was no compromise in the date for delivery at Lidcombe. “We had seven delivery vehicles moving seven modules, a crane at Cessnock and a crane on site at Lidcombe. When we made a commitment to send a building on a particular day, we had to meet it.” says Derek. Within a gaol environment there’s always the unforeseeable. “But the commitment to get those buildings out was terrific. We had officers working through the night before a building was dispatched the next day. We focussed all inmates on one building while the crane was picking modules up at the other end. As they were craned, inmates were still working on modules. They just got better and better.”

When contracts arrived there were no drawings, nothing to show how it was done, no consulting engineers. Says George: “It was something we’d never done before. We’d work out a better technique and the solution often came from blokes on the floor.”

Inmates took pride in their work. One long serving inmate made a welding bay to fix grills and awnings. He just about ran the area as did an inmate who’d been a roofing contractor outside corrections. He trained several teams throughout the life of the project.”

The pressure and responsibility of work transformed attitudes. Troy gives an example: “An inmate had problems with drugs, he’d been in and out of gaol, an untidy type and a fairly ordinary worker in the past. But he cleaned and detailed buildings better than anyone I’d seen. He was outstanding on this project.”

When the Olympics were over, the born again demountables were lifted off the site to be used as staff administration libraries by the Education Department.

A hard working crew that took pride in its biggest challenge was left with time on its hands for its next serious assignment.
there wouldn't be any gold medals for our effort, but we were essential to the way the world saw Sydney.
Much more than Legend

It’s easy to spin a legend like ‘Big Bad John’ or ‘Man of Timber’ around a contract logger and bushman like John Walters. But legends generally stand alone. John is a dedicated team-builder. A stocky pragmatist in his fifties he has a gravel voice and three decades of bush wisdom. The tough exterior conceals a humanist driven by a love of work, a target setter who demands standards to match his own.

Says Brad Fisher, CSI’s Manager Of Industries in Glen Innes: “It’s easy to misread him as a hard man but there’s much more to him. He expects a fair day’s work and takes great pride helping men turn their lives around.”

John Walters is one of a growing number of overseers working the system with tough humanity, dedicated work ethic and extensive knowledge. With a bushie’s reticence he’d rather be working than talking. But he’ll talk about inmates and what can be done. A third generation timber worker, he got his work ethic as boss of twenty six men. There’s a quiet pride in what he’s achieved over ten years supplying state forest timber for CSI’s sawmill. He does it by imposing respect for authority and adherence to duty. He has unbreakable rules and standards that are quietly enforced.

“If a bloke’s cleaned up and respectable he feels a lot better in himself. That’s the place to start because a lot of blokes let themselves go in gaol. I encourage a man to say ‘good morning’. If you walk past a person in the morning as though he’s not there, the productivity won’t come. They’ve got to be gentlemen in the camp if they want to remain in the A team. They can’t abuse an officer and come to work with me the next day. There’s rules to their personal standards. When they realize the system’s not against them, it changes attitude.”

An inmate who started that morning will cut limbs off felled trees for a fortnight until the chainsaw becomes part of him. Skill level will slowly rise and within a month John will assign him work under the trees. “You can tell when a guy’s ready for the next level.”

One worker who moved steadily through those levels to a future after release is ‘Dave’. He’s been with John’s team for seven months. “He’s sensible, level headed and capable. He’s on time every time. There’s two contractors who want to take him on.”

As a kangaroo sniffs the air nearby and butterflies skim the ferns, Dave is drenched in sweat from his morning’s work.

“If you’re fair dinkum with him he’ll be fair dinkum back. If you want to bullshit around, he’s not interested in that. It’s beautiful out here, you can stop and have a smoke, a bit of a chat. We don’t have any problems, we get on like a team. Soon as I get out of here I’ll put in a good solid day’s work and get returns at the end of it.”

Trust is important. Two inmates are sent off in a jeep to get a barbecue plate. “There’ll be no wheels spun and no risks taken and that’s spoken about before they drive” says John.

Change is as much by osmosis as instruction.
John presides over a quiet bush camp in a pine plantation near CSI’s Glen Innes sawmill. Focus is firmly on the job. The men often work beyond hours. “We won’t be going home till the score’s right. If we want a hundred tonne of logs, we’ll stay till we get a hundred tonne.”

‘Frank’ steadies his chainsaw with an arm shortened from birth by thalidomide. He’ll stay with the team until his release in ten months. “He’s real good! He teaches you a fair bit!” says Frank who’s got thirty competency certificates from John and will look for work with logging contractors near his home town. “I don’t reckon I’ll have too much trouble. They’ll look at your ability not where you’ve been.”

John lives two hours north of Glen Innes. During the week, home is a small fibro cottage on a hill in the compound. It has a view of green hills and forest on one side and the sawmill on the other. Parents of inmates sometimes call by the house to thank him.

CSI Director Wayne Ruckley invited John into the system a decade ago: “He has a tremendous sense of values in work and life, he’s a big influence on inmates and there’s many examples where they’ve come in with no hope and left with a job he’s arranged for them.” Visiting a logging site, the CSI Director was told by an inmate: “I never thought I’d get another chance in this world and I got one here. I’ve got a new life when I leave here.” Another chat was cut short when the inmate asked “if that’s all you want I’ll be going. I’ve got to get back to work.”

Says Wayne Ruckley: “It was the first time anything like that had happened and it really jelled with me.” John’s conservative estimate is he’s helped place at least seventy former inmates.

Few forget what he’s done. At Christmas, there’s always a box filled with cards.

One is from an inmate he remembers well, ex-army, covered in tattoos, he was in the cabins as a sweeper before he began a fifteen month stint with the team.

He got interested in chainsaws and timber and became a good tradesman.

“No trouble for him to get a job. The opportunities are there if they want them. Some take it with both hands.” He keeps a keen eye on anyone with promise and feeds inmate’s self discovery and growing sense of worth. Every now and then it gets personal. He remembers two outbreaks of fighting brought on by ‘Dear John’ letters. “Many have been through marriage breakups and all sorts of stuff. That ‘Dear John’ is the worst that happens.”

He deflects anger by telling an inmate what he wants to hear. “Then we discuss it sensibly. I’ve taken a knife out of a guy’s hand. It took ten minutes. Someone had forgotten to put butter in the lunchbox. They take it in turns to do the box. That’s not important to us but it can be to them, because ‘the wife’ wasn’t home when he rang or ‘the visitor’ didn’t turn up.” It takes him several weeks to understand where an inmate is coming from.

“Some take longer, some don’t talk as much. They’ll tell you what they want you to know and others will tell you extra. Some you trust more than others.”

He can acknowledge how much an inmate takes on board by testing him in any of ninety licences from felling to grading logs to loading and driving machinery. “There’s no on-the-job training when they leave here. They want to hire an experienced person. You only have to go through the job sections of the paper to see what they want. In the award, there’s no flexibility for a timbercutter. He’s hired that way and it’s what he is. But there’s fifty and seventy five percent and a hundred percent timbercutters.” A stickler for the right standard, he can write an open licence to fell trees or nominate the size of the cut on a certificate. “I’d rather make someone a hundred percent in one area than fifty percent in three areas. It means they’re employable. Halfway is not good enough. We want quality in the workplace.”

There’s never been a serious accident because he places firm emphasis on safety equipment and regulations. “There’s always a warning before an accident. You’ll see a guy doing something wrong and know what it leads to. That’s where you stop. I’ve seen a few little nips and cuts but never a decent broken bone.”

He’s a firm believer in a state licencing system formulated in 1987 when fourteen timberworkers were killed in one year. The following year two died.

He’s now cutting plantation trees put in the ground in the early fifties and believes its time to leave the native species alone.
"There's places where there's ten beautiful trees in a thirty foot square, you take two. The right man's got to remove them so it doesn't damage the others. There should be more money to get trees out carefully rather than earning two hundred dollars by driving over everything. I always pick a track that won't do damage. If that little silvertop stringy bark's only five years old and five foot high, he deserves a chance too. You look after your workplace. Management is the thing."

He's been witness to significant industry change during his time and has altered his attitude to environment: "I'd like to talk with protest groups. I agree with a lot of what they do. But do they understand what's happening with canopy and certain species? There's areas that have to be left alone. But they tell me the leaf litter in parts of Washpool National Park is over six feet deep. If a fire starts at the wrong time, it'll be too hot and will kill more timber than any chainsaw. Don't lock a national park up and walk away, it's not the right thing. If leaf litter and ground cover gets too deep and a heat wave comes through it gets all dried and a lot of protected species will go."

He's critical of too much hardwood clearfall. "The first thing that regenerates are the softer eucalypts. Some rarer species like cedars, oaks and rosewoods will only come through under the canopy. For that to come back to a normal forest when protection's gone could take longer than they all think. He says it's no trouble to grow a paddock full of round-leaf gum, which comes through first. But to get back native species could take longer than the forestry department think because a lot of them only come through under the canopy. To get canopy back could take thirty to forty years."

With John's contribution to the sawmill, Brad Fisher recently won CSI's Managerial Excellence Award. He praises a team who make sure the work gets done with a minimum of fuss.

All four overseers are highly skilled with 120 years experience in sawmilling between them. Brad knows the time will come when John will toss it in, and that's not something he relishes. "He'd be thinking of retirement. He's well set up, doesn't have to work, he loves what he does. He's enjoying watching the mill go the way it is, we've had the best year we've had this last year and that's refreshed him."
Heard the one about Prison Food?

Let’s not mess around! Anyone who knows prison food can tell you it’s slops, stale bread and water, grey death on a plate. Its got weevils, it’s crook and it should be!! It’s part of the punishment. A chain gang’s gotta swallow something after eighteen hours breaking rocks in a pit. Are we getting a bit carried away? Yep!... more than a bit!

Over the last few years, there’s been quantum changes in the management of food, in the way food reaches inmates and how it contributes to their health and personal development.

There’s a new level of self sufficiency, the community is saved money, kitchens are undergoing a revolution, and inmates get vocational skills in food service and catering. Some will depart the system to find work in hospitality and tourism.

What’s more, the tucker’s pretty good.

It’s not vermouth and rock lobster fetuccine or quail eggs in coconut sauce.

There’s no visiting chefs and table captains with a cellar list.

When menus are put together, the choice is more like junior turkey burger, tri-patties, lamb supreme, roast chicken, or ravioli. CSI Food Services provides the highest standard of institutional food.

“Many members of the community would be happy if the staple diet was ratsack” smiles CSI Director, Wayne Ruckley.

A great meal to many inmates is a fast food hamburger with chips and milkshake. “They’re second generation fast foodies. They consider it real food. A lot of them wouldn’t know real tucker if they fell over it. Irish stew or casserole or a good curry, they’d just look at that” says a long serving inmate worker.

“I was just cutting corn beef a while ago. If you’d had that years ago, you’d think ‘top food’. They just look at that and throw it. They think real food comes out of a cardboard box.”

All institutional food has a reputation. Just ask anyone who ever spent time in a big hospital. There’s a general view it has to be bland as well as crook.

Says Wayne Ruckley: “We’re turning food services on its head. We’ve got the capability of producing really good institutional food. We’re making tremendous progress now with a completely different approach.”

Providing quality food to the tastes and needs of inmates means three modern food preparation facilities soon to replace over twenty kitchens around NSW. A menu control plan for breakfast, lunch and dinner has been developed to ‘Australian Healthy Living’ dietary and nutritional formulas.

If we are what we eat, it makes sense for the system to feed its own. Poor food is seen as a major cause of agitation and rioting. The Royal Commission that followed the Bathurst riot in the seventies pointed a finger at the quality and supply of food.

Says Wayne Ruckley: “Food costs taxpayers a lot of money. If its not organised and delivered properly it has consequences for the system. A different approach was wanted.”

Keith Smith runs the kitchen at Silverwater and he’s proud of what he’s achieved in the last few years. Weaving through a maze of freezers, he checks the lean ham, bacon, pork, green peas and corn kernels. None of the fresh vegetables are frozen. They’ll be used the next day.

“When CSI took over, budgeting got better, capital and support were put in, industry quality control came into it.”


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It's a major logistical operation to get hot, tasty and well presented food from a service area to the consumer. Along with bread and rolls from the latest oven technology, the Reg Boys bakery at Long Bay sends desserts and there's dairy products from Emu Plains which also has plans in the pipeline for vegetable processing.

It's detail Keith knows and juggles every day. But he has to be much more than a food manager. He's also a team leader and occasional confidante. "With the younger blokes, you've got to listen to their problems, be able to read them. If a bloke comes in and he's working fine one day and wants to pull your head off the next, there's got to be a reason. One case we had not long ago, a young bloke's mum passed away and we all went through it with him. The blokes in here chipped in two hundred bucks for a wreath. Two hundred bucks to these guys is a lot of money."

Keith began the work with a 'cook and chill' apprenticeship at Royal North Shore. The food served from push barrows was mostly stews. A small kitchen for the old barrows system eventually turned into an acre and a half of kitchens, the hospital went from three to twenty three cool rooms.

Keith Smith remembers only too well the days when institution food got the reputation it long deserved. But he's also seen radical change and is responsible for much of what's happening. In his cramped office, the phone rings and freshly grown beetroot is on offer from St Hellen's farm facility outside Muswellbrook.

The focus is on processing rather than producing food. Very little vegetable and fruit is grown because its just not competitive. Its unlikely the system will ever grow all it's own food. But processing, packaging and delivery are growth industries for CSI.

Quality protocols now in place are set to win external markets. The operation is also helped by the arrival of inmates with IT experience. A former banker has programmed the computers for a distribution programme that tallies meals so menus can be planned far in advance.

"We enter the data and it breaks everything down into the different type of meal and the location it goes to. Labels show what's in the container. We're working on our orders up to a month in advance."
A few years ago Keith and his staff wrote all labels by hand: “It was totally cumbersome” he remembers. The computer now watches specific needs of inmates. There are meat eaters and vegetarians, special requirements for Moslem inmates, there’s kosher food that needs preparing and packaging in its own kitchen. Some people can’t eat fish, others need a soft diet that can be digested without chewing.

With two thousand inmates waiting for lunch, its impossible to please everyone. “One place will love something the other hates, some meals are suited and some aren’t. But ninety percent of the time we fix any problem. There was one this morning, a mix up, lasagne arrived when it should’ve been chicken.”

Since every inmate is there against his better wishes, contented individuals can be thin on the ground. But excellent controls and measures mean fewer problems. “We have regular feedback. Its bulk catering but you sit down and enjoy it” says Keith.

And a couple of his critics are on hand. One of them, ‘a lifer’ remembers ‘the old days’ before the Bathurst hearings. “It was garbage. There were maggots, the porridge was called ‘grey death,’ weevils and everything. Then the Royal Commission happened and we got better food.” He’s joined by another long termer who was first incarcerated in the sixties. “What you’d look forward to all week was a thing called plumb duff, like a fruit cake with custard or a bit of margarine on it. You’d get meat but there’d be a lot of stews. There was one called ‘grey death.’ No-one could eat it, it was tasteless and the rumours were the meat was bad. I remember weevils in the porridge at Parramatta in the sixties. You had to eat something. You’ve got to eat haven’t you?”

It’s a rare chance to publicly air a few long-held grievances. Keith is confronted by two familiar and persistent critics.

“If I got out of gaol today I’d have a nice piece of ocean perch” says one.

“You had it this morning dickhead!” laughs Keith.
A Contentious Association

Locking up lawbreakers and making life tough for them is easy. We just keep building prisons and filling them. The community shrugs off all responsibility for the lives inside. It’s someone else’s problem. We pay taxes and what we don’t see we don’t know. Nor do we want to know until rioting erupts.

The traditional approach is easy and irresponsible.

“If we want things that way it will still cost a fortune and people will come out of here absolutely worse than when they came in. But I’m sure that’s not what we want” says CSI Director Wayne Ruckley. “It’s got to be a tough system because we’re dealing with tough individuals but it can also be a fair system and produce results.”

Inmates are now expected to confront and address their offending behaviour. A few will sneer and turn their backs, but they’re a tiny minority. Wayne Ruckley wants each inmate tested before release to assess what degree of rehabilitation has been achieved during sentence. He wants keener insights into physical, psychological, emotional and social influences that feed and shape rehabilitation.

He’s asked Canberra based criminologist David Biles, for a broader profile on rehabilitation. The response is enthusiastic:

“In Australia we haven’t taken the science of corrections anywhere near as far as we should. Bearing in mind our history, we should be experts. But we constantly depend on Canadian or American research”

But the consultant criminologist questions both the system and CSI. He sees prison industries in the middle of a network of competing values. Of Australia’s eight correctional systems, New South Wales has a third of the country’s inmates and CSI provides work for seventy percent of them.

“CSI has been diligent and successful with a large staff. The business managers and supervisors seem to be more on the ground than other prison industries in Australia” says Professor Biles.

He sees Correctional Industry as one ‘relatively small part’ of rehabilitation and expresses doubts about CSI’s business driven directions.

“There’s some value in keeping people occupied, whether its dull and repetitive work or not. Self discipline, the ability to work six or eight hours a day co-operatively with other people, all have value. CSI is strong on that and I agree. But you can’t achieve personal rebuilding just from reasonable work schedules. I have no great dispute with the value of work but I’m unhappy about this notion that ‘We’re business managers to provide profits’. They’re not businesses, they’re very, very important activities contributing to (a) running a safe prison and (b) rehabilitating. If there is a business that’s what it is.”

He has reservations about some jobs assigned to inmates.

“I’m not enthusiastic about cleaning and repackaging airline headphones. That’s a bit soul destroying. But at the end of the day, even repetitive line work is better than nothing. It’s much better to have people doing constructive things than nothing.”

He’s concerned that too many inmates in the New South Wales system remain unemployed. “Seventy percent of all prisoners work. That’s too low! It should be in the nineties. It means twenty percent are unemployed.”

And when Corrections gets human rights wrong, when there are significant disruptions in contact with family, industry is a waste of time, according to Professor Biles.

Not long into an interview for this magazine the academic calls for a review of priorities: “The number one thing is not to make money but to run a decent, productive system that is not harmful. Keep them occupied. Do it in ways that will lead to >
gainful employment outside. Try and match the work experience inside with what’s outside. That’s a tough one but try it. If you can do so, make some money out of it. We should recoup some of our costs. But if money was the issue you wouldn’t do any of those things, you’d lock people up and say ‘Sit in the corner son and get a suntan.’ No factories, no workshops and it’d be cheaper because you never recoup the total capital costs for running prison industries. The system with excellent industries might recoup three or four percent of total running costs.

A prison system is enormously expensive. Profit from industry is icing on the cake.

But the CSI success story stems from commercial realities, an ability to find a range of work for inmates in New South Wales by talking the language of business, by going into partnerships. Surely business will always draw the bottom line at ‘What’s in it for us?’

“You risk digging yourself into a big hole if you take that too seriously” says David Biles. “The starting point should be ‘We’re all NSW taxpayers, we live in this community, there’s a difficult job to do with these prisoners, I need your help, let’s join together to solve that.’ Even if CSI gets one hundred percent employment and lots of contracts, it’s not going to threaten many people’s profits or the jobs done by law abiding citizens. The jobs we get are relatively small. But realistically it’s for our total good, for a better society. That’s what it’s all about, that’s got to be the starting point, not that we are businessmen competing with each other. I don’t think that’s a viable starting point for negotiating with Correctional Industries.”

He sees three types of work that can be done in any institution. There are purely internal services such as sweeping passageways and scrubbing bathrooms and cooking, there’s manufacturing absorbed within the department. And there’s product manufacture available on the open market, on order or through shops.

“It’s competing head on with normal industries and a matter of great sensitivity, particularly if the prison industry dominates the market. The normal manufacturer will say ‘this is not doing me any good’. That’s what everyone talks about, it’s the outside FOR SALE product. But the argument is equally true for the internal product. What about the fellow who makes office furniture for everyone? Why doesn’t he get the market for prison office furniture? And even with internal services, the laundry and cooking, there are professional cleaners with standards and wage rates. Why shouldn’t they have this work? Why shouldn’t they complain?”

The criminologist believes Corrections is far more successful than it credits itself.

He claims there’s little cause to be distressed by statistics asserting a recidivism rate of seventy to eighty percent.

David Biles says they’re misinterpreted. “You keep seeing your failures and never your successes. They’re going to the footy, going to work, you never hear from them again, nor should you. Prisons are remarkably successful. Those thirty percent who keep coming back you’ll keep seeing. ‘G’day Jack, here we go again, I’ve saved your job for you’ and there’s a cynical acceptance of the failure of prisons. In fact that once a person has come back twice, the chance of returning is very high, any deterrent impact has gone. The attitude is ‘prison’s not all that bad’ and external circumstances, the drug taking, the associates and so on are still very active and they get back into it.

But the majority of first timers do not come back. We should congratulate ourselves rather than lamenting our failures.”

A RESPONSE FROM THE CSI DIRECTOR

For work programmes to be successful they have to be predicated on sound business management and practice. That’s the bottom line for CSI Director Wayne Ruckley.

He says “it would be very easy for us to be swamped by the importance of the rehabilitation endeavour and forget the cost.”

When criminologist David Biles puts his focus on the value of Correctional industry, the gloves are off for Wayne Ruckley.

Professor Biles sees Correctional industry as one ‘relatively small part’ of rehabilitation and says they’re not businesses but important activities contributing to a safe prison and rehabilitation.

He’s challenging the director’s core philosophy. In nearly two decades of turning Correctional industry into a strong business entity, Ruckley is agitated by the statement. He emphasises his philosophy about the power of work:

“A chemistry takes place that gives inmates a sense of importance and a reason for their existence and future. To suggest that can happen positively and productively in a non business sense is ridiculous. To get fulfillment from work you need to do something on which someone depends. It needs to be done when the customer wants it and in accord with customer requirements.

The whole experience between worker and customer must be built on co-operation. This foundation isn’t optional, it’s the most fundamental part of what we’re trying to do. All the feedback I get is that inmates don’t want ‘no reason’ training. We have to expose inmates to workplaces that are real, relevant and closely matched to the sort of workplace they’d find in the community.

If we don’t do that, we’re not establishing the environment
essential to inmate development. I find it difficult to understand why people in the social sciences have this great distrust of the word and context of business and commercial people. If we relied on the commitment of individuals in the community for some wonderful social stride in inmate activity, we’d have none. It’s just silly! What business in the community will give us work because they think we’re a needy bunch? It couldn’t work that way.

We also take very seriously our responsibility to the community that the inmate work programmes do not adversely impact upon other businesses. We work very closely with various interest groups through the Correctional Industries Consultative Council of NSW.”

On bringing change to an individual in a real and productive workplace, Wayne Ruckley emphasises: “There’s no greater adrenalin rush for an inmate than when the feedback is ‘You’ve done it well… you’ve done a good job!’

When that happens, work goes beyond work and has an impact on their lives. They start realising they can be useful individuals. This issue of getting inmates to better understand themselves and understand their own abilities and to take pride in what they do is important to rehabilitation but its important they see themselves in a different light so they see others in a different light.

I’ve rarely heard that talked about within the system or within criminology. But this is the dynamic that takes place in the workplace. Every inmate has a multitude of issues to be recognised and the workplace is where we can deal with a whole lot of things at one time.

When we concentrate our efforts on establishing management operations and practices, one of the curious things that occurs is that positive commercial or economic performance is an automatic extension of that pursuit. In CSI we rarely use the word profit. If we do it’s in a social and economic sense. I have no apology in saying we’re here to ensure work environments are truly developmental.

We’re also here to ensure they’re conducted in a cost effective way. In a sense that means we’re here to make money. I’ve got no problem with that and again make no apology. Unless you expose inmates to the tough world of business, you’re creating an unreal environment.”

Professor Blies is ‘not enthusiastic’ about cleaning and repackaging airline headphones calling the work “a bit soul destroying” but adding “It’s much better to have people doing constructive things than nothing”. Wayne Ruckley is annoyed by comments that criticise process work.

He says: “Very few Australians are employed by NASA or the CSIRO. Most are in work we all rely upon, in many cases its process work.

In CSI we see no function as unskilled. We believe every work function carried out by inmates is important for the development of self esteem, self confidence and their preparation for the outside world. Many inmates who come through the NSW Correctional System will only ever aspire to process work. It would be absolutely ridiculous to train them for MBA’s and PHD’s. Much has been said about work undertaken by women inmates. The comments are highly unfair. Women in the system are representative of the most disadvantaged of the inmate population. The environment we provide to rebuild their lives is absolutely critical.

If you walk into a workplace where women are refurbishing headsets you’ll see an eager team of individuals talking with each other, working hard, working for an end and building a future. I reject totally the criticism of that pursuit. The greatest testimonial is to talk to the women.”

Professor Blies is concerned that too many inmates in the New South Wales system remain unemployed. “Its curious to be criticised for maintaining a level of inmate employment of around seventy percent” says Wayne Ruckley.

“Most correctional managers are criticised for not maintaining employment above forty or fifty percent of the population. While there can always be improvement, its nonsensical to expect every inmate can or could work. Beyond seventy five percent would be quite unrealistic.”
Fear lies buried in a shady grove west of the Blue Mountains at Oberon. But a wooden cross in the ground has nothing to do with resting in peace. It's distinctly about living with new attitude.

No formal ceremony took place, just a symbolic nudge at what the Young Offenders Camp is all about. In a field near workshops and huts, a collection of high telegraph poles with wires strung between them stand like a circus without canvas.

One of the first sights to greet inmates arriving for a new intake is the 'high ropes' area. "We needed to give a greater sense of achievement, to really challenge and test them" says James Armstrong, Manager of Industries for CSI at Oberon.

Inmates are soon standing on a tiny platform high above the ground like acrobats without a net. Plenty are scared of heights but they get used to it as they leap blindfolded into thin air, jump chasms from one platform to another, help each other up vertical and slanting poles and engage in activities like 'the dangling duo'.

But they've got plenty of hard work to do too. There's a hundred and fifty acres of agriculture land growing potatoes, pumpkin, capsicum and carrots to supply the kitchens. They build crates and are about to take on metal table frames.

A major workforce for state forests in the Macquarie area, inmates do pruning as well as clearing eucalypt and wattle. Their stay at the camp is a combination of solid work and core curriculum. One day they're on the high ropes the next at work.

The challenge appeals to a young man's need for risk taking action. "It's got the same endorphins that went through their bloodstream for that drug high" says acting programmes manager, Dennis Carey, a nuggety ex-navy trainer ferociously dedicated to planting seeds of change. Before they put their lives in each other's hands, newcomers learn to function as a team and understand resourcefulness.

And it pays off in human terms. One participant in his late teens is cocky but keen to assist. A few weeks before he looked like one of the few dropouts. He was late for muster, causing trouble and refusing to co-operate. "We had him working until dark. He settled down and never looked back. A big turnaround!! The penny dropped when he realised people would listen to him, they'd reason with him and say 'why're you acting this way? He was able to bond with the group" says acting adventure-based educator, Neil Haslop.

The programme starts when a new intake journeys to the first of three wilderness camps deep in national park surrounding the facility. "The first one's a kick start" says Dennis. The bottom line is to give these men personal strengths and reasons to never reoffend. "I like it when one of them says 'no' because it means he can go out there and say no to drugs and crime" says Dennis.

The kickstart camp was the turning point for a young inmate. At the end, the Governor visited an on-site debrief. The inmate jumped into the back seat of the Governor's car and talked the whole way home. "He held court for the half hour drive. He was very sure of himself. Now if something needs to be done, speak to him about it and it'll be done" says Dennis.
The approach to training is unique and under constant review. There’s echoes of Outward Bound but the plan was to start from scratch, to find out what elements would turn lives away from reoffending. It had to be tough but with plenty of room for understanding.

After a rash of think tanks, the basics were drawn up. Personal development was crucial but few inmates embrace change if there’s no job to pay the way. “They’ve got to prove a work ethic like any of us on the outside. They’ve got to know how to write a resume and front up for an interview.”

Participants complete at least one vocational educational course, they undertake drug and alcohol programmes, and enter a Workcover accredited occupational health and safety certificate course. They’re made to be accountable for their behaviour. “Dignity, respect and responsibility is achievable and measurable. We treat them like adults, teach them living skills.”

Responsibility for self and others is high on the list. Living ten men to a house, they look after and clean up after themselves. “From day one when they get here we ask them to stand up and say something about themselves” he says. Theory’s fine but this course is a personal challenge steeped in everyday living.

“Very early in the programme we deal with choices and emotions. Each person has the right to feel anger, the right to feel happy, the right to feel fear. But what they don’t have the right to do is transfer that emotion on to someone else. We look closely at their strengths and weaknesses. We say ‘You’re going well here but your work ethic isn’t good. Why isn’t it up to standard? Is it a clash with the overseer? Are you pulling your weight? Is it that you’re not interested?’” says James.

No one driving the camp has illusions. These men come from a culture of drugs and gangs. When they arrive their expectations are as low as their responsibility to others, their defenses are compromised by the way they’ve lived.

At the end of the course, they’ve got a sentence to finish elsewhere in Corrections and can slip back to destructive, negative attitudes. “They leave on a high and get deflated. Those with inner strength will keep going, but it’s easy for the rest to get back to old ways, to meet up with cronies and go back to square one.”

But any downside is diminished by changes and the statistics are encouraging.

In 1987, ninety six of a hundred released inmates returned to gaol. A few years ago they did a study and it was down to seventy two percent.

“We’re one third of the way through our own study of every inmate who’s done this programme and the figure now looks like forty eight percent. We believe it’ll be at thirty eight in every hundred. We’ve got to be doing something right.”

“What’s our subject today?” demands Neil as athletic bodies circle the instructions with giant poles as silent witnesses to the start of an afternoon training session.

“Apart from social responsibility?” Dennis follows through. “Fear!” says one inmate. “Confidence” says another.

There’s a collection of cultures, the men are all highly competitive, a dozen faces struggling with answers, keen but sensitive to criticism. Resistance and rebellion are there beneath growing keenness.

Someone has an answer and calls out “Working together!”
"I'm standing here and I've got to get to there. What am I talking about?" demands Dennis.

An uncertain voice suggests "Goals?" The instructors leap on the idea: "Setting and accomplishing goals."

The first goal for the afternoon looks impossible from the ground, it'll look worse from up there. Connected to a lifeline and belayed by a team-mate on the ground, the first leaper is ready to ascend to his platform. "You can quit anytime you like" says Dennis with challenge.

Quietly he acknowledges: "Something inside says 'I'm not going to quit'. Me and my mate are tied together, we're doing this together, I won't let him down, he won't let me down." With the first of the men on that high platform, there's little tension on the ground. Dennis and Neil have seen hundreds of participants do this. Its not so much a leap through space as a kind of initiation into a new way of being, an understanding of greater possibilities.

The worst injury on record required a bandaid.

After leaping from perch to perch and plunging blindfolded into a void, the reliance on a ground partner is established and two men teams start a new vertical climb up slanted poles. The higher they go, the scarier it gets and the greater their reliance on each another. The first team makes half the distance, the second gets a little further. When one team gets precariously to the top, the standard is set. Everyone who follows is determined now to make it to the top.

There's no giving up.

Not all participants are specimens of fitness. "We had a big boy here just a while ago and we had him walking every afternoon. He lost fifteen kilos" says Dennis.

And true courage comes when a participant with real terror of heights struggles sweating to the platform and makes the leap. The look on his face after that leap is one of sheer achievement and a new sense of self" says Dennis.

"We work with them slowly, some don't get to the same level as others but for some just getting up there is a personal achievement" says Neil.

James understands, he has a confession: "Before I went up I thought 'this'd be good' but when I got up there I froze. I've got a fear of heights. At least I had a try."

Parental support is crucial. "We've had a few escapes but nine times out of ten we get a call from a member of the family saying 'can we come and get him'? The more parental support these fellas have, the greater chance of completing successfully."

At the end of their programme, there's a graduation ceremony where parents and friends can be invited. "They'll talk about the programme and how they've been successful in getting their forklift ticket, doing the carpentry course or the office skills course and how they struggled with 'Motivator Hill'. It's a four hour climb but they got there. The parents are behind them all the way. When parents aren't there other parents take them under their wing."

When James started this work, he even questioned his own parenting.

His eldest son was eleven and comparisons were clear. He saw his son in the behaviour of inmates seven to ten years older. "It sent a cold shiver down the spine. Is this what's in line for my son? Are these blokes so far behind? They get what they want by reacting the way an eleven or twelve year old will. Its not socially acceptable."

What they learn here has to translate back into the workplace and in life outside. James knows it may take time for the camp to make its impact.

"One day they must sit down and think about what they've done and try to relate it to real life. The fear you feel when you're about to jump trapeze is exactly the same fear you feel when you're trying to kick that drug or get a job. The emotion is the same and the skills they use to go for the trapeze are exactly the same skills they've got to use on the outside to go for that job. They've got to transfer all this to real life situations."
To rehabilitate the Inmate first fix the System

Before any individual could be rehabilitated in New South Wales Corrections the system itself had to be rehabilitated. The angry and violent dinosaur that lumbered out of the seventies had to become a civilised beast. In the late seventies, the Nagle Report gave a list of changes needed but no indication of how to change.

"Justice Nagle did nothing to tell us how to do it, just 'this is what you've got to do'... unfortunately it was not organised well" says Ken Kellar, who joined the system as an officer in 1971 and is now Governor of Malabar Special Programs Centre.

In the quarter century since that report, change has often struggled to happen. And correctional industry has played a big part in that process.

When a seventies researcher looked into rehabilitation of inmates, the result was a declaration that "Nothing works!!" The system is now asking 'What works?'

Hundreds of studies have gone well beyond that point of despair to a recognition that industry and therapy can bring big change in the individual.

"We knew things were wrong but justification is easy. It took the searchlight of the royal commission to show how bad the system really was. The public disquiet and distaste for the findings brought change" remembers Ken Kellar.

If there's a single turning point in the story of reform in New South Wales its the Nagle Report and its findings. In 1978, Justice J.F. Nagle delivered his recommendations in his 'Report Of Royal Commission into N.S.W. Prisons.' The Wran government beat the report to the punch and sacked Commissioner Wal McGeechan before findings were published.

He'd presided over a prison culture that hit full crisis with the burning of Bathurst gaol in February 1974.

The report pointed out that punishment extended well beyond loss of liberty, especially in gaols like Grafton and Bathurst. Grafton prison was used since the forties for the department's toughest inmates. The administration sought 'capable, tactful and robust' officers for duties of 'an arduous nature', officialese for a culture of bullying in which the reception bash was notorious. Incoming prisoners were met by officers with rubber batons. It was denied by the administration of the time but an admission came from the officers' union.

The Royal Commission opened a can of worms. And Bathurst prison was as bad if not worse. The system reached boiling point in 1970 when inmates and officers went face to face. Eventually prisoners returned to their cell blocks. The next morning they were moved back to their own cells by officers with batons who told them: "You were pretty tough yesterday. Let's see how tough you are today. Cop this!" What followed was a wholesale bashing, heads cut open, some beaten into unconsciousness.

An oppressive regime, idle inmates, a lack of leadership, untrained officers and a culture of brutality continued until a riot in 1974 in which the prison was burned.
There was no riot control plan for Bathurst or any other gaol. The Commissioner took command of the operation from his Sydney office and more than fifty inmates were injured by shootings or beatings, one prisoner was made paraplegic. An officer arrived at the front gate in the early hours and threw down his baton and helmet saying he wanted no part of what was going on inside.

Ken Kellar remembers the tough rules of prison life. "It was black and white. After the riots in Bathurst, there were blackouts and a number of disturbances at Long Bay and Parramatta where an officer was beaten and died. It was about survival and protection. If someone did something wrong they knew what was in store. It was a dreadful experience. You couldn't talk to a prisoner nor could a prisoner look an officer in the eye, there were no contact visits. If somebody wanted to commit suicide, it was 'What do you want? How can we help?' There was no duty of care. 'Do you want a knife, a rope?' No consideration of families on the outside."

Nor was there any industry at Long Bay other than some printing and bookbinding for the Government Printer. A laundry and a mat shop came much later in mid-seventies. "There was good, committed staff and inmates who were interested in working. But very few of the staff had the skills to teach anything. At some stage we lost focus and those industries disappeared" says Ken Kellar.

Wayne Rucklely remembers work programmes in the early eighties. He was brought back into the system in 1988 to rebirth CSI: "Not much was happening. inmates were playing cards or sleeping, no momentum, no activity, no motivation. Sleep in every day and you get to like it. I often used to comment the only industry that boomed was the sultan industry, a whole lot of inmates wandering around putting sultan cream on and laying in yards. When I was brought back my brief was to have a look at 'what those characters in prison industries were doing' and phase it out."

Says Ken Kellar: "It was a lack of understanding by management of the importance of industry and the management of people, a troubled time for the service with emphasis on containment and control. The main concern was to control the situation and make sure no-one escaped. Governors were the hard men of Corrections who came up through the ranks and made it to the top. Misbehave and you got a hammering. If prison officers had a blue, they'd take it into the cell and have it out. There were no reports, that's the way they did business, a culture of violence."

But the value of work to bring change was already showing its potential. "Inmates would generally not escape from the workplace, they wouldn't have gaol politics in their workplace because they had a certain respect for officers there and didn't want to upset what they had. They'd wait until they came back into the gaol to plan their escape" says Jeanine McGlinn, the first woman officer into Long Bay and now Custodial Director of Therapeutic Programmes.

Social scientist Tony Vinson was given power to carry out radical reforms. It was a bit like putting a terrier in charge of the bulldogs. The Nagle Report armed him with significant and often shattering change throughout rank and file.

Tony Vinson became notorious for his style. The prison officers' union saw him as hatchet man and interventionist.

He was known for tactics such as turning up in the middle of the night at a major facility to hear inmate complaints.

But changes were in place and they began to have an impact. The report gave inmates rights they'd never known. It called for big improvements in training of officers, twelve months probation for new officers, a system of promotion, more pay, status and responsibility, greater consultation, the employment of women in men's prisons, better reporting and inspection. It demanded classification of inmates on the basis of security; it recommended contact visits, travel vouchers for visitors, unrestricted legal visits, appropriate weekend home visits; there was to be no limit on mail and an end to letter censorship; it wanted pay phones installed and the right to buy any book, newspaper or magazine; libraries were to be improved and food standards lifted; there were to be better laundry facilities, more sport and hobbies with earning power, inmates could keep personal possessions, no restriction on cell decoration, inmates were to be called by name not number.

They were given the right to vote and sue. The two hundred and fifty two findings turned the system inside out.

But a culture of brutality and violence does not change easily or overnight.

"The recommendations were to humanise the system but the staff were not ready for this new reality and for a while inmates were on top of the situation but the staff couldn't come to grips with all this new stuff" says Superintendent Kellar.

The Nagle Report also put the focus on prison industry. It said inmates should be offered 'gainful employment.' It called for better consultation and an examination of its effect in a competitive market and on labour conditions, a permanent body to plan and run industry and market products.
The arrival of CSI in the late eighties was a major response to the report and the start of a success story that now goes from strength to strength.

"The hardest thing was to change staff attitudes, particularly the managers. Like their predecessors they were interested in security, containment and control" says Wayne Ruckley.

"People often said we should be training people to be good unemployed. It was part of the explanation as to why little happened. There was certainly no customer focus. The view was customers understood the difficult task we had in motivating these 'orangutangs', that's what inmates were called. When we fouled up on quality or delivery the customer fully understood.

People hadn't thought things through. Sabotage was frequent; sugar in petrol tanks, inmates weren't to be trusted with sharp tools, lurid notes and drawings were slipped inside school desks. At Emu Plains, a massive tomato crop was destroyed when an inmate 'mistruck' weedkiller for tomato dust and sprayed the whole crop. Many people had to be brought to account, there was tough talk and tough times, people came to the party, not as quickly as I'd like. There's now massive and substantial change."

Says Ken Kellar: "In the eighties, Governors placed low priority on industries. If a couple of officers took sickles, we'd close the industries and use staff for custodial duty. There was a lot of hard work done and a lot of persuading to do. Wayne successfully sold the notion of industry and its benefits. He charmed Governors and got a lot of them onside and a lot offside. He can be blunt when things aren't working the way he wants. He's a not afraid to throw a compliment around, telling someone they're doing well."

In the years since Justice Nagle handed down his report, there's been a determination to overcome personal and systemic barriers in moving from prison-thinking to a correctional system.

Says Wayne Ruckley: "In the prison era you direct and command people to do things. In the Correction era you encourage people to do things. Staff thought it was dangerous, unpleasant and unacceptable to recognise that an inmate might know more than you. But many have the ability to harness massive skills to support our operation. When I walk into the sawmill at Glen Innes and ask the inmate clerk 'are we making any money?' he'll go through the commercial performance and say 'Yeh, here and here'. The inmates are our workforce, it's that co-operative environment that didn't exist in the past. Take white collar crimes: traditionally the view has been you don't allow them near a book. But a progressive release of trust is essential to restoring confidence, credibility and ultimately to the rehabilitation of the inmate."

He says one of the toughest parts of the transition from containment to rehabilitation has been finding the right people to make it happen, "If officers paint a picture that they're dealing with loudmouth, rabble rousing, lazy, drug affected, alcoholic, violent persons and can't do anything, they've got a pretty cushy job. In the last ten or twelve years one of the most remarkable things has been this tremendous change of culture from our staff."

Every system has its share of disruptions, especially in times of radical change. There's been instability and a flow of people through all levels of administration. Its brought with it occasional broken promises, collapsed initiatives and uncertain futures.

As Wayne Ruckley promoted his vision, it was met by resistance. "Governors resisted change because they believed the structure we were putting into place was not appropriate. There's a close synergy these days between what we're doing and the work of the Governors. You've got to think and argue through what you're trying and get support. There's been a massive change of attitude, output and quality. We've got problems but it doesn't compare with the way things were twelve or fifteen years ago. We're doing things you wouldn't have thought possible then. People in government and through CSI are genuinely committed to transcend suggestions of the past that this is a system of no-hope. Many of us found that suggestion offensive and we're working hard to change it, it does require a much greater level of commitment, application and perseverance but it can happen and is happening."

Part of the new challenge is in the public attitude. As the impact of the Nagle report fades into history, the public has again started to harden like cement.

Says Ken Kellar: "When you say you're a prison officer you learn the community attitude has swung back to 'these bastards have done the community wrong, they deserve everything they get, throw away the key."

But he's one of many people bringing humanity to what was a harsh and rigid environment. Wayne Ruckley has only begun cranking up a powerful and far reaching CSI: "Over the last year we've been looking at the interrelationship of all the programme areas impacting upon inmates. But over the next couple of years we'll try to recognise a whole range of dynamics other than products and services" he says.

The prison era is behind us in the twentieth century. Industry can now do its part to make sure a new century is about rehabilitating lives.
Refurbishing
the individual

The inmate didn’t leave his name but he had a story to tell his old boss. Shortly after release, he went to a meeting at his son's school. The first thing he did was get down on all fours searching for a stamp that would give him personal connection with the school’s desks and chairs.

“For the first time in my life I felt I contributed something” the unknown inmate told Bill Holland, CSI Manager of Industries at the St Heliers Correctional Centre in Muswellbrook.

While working in the unit he hadn’t realised he was doing something for his boy and his classmates. “He was emotional on the phone and said it had changed his life dramatically” says Bill.

The former inmate dusted off his hands and stood to his feet in that classroom. He told other parents he’d been out of the community for a few years, that he’d been inside Corrections, working through CSI. The story impressed another parent, a kitchen builder who offered him a job.

Bill found the story moving. It summed up the worth and value of a unit where, on a good day, up to two hundred pieces of furniture are stripped down and reassembled. Furniture is picked up from schools across the state and brought to the centre where its pulled apart and rebuilt. Frames are rubbed back and spraypainted, plastic bucket seats get washed and scrubbed. Tables are relaminated and sanded.

Contractors then take it back to schools. Wear and tear accounts for most deterioration. There’s an odyssey of chewing gum to be scraped away. Jumping on seats spreads metal legs until chairs look like a mule’s last journey, carved initials declare true love and cruder variations in desktops. ‘School Sucks’ is the oldest message in liquid paper.

Some furniture is a lost cause and cannot be used but the emphasis is always on recycling as much as possible. Waste is kept to a minimum. Most old school furniture used to go to the dump. It was in the department’s ‘too hard basket’ for many years. Private enterprise tried refurbishing and couldn’t make it work. There isn’t a high profit margin and moving the furniture around the state could be a logistical nightmare. Business began as a single shed with a hundred thousand dollar contract from the Department of Education And Training. It now occupies one and a half fenced acres with four sheds, turning out more than thirty thousand pieces a year for schools across the state.

“That’s three semi trailer loads of furniture deliveries a week” says Bill.

CSI’s eight hundred thousand dollar contract is cost negative. “They save that much by doing it this way. “And the work is ideal for CSI because its very hands on. All the work carried out in these sheds could be mechanised but that would defeat the key purpose of giving inmates work.

“We’re not just refurbishing furniture, we’re refurbishing lives” says Bill. “They emerge from here able to do complex things with wood and paint. They can pick up skills that are easily converted to things they might want to do when they get out.”

Inmates often have poor education and little or no work ethic. “Before they come here, plenty would be difficult to place and with little chance of stable employment.” One inmate had left school at seventeen and was twenty eight. He’d never had a job.
Many collect basic certificates while working on the furniture. They can take TAFE accredited courses in subjects such as woodwork and spray painting or get a ticket to drive a forklift.

At the very least, inmates learn to get out of bed and go to work. Those who have children at school can feel they’re doing something for community.

“The work is not complex but it’s rewarding and their skills are easily converted.”

For most inmates, there’s an obvious rapport with overseers.

“Some angry young men come in here, they don’t have much to say, but they roll away. We’re not at them all the time, we keep it simple and easygoing, it’s all about the way you treat them” explains chief overseer Mark Bastik. “If I’m a custodial officer, an inmate is always wanting me to do something for him; as an overseer, I want him to do something for me.” He’s pragmatic about his role but not someone who talks easily about the work.

“My training’s on the job, you work out the things that work for you, the more easygoing you are with these blokes, the more results you get from them. They might have a phone call or want to duck down to the compound to book an appointment or see a mate for a few minutes. If they’re a good worker you don’t mind. It’s a relaxed atmosphere up here.”

Mark likes to get the job done. “We don’t have to say much to get them motivated. The more we tell them they’re good, the better they work. But we’re not at them all the time and giving them a hard time. We’re fair. The inmates take the piss out of us, we cop it on the chin and take the piss out of them and it’s one big happy family.”

The inmates back that up. One who’d worked in a bank with the loans department and in customer services was in the workshop cutting timber for desktops. Its his first time inside with ten months to serve of his sentence: “You do it to keep yourself busy, to keep a clear mind. Given a task I like to complete it,” he says.

Another inmate agrees “It’s an achievement, you’re getting something done”. 
A man in his fifties who drives trucks for a living says he hates sitting around. "I just keep going, this fills my day in. People on longer term would rather work." Another declares "I don't like mundane, boring jobs, I like to follow a project all the way through and get job satisfaction and the end result is something I've created." Another agrees: "With what I've learned here I could go straight into a warehouse and on to assembly, I've got a trade," he says.

Mark Bastik was a boilermaker who specialised in pressure welding. The other overseers are from building, electrical, timber and metal trades. For all of them, life behind the wire isn't all sweetness and light. With a big turnover in inmates, there's a few who resent any offer of work. They're often bidding time on a shorter term and arrive with attitude that resists all help. Shifting them isn't an answer Mark prefers. "It just makes them someone else's problem. If we can get them onside, keep them happy, get a little bit of production, that's good."

"At any day, we've got thirty thousand children sitting on our furniture" says Bill Holland with pride.

Three and a half hours drive from Sydney and into coal country, the sign declares 'Muswellbrook. Bustling with energy'. Concrete stacks at the power stations pump columns of steam into a blue sky. A parade of giant metal skeletons take power from the station alongside Liddell lake and out across the rural countryside. Past motels and shops of the Upper Hunter town over a bridge into vast and very green farm country is the historic St Heliers property. It was granted to battle scarred warrior, Lt. Col Henry Dumaresq who took part in eighteen campaigns and was twice badly wounded.

At Waterloo, a musket ball smashed five ribs and entered his lungs as he carried a message through battle lines. Near death, he delivered the message and fell from his horse. A year later he was back in the fray and ten years later emigrated to the new colony.

The original stone homestead near Browns Mountain was lined with cypress and gardens and surrounded by orchards. Only a couple of ornamental trees remain.

Dumaresq was forty six when his war wounds claimed his life. He was buried on the property. His remains were later transferred to Muswellbrook Cemetery. The present house arouses keen interest from historians. Precisely restored to its look in nineteen hundred when it was built, the house is now headquarters for the facility. It was purchased by the state government in 1945 as an institution for boys. Corrective Services bought it in 1988 and renovated it using prison labour with overseers from building backgrounds.

Seven accommodation units built in the early nineties are called The Dumaresq Centre. A comment in the Australian Dictionary of Biography (1788-1850) mirrors what's happening there today. It defines spirit of place: "the law on his estate is the law of kindness and incitement to industry. Good conduct are rewards, not punishments."
The ghost of Industry Past is a faded and distant figure that once broke rocks, stitched sacks and made number plates. But it still haunts CSI’s Business Development Manager Tony McGinley, as CSI moves further into an era of technology.

Tony knows one of his tougher jobs is to exorcise that ghost: “When I talk to potential clients they still believe we’re doing number plates and breaking rocks. How could we hope to do their product? But when you give them the full story, and tell them about our thirty million dollar annual turnover, their whole persona changes. They’re surprised, they have trouble believing it. Perceptions only last as long as it takes to find something that appeals to the client more than the perception itself.”

Tony’s persistent phantom was long ago replaced by a ghost of industry present who does complex engineering tasks in furniture building and metal fabrication.

But it’s just another ghost in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

Meanwhile the ghost of industry future gets clearer month by month. It sits at a bench peering into a microscope, a computer screen, tames a wild mouse and asks all the right questions into a call-centre headset.

Technology is bringing big change to commercial life and CSI is changing with it.

High tech is the key to the future says Tony. “We’ll never invent programming or find a new microchip. We find solutions for people looking for a labour intensive type of work whether its assembly, packaging, manufacturing, or line processing. We’re not the sort of people who could set up a robotics area, that goes against our philosophy. We need to stay with the times and keep moving into areas like information and data processing, assembly and packaging.”

One major influence over the way CSI will change is Australia’s diminishing manufacturing base.

Tony’s job is to recognise new opportunity. With a background in textiles, he’s seen an Adelaide jeans factory close and a Melbourne suit manufacturer move its operation to Fiji because costs were cheaper.

“All T shirts are fully imported now. We do all our printing in China because of costs. I can’t count the number of times I’ve seen Australian companies close down their Australian base and move overseas” he says.

One of his more significant commercial missions is to fill the needs of Australian business that head offshore. He understands the fragility of the current commercial scene and CSI’s careful path through it. “We’re not about taking away jobs currently in the Australian market. If we had the same manufacturing basis as the bloke down the road and he lost business because we were doing it, that’s not what we’d want. But if that same bloke was about to go offshore because he couldn’t afford to stay in Australia, I’d be talking to him.”

CSI is refurbishing small electrical products under warranty for a major manufacturer: “Rather than scrapping the products and bringing in more cheap imports.”

He says this industry will train people and get them ready for employment on release. But the deal came to the table with old perceptions strongly held.

“I try to reach into where the client is hurting the most. You tell them you’re from prison industry and they’re guarded for the first five or ten minutes and you say, ‘there’s a chair here imported for fifty five dollars, we can source it locally with a lead time halved at a similar price and certainly delivering the same, if not better quality.’ We’re shortening your lead times and providing a flexible work force. We don’t sell to public, we sell to wholesalers. It’s a better alternative to offshore. We’re not cheap, we’re sometimes dearer but we’re flexible in our lead times and in our quality and we’re here. It takes up to eight weeks on the water from Korea , that means money in the bank.”
He anticipates a strong future in call centres: "Why get others to do it when we can do it ourselves? We're setting strategies to give eight to ten inmates a job. When you look at the scope of people coming through the system they range from those with little or no literacy skills to those who're highly intelligent. A call centre is the basis for learning about communications, selling and marketing by phone and that's the basis for all selling. A lot of companies are getting into call centres and moving to places like Tasmania and Broken Hill. You're taught to sell and market yourself and its more than they were doing when they came in here."

He knows correctional industry isn't for everyone.

"The ideal industry is profitable and sound and provides vocational programmes. As industry changes, so will vocational programmes done by inmates. We're providing real programmes for people to be rehabilitated. Clients come in here with a perception of us as prison labour, but I tell them to think along the lines of being a good corporate citizen. You're getting inmates to learn something so they can be of more value coming out than when they went in. The people who come in here don't usually have a stable or sustainable work ethic. We're telling them they've got to get up in the morning, go to work and get a wage. Do that for two years of their life and they get used to it and their responsibility goes up."

Variety and greater responsibility in the workplace are rewards for increasing skill and application.

"There'll be people who'll start off cleaning items. They'll go on to repackaging and data entry. When they show they're good at that they'll go up to safety testing and then into programmes like an electrical safety testing course, an electrician's course. Then they're earning sixty to seventy dollars a week. Two hundred and forty dollars a month is a fair amount of shopping for an inmate."

Unemployed inmates get a dole of twelve dollars or have to rely on the outside for money. What they've gained with CSI is the ability to show up for work and leave work and get wages.

Whatever the shape of CSI's future, it'll most certainly be a public one.

Says Tony McGinley: "Business development is a key to successful inmate work programmes. By its dimension, continuity and structure, it strongly influences programme outcomes. My intention therefore is to take a very proactive approach to our market endeavours."

Specialist CSI Corporate staff monitor all facets of production and quality systems certification. They are the interface between the CSI Business Units operating in correctional centres throughout NSW and the customer.
Much more than a Hobby

The world is a tough place for any former inmate looking for work. Chances improve with industry training and certification. Some inmates arrive in the system with trades and skills but their potential for a smooth re-entry into society is clouded by a crime regarded as unforgivable.

Released, they return to a society where doors are locked, especially in the work for which they’ve trained.

Janet Ruecroft, programmes manager at Kirkconnell outside Bathurst knows such inmates have little choice but to retrain. “Many can’t go back to the work they were doing because of the nature of their crime. They’re looking to the last twenty years of their working life doing something they might’ve once regarded as a hobby.”

It was a factor in bringing CSI’s first traineeship scheme together.

With quite a few short term inmates, selection had to be careful. Inmates are shifted inside the system for a variety of reasons and it can be difficult to expect a group to remain in one place for a full year. But Kirkconnell is a facility where classification means enough inmates are likely to stay long enough to complete training.

It’s a significant reason four year trade apprenticeships are out of reach in the Corrections system. But a successful scheme in Kirkconnell has demonstrated to the system that traineeships are a different matter.

And the value of the scheme has been proven by the outcome. Of twelve inmates who took up the offer, ten came out of the year-long course with certificates. And the scheme inspired a spirit of co-operation. Even literacy and numeracy problems were overcome. Half the inmates struggled with delicate and specific design plans but help was available after hours.

“A couple of inmates were going to drop out, it was just too hard. The other guys said ‘Don’t do that, we’ll give you a hand’

They guided them through verbally. The teacher would give them the information and if the guys didn’t understand, the others would go through it at night with them. They’d help with measuring up for the drawings. They developed a cohesion they didn’t have before” says Manager of Industries at Kirkconnell, Nigel Williams.

One inmate was succinct about his new skill, “I can knock a unit up no trouble” he proudly tells. Officers in the unit say several inmates emerged from the traineeships with the potential to be very good cabinetmakers.

Says one officer “Every piece of furniture that goes out of the shop is strictly quality controlled. We go above and beyond what is necessary to keep clientele. We go to a lot of trouble to do as good a job as we can.”

In a world where many pine products are shoddily built, this unit prefers hardwood cabinets. “We can make whatever the client wants, we’ve done hardwood and Tasmanian oak and redgum. What I tell my customers is, you buy a piece from here you’ll have it for the next hundred years, its solidly made.”

Several trainees stood out as really good workers. It was satisfying for overseers because it promised a shift away from simple production lines to specific and skilled craftsmanship. “The training means we can stretch out, we can do more craftsmanship with one-offs.”

The scheme threatened to fall apart before it had begun. There was an official gauntlet to run before traineeships could take place in Kirkconnell. A trainee has a basic wage and a specific legal status including awards and industrial conditions.

Could an inmate be a trainee?

“We were told it would take an act of parliament. We said ‘Rubbish!’ We’ll get this through. We did it by changing where the old act said trainee to ‘student’ and got round all the legal mumbo jumbo.”

In setting up the scheme, Nigel Williams and Janet Ruecroft made sure inmates were case managed for employment. Employment agents made regular visits and got to know inmates and their work. Those who completed their traineeship with a certificate would be interviewed on release by an employer with national contacts. And inmates created a portfolio as part of their traineeship.

But Janet will never know what becomes of the new batch of cabinetmakers when they served their time. “When someone comes in with very little skill and goes out with a certificate and a well developed work ethic, we don’t know what happens to them on the outside. Hopefully they’ll turn to that sort of work and not recommit an offence.”

A return to crime remains the easiest option, especially if doors start closing.

The traineeships provide just one hope of a different direction for a released inmate.

“If they have something they can turn their hand to, there’s the chance. That’s what we give them. They’re so happy to get something like a certificate. It sets them apart from other inmates, they’ve achieved something” says Janet.

She can’t see it happen again. “We know it can. There’s issues to resolve but we’ll run it again as soon as we can.”

CSI Director Wayne Ruckley regards the concept of inmate traineeships as one of the most far reaching initiatives taken in corrections.

“It’s a very innovative, with the bridge between Corrections and a successful return to the community.”

With clear purpose in sight

Correctional industry often has problems with aim and vision. There’s occasional bouts of short sightedness and then, when there’s too much focus on the long view.

But there’s no shortage of vision in two man community service unit inside the Metropolitan Reception and Remand Centre at Silverwater. A visit to an accommodation for a new pair of eyeglass is costly but effective.

Eighty percent of blindness is preventable, but it’s long been beyond the reach of forty million people who rely on glasses for sight.

In Australia, thousands of used eyeglasses are discarded every week. They are collected by CWSI in a Donut Club project. “Recycle Recycle” has been running since the mid nineties. Stores across the state collect glasses. The company donated grading equipment to CSI and taught officers how to use it. They were then able to train inmates. When the project got going it was difficult to organise and co-ordinate so inmates to grade the glasses collected. Now, over fifteen hundred eyeglasses pass through the Reclaim unit every week.

Their strength ranges from slightly adjusted reading glasses through bifocals to the end of bottle tops Mr Magoo would need.
It takes special people to change lives

Q: How do inmates accept there’s a better way?
A: By making them feel better about themselves.

It follows they can then feel better about others.

It’s the essence of change in CSI and sounds simple. But like most truths, it’s easier said and needs special people with skills like commitment, leadership, patience, and an ability to share.

People and their attitudes often bury the bottom line under disillusion, skepticism and pessimism.

Radical change can only happen if the skills and attitudes are right in people driving the system. “All staff right across the board are trying to drive this to be a system where positive things happen. If you mould staff you get inmates to accept there’s a better way” says CSI Director Wayne Ruckley. “We get people in at the ground level with the attitude and commitment to bring that into effect” he says.

Proof is Parklea officer, Desmond Borgonah. A restaurateur before he joined Corrections in the mid nineties, he’s since got the Director’s award for excellence, the Officer of the Year Award and is the inaugural recipient of a scholarship to study resocialising of young offenders in several American states.

Des Borgonah is a clear communicator of ideas and intentions. He does it with a studied humility that is proud of what he’s achieved. Without any hint of a boast, he shares those achievements equally with inmates and other officers.

Trained by the Indian Army as an engineer, he’s a problem solver, the kind who could turn a tin can into a robot, or more specifically an abandoned container and a set of drums into a drying facility. And he’s got extensive experience as a leader of men. A colonel for twenty three years, he commanded a regiment and fought two ferocious wars against Pakistan.

When he first arrived in Corrections in 1996, he was put in charge of a large shed with mostly young offenders at Parklea. Plastic tier pads were washed and put in racks for drying in the sun. They’re used for transporting layers of bottles five or six levels high. When they’re cleaned and dried, the tier pads and bottles are wrapped in plastic for the journey. It’s an efficient and far smoother approach but still requires intensive labour from inmates who sometimes need special attention.

“When young characters come in, they know the answers to everything. It’s difficult to get them settled down, very difficult” says Desmond. His army experience has given him crucial lessons in how to deal with resistance. Anyone not up to scratch is given three solid chances to stay on the job. Their arrival in the system can be tough, but Desmond has some understanding of what they’re going through. While he comes across as a gentle humanist, there’s a military bluntness to getting what he wants from difficult people.

Nothing was easy for him when he first arrived in the job as an overseer. He had to prove his worth. “I had to say ‘this is what I want and if you can’t give it to me, go somewhere else. There are people who come in here who’ve never worked. They need a direction, most are from troubled families. They’ve got no education. We show them how to work and deliver a finished product.”

He changed the way things were done, and there was plenty of room for change.
There were also the means to do it, for anyone with an innovator's eye. No big deal! He simply created an industry from scrap. "We found everything here. There were containers and drums lying around that no-one wanted and the boys welded them and we saved fifty thousand dollars in setting up our drying units" he explains.

The unit picked up a new customer, demand increased and more innovations were needed. Instead of paying many thousands of dollars for ducting to carry hot air into the drying cabinets, Des and his team converted forty like drums as a heat source. Working with people like Barry, his inmate clerk and a former pharmacist, turnover was increased by at least four times. "He's a practical man and he's always there with the details and when there's design work to be done" says Des.

Over forty inmates who've worked in the unit have left with forklift licences. "They'll get jobs. We won't see them again, if two of them don't return that's a saving to the taxpayer of a hundred thousand a year."

Young offenders are the focus of his concern. When Regional Commanders sat down to assess written entries for the Geoff Pearce Memorial Award, they were unanimous on the worth of Desmond's submission. He proposed a trip to Texas and Colorado where internationally recognised work is done in training young inmates. The award reflects the hard work of duty by remembering an officer who died of AIDS after a needle attack from an inmate.

Desmond migrated to Australia and had his own hundred seater curry restaurant. Weary of life in prison and other tension in running a restaurant, he sold it and was looking for a new career when a customer friend suggested Corrections.

He's now doing a degree in engineering and has his sights set on higher rank. Watch this space!

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**Much more than her Qualifications**

While the right to work is crucial to our way of life, no-one is ever promised a job. And the struggle to find employment is not exclusive to inmates. Overseers working in the system have stories to tell of facing the worst of odds.

As much as we like to regard ourselves as egalitarian and tolerant, many well qualified migrants are forced to turn their backs on their professional and craft training.

But the outcome often forges a determination to succeed.

Mulawa overseer Japjeet Hunjan migrated to Australia from India in 1993 to follow her husband, Gary who came here the previous year to take a job in computers. She worked with a masters degree in human resources and a diploma in education. Her father and two others are in India. She was employed at home where production was slow, up to 30% below expectation. It was what she always wanted to do, she says, and she was employed at work for which she was knocked back because she "looked locally unemployable".

"I was working in women's shoes at that time. I had come up in Corrections as a casual officer and was asked to work in customs. At CST you're seconded, you're supposed to work. I had to accept because you get paid, but you never get any respect. So I thought I wasn't going to last.

The memory is still vivid in the body of an official back when she was called in to train prison officers whose task is to manage Triplets. "I'm not very good at discipline," she says with respect for CST who seem to have a good system of management. She watched them work, observed and absorbed. At home, she thought she was "in the wrong place" and took a course in quality systems, with production managers under the tutelage of a statistical man. She was exposed to statistical quality tools to see how production is going in high volume work. The job is to make sure work is done in the time frame and that the customer is satisfied by a high quality that meets the requirements.

"I was sent to run our new computer system and told I had to do it." She was sent to run the computer system and trained the new computer system.

"I had to learn to do the work with a computer, and do work with ICT." The managers were all there to offer new ideas to improve production. Everyone comes up with ideas and you learn how they operate.

She's set her sights on working in corporate headquarters and has the eagerness to learn anything. "I'm capable of doing anything. I'm pretty confident if they give me a job and ask..."
'can I do it?' The answer is "Yes!"

She had a temporary taste of headquarters as acting assistant superintendent of industries. She saw it as a valuable opportunity to prove her worth further and left her mark by making nineteen thousand dollars for each of the weeks she was there. The job hadn't made that kind of money for seven years.

There's an established difference in the communication styles of men and women. What is often regarded as intuition can be a female ability to read body language. Japjeet is sure she's got that talent in abundance.

Women read women and a glance out the office window assures her of the group dynamic out there on the floor where processing and packaging is underway.

Today the women inmates are bundling school magazines for the start of the school year. But the bulk of their work is packaging headsets for several leading airlines. The work has been criticised as monotonous and repetitious but it's a contention that rarely has any validity in the day to day job of meeting targets and schedules set by Japjeet and other overseers. "The work can be pretty ordinary but we rotate them in different jobs. The loading dock area is considered to be a good job. They know if they perform well they'll be promoted to work on things that pay better. And we have to meet deadlines."

And you only have to watch women inmates at work to recognise the camaraderie at the benches. When a newcomer is reluctant to work, others understand and an energy on the floor can encourage a change of heart. Difficult inmates sometimes refuse to work and some get the sack. But take away the wage that gives a kind of freedom within the system, cut them off from social interaction on the floor as well as the structure, discipline and satisfaction of work and any reticence quickly fades.

There are faces that keep returning to the system. "They leave here and go straight back into the drugs, we see the same faces because of drugs, they have to support the habit. But while they're in here, they take on a different look, they have a new enthusiasm for life. I strongly believe work does change lives, maybe not a hundred percent but our duty is to develop inmates’ work ethic and give them training so they can get work" she says.

It helps to have overseers who listen to problems. "The bottom line is how you talk to people. Some don't want to work, you talk to them and they make an effort, sometimes the other girls show them what it takes, sometimes they have to be put with others who don't work, to think about their attitude". From the moment she became an overseer, industrial work was Japjeet's kind of work. "It's a pretty challenging job, every day you prove you can utilize resources to the maximum. I love working here. It's the opportunity to offer inmates a creative and satisfying way of doing their term. We make sure we gainfully employ inmates and provide them with proper training. They get paid and work equals income and opportunity. They learn skills and it enhances their chance of employment. When they get out they'll get a decent job. We're basically a packaging unit so they can go out and work as a processor in any packaging unit" she says.
C.E.O.

DILEMMAS

"WHERE CAN I FIND A SUPPLIER WHO CAN GUARANTEE A 100% DEDICATION TO MY COMPANY'S NEEDS?"

"I HAVE GOT THE CUSTOMERS, PLANT AND PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES, BUT REQUIRE AN OFF-SITE FACILITY FOR PACKAGING AND CONSIGNMENTS."

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"DO I REALLY HAVE TO SOURCE A LABOUR MARKET OFFSHORE, IN ORDER TO KEEP MY WORK FORCE COSTS TO A REALISTIC LEVEL?"

"I NEED ACCESS TO A DIVERSE AND ACCREDITED TECHNICAL COMPETENCY BASE IN THE MANUFACTURING OR SERVICE INDUSTRIES."

"COULD I AVOID THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SOURCING OF LABOUR?"

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If you wish, we can also arrange for a full-colour information package to be sent to your office.

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