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.

The Girrawaa Creative Work Centre
Bathurst Correctional Centre
P.O. Box 166 Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: 02 6338 3295  Fax: 02 6332 1789
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 Ruckle 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 Olympics to fill hearts and minds with joy and pride.

We were in the hands of astute risk-takers who shunned clichés 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 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 olympic
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 Brindie “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.”