BATHURST GAOL EVALUATION STUDY

Implementation of the Bathurst Gaol Management Plan:

Research Findings, January 1983 - January 1986

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PREFACE

The opening of Bathurst Gaol in 1982, refurbished after the riots of the 1970s, was the beginning of a major innovation in prison management. The gaol was to operate under an ambitious plan intended to improve on the relationships found in traditional secure prisons between staff and prisoners, and to reduce some of the adverse effects of secure imprisonment by fostering inmate autonomy and responsibility.

Many correctional innovations appear to fail because they were never genuinely implemented. As the new programme began at Bathurst, the first difficulties of implementation became evident. Workshops for the employment of prisoners were not ready. The staffing thought to be required could not be approved. Some of the proposed innovations have never been implemented. However, an enthusiastic Superintendent and a committed group of senior staff were determined to achieve whatever they could. It was, therefore, vitally important to monitor and evaluate what was being done, and how it was working.

Many new steps were taken, including: the open layout of accommodation inside the secure perimeter; the development of small residential units for groups of 16-18 prisoners with active steps to encourage inmate participation in day-to-day decisions in the units; the organisation of staff rosters to place staff in consistent functional teams; the first multi-disciplinary Gaol Management Team; major emphasis on staff development for prison officers within the institution; and (later) the development of full-time trade training and education as occupations for a large proportion of prisoners. Thus, research staff were recruited to work freely inside the goal within a few months of the first prisoners arriving. This was itself a major innovation, allowing much more trust between researchers and the researched, both prisoners and staff.

This report summarises the results of the research from January 1983 to January 1986. The studies summarised examined the extent to which the original plans for the gaol were implemented or modified and the immediate impact of the innovations on the prisoners and staff who lived with the results. The research team has throughout the project, operated as part of the gaol and its development, taking the role of a friendly critic.

Co-operation by other staff and prisoners has been excellent. This was enhanced by the location of the researchers inside the gaol, and the policy of circulating and discussing all reports inside the goal before presentation to the Corrective Services Commission. I believe that the research helped to bring some difficult, and at times contentious, issues into focus, and contributed to some aspects of the success achieved, and to redefinition of many of the original objectives.

This is the first publication of research findings from Bathurst. It documents evidence of some major and continuing achievements. Security and safety have been combined with a low tension level. Prisoners have been managed by communication and co-operation rather than coercion, particularly in the units.

Difficulties in the planned approach to work and training were creatively resolved. There is also evidence that some of the ground gained has subsequently been lost.

The findings show that worthwhile progress can be achieved in our prisons by sufficient commitment and effort. They also illustrate the very real limits on what can be done inside a gaol if the constraints of legislation, funding and staffing are not altered.

This work reported here involved many people. Four research officers (Manuela Crouch, Kerry Mahony, Kathy McLennan and Diana Simmons) have worked for extended periods inside the gaol. Angela Gosta has provided continuing supervision of the work with some assistance from Don Porritt. The views expressed in this overview are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Corrective Services Commission or of the Minister for Corrective Services.

Don Porritt
Chief Research Officer
December, 1986.
in industries with incentive bonuses for completion of courses.

4. Activities
Activities were proposed to be available for inmates during recreational hours. The use of a gymnasium and recreational room was to be available on the basis of paid membership and rental of equipment.

5. Reception
Reception was viewed as an important tool to assess new inmates at Bathurst. The Reception Committee was to include staff such as the psychologist, the welfare officer and parole officer. The committee's role was to explain the new programme at Bathurst to the inmate and to draw up a written 'contract' with an inmate into which he would voluntarily enter with the option of withdrawing within a certain time. The nature of these contracts was to depend on the inmate's choice. It could be a simple agreement to participate in the programme, or it could refer to more specific behaviour.

6. Visits
Visits were to be a right for all inmates during recreation hours.

7. Internal credit book
The internal credit book was to be for payment of private purchases and weekly accommodation expenses.

8. Team management
Team management was to evolve with specific teams and team leaders responsible for Accommodation, Security, Prisoner Processing and Staff Development. Whilst still retaining the chain of command, team management aimed to enable officers at all ranks to participate in decision making relating to their area of involvement.

9. Staffing and selection
Gaol staff were to be selected on the basis of their ability to adapt to new ways of working with inmates and interpersonal communication skills. A target level of 25% female custodial staff was also proposed.

10. Staff Training
Staff training was to provide ongoing training as well as general and unit orientation courses for officers in the initial implementation stage.

11. Job Rotation
Job rotation was to be introduced to enable officers to gain experience in different areas of the gaol for a set rostered period.

12. Physical structure
Although not specifically mentioned in the management plan, it was expected that the freedom of inmate movement in the gaol would greatly reduce tension. This was mainly due to removal of gates as points of conflict between inmates and prison officers.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS
Six of the twelve areas listed above have been the main focus of evaluation over the past three years. Other areas have been touched on as problems arose which affected all areas of the gaol.

The main areas assessed have been: the unit accommodation and management system; aspects of staff training; team management; education; and the vocational (trade) training scheme; as well as staffing in general. The effects of physical structure have also been examined in passing.

In earlier studies into unit accommodation, staff training and team management, findings were particularly positive. Reduced tension across the gaol community and improved relations between officers and inmates had been achieved, despite major difficulties which had impeded full development of the programmes. These difficulties included: lengthy delays in the development of industries; pressure from unexpected increases in inmate numbers before the gaol was fully operational; and the placement of Peter Schneldas, an inmate with a history of violence towards prison officers, at Bathurst, and subsequently diversion of resources for his containment. During the first two months of his stay at Bathurst, a 'pool' of thirty-five prison officers was set up to look after him. Schneldas was initially housed in Unit B1 on his own with a staffing structure of one Senior Prison Officer, one 1st Class Prison Officer and one Prison Officer with the executive officer on call.

The state-wide, 37 day strike in February-March 1984 significantly affected developments in the programme, particularly officer/executive relations and officer/inmate relations.

To that point, programme planning was carried out by an Implementation Committee which included gaol staff, community representatives and (once prisoners were at the gaol) prisoner representatives. The operation of this committee was also assessed (see References: 7).

Later studies, at the end of 1983 and 1985, showed that while most officers still held positive attitudes towards the programme, some felt that Team Management had broken down, and officers' attitudes to prisoner management had become less liberal (see References: 9 and 14).

Problems such as understaffing have caused a great deal of upheaval in the gaol, and this uneasiness has been transferred to inmates.
two units, and then to one officer per unit. Also, permanent staffing for units can no longer be maintained overall, although some units do have permanent officers.

At Accommodation Team meetings, prison officers have supported maintenance of permanent staff in the units. The planners and the officers felt that permanent unit staff would assist in creating a stable unit environment.

There are fewer unit meetings being held now than during 1983. Some of the units have held occasional meetings, mainly to solve minor house-keeping problems. In one case a meeting was called to discuss the eviction of an inmate.

Finally, the success of the Unit C3 cooling project should be mentioned as an indicator of inmate responsibility. This project has been operating for 2½ years. Ingredients for cooking are supplied from the main kitchen. In the beginning all C3 inmates shared the cooking and cleaning on a roster basis. As more work became available, fewer inmates could take time out for cooking, so positions were created for two inmate cooks. Following the success of C3's project, members of the Inmate Liaison Group requested that all units do their own cooking. This was introduced in December 1986.

2. The development of industries and employment for inmates

a. Background

The establishment of the Industries' workshops and Trade Training courses took longer than expected. Consequently, for about eighteen months, there was a severe shortage of meaningful work for inmates. This meant that criteria for living in units needed to be relaxed, and to date these have not returned to the rigidity originally intended.

The delays were caused in part by difficulties encountered in setting up elaborate machinery shops and finding suitable overseers. The prison officers’ strike of February - March, 1984, again caused severe disruption in these work areas. No trades people or education staff could enter the gaol during that period. The timing of the strike presented particular difficulties since the Trade Training Programme was ready to commence in February, but the strike delayed its commencement until July, 1984. The extra six month delay was due to rescheduling the Trade Training Programme to fit in with the Department of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) timetable.

In the implementation process, Programmes Division undertook the primary responsibility for introduction of the trade training under the Industries umbrella, and meant that the emphasis of Trade Training was on training, rather than the production of saleable items as was intended by Industries. Industries has retained responsibility for inmate domestic work (sweepers, gardeners, cooks, clerks) and the Upholstery and Bookbinding workshops which re-opened in June, 1984. The establishment of full-time Trade Training evolved from close co-operation between senior officers of Industries and Programmes at Head Office. By July, 1984, there were more work opportunities available to inmates as the Industries, Upholstery and Bookbinding workshops, and the Trade Training Programme were opening. Also, the part-time Basic Education class had become full-time.

b. Present inmate workers

The main gaol has a population which varies between 180-200 inmates. On 15 January 1986, there were 152 inmates working, 43 non-workers and unemployed, and 8 inmates awaiting trial. Of the workers, sixty-seven (44.1%) were in full-time education, trade training or ceramics; sixty-five (42.8%) were in domestic employment, i.e. sweepers, clerks etc. and twenty (13.1%) were either in the Bookbinding or Upholstery workshops.

(Note: at this point, the Upholstery workshop had been re-opened outside the gaol walls.)

c. The wage incentive scheme

Payment to inmates has not been implemented on the basis of a realistic wage. Major external constraints in legislation and Treasury policy will have to be overcome if this element of the plan is to be implemented.

Inmates are paid according to Departmental guidelines. These wage rates are traditionally very much below community wages, even when provision for food and accommodation provided is taken into account. Within this framework, the Bathurst inmates earn bonuses only in the production workshops, i.e. upholstery and bookbinding. The majority of domestic workers are paid the base rate with the clerks being paid at the higher rate.
on their perceptions of what life and training skills they had gained; and to reassure programme acceptance among other inmates, prison officers and professional staff (see References: 13).

The main findings were as follows. There were few differences in average ages and educational levels among trade trainees and workers in other areas. The average age of trainees was twenty-eight years. Ex-trainees, those who had dropped out of the course, tended to be younger than those who remained. A slightly higher percentage of trainees had left school in Primary School and in High School Year 11, while no trainees had completed the Higher School Certificate.

The trainee apprentices had a more positive attitude towards their work, leisure time and use of skills acquired in gaol on release, than inmates in other work areas.

Trade Training was well accepted by the prison officers, professional staff and other inmates interviewed. Participation in Trade Training was seen as lowering tension levels in the gaol, although some of the officers were concerned about security in the Training areas.

Since this study was completed in May, 1986, the Department has given assurances that Trade Training will continue at Bathurst, subject to funds being available. There are still problems in fitting in trainees, who wish to continue their trades course at lower security institutions. Factors such as course availability, appropriate classification and suitable TAFE commencement dates, all have to be considered. Trade Training personnel were disappointed that the Bathurst lower security X-Wing was not re-opened as a male prison. This would have facilitated lower security trainees continuing with their course at the local technical college.

Training officers have succeeded in maintaining a flow of practical work for trainees. One example of the practical work obtained was the repair of vehicles from a local bush fire brigade. Securing practical work from the community will always need ingenuity on the part of supervisors, given the gaol setting, some community prejudice against gaol work and sensitivity among unions about competition from prison labour.

Recently, the trades courses have been interrupted on two occasions because there were not enough apprentice training officers to supervise trainees on non-TAFE days. There were some delays in processing the appointed positions. Such closures set back apprentices' progress even when they only lasted for a couple of weeks.

4. Activities

As work opportunities increased, activities continued during the recreational hours commencing at 3.30 p.m. on week days and during weekend.

Inmates have not been provided with rooms for a gymnasium and recreation room. Consequently, the proposal of paid membership to a club and the inmate rental scheme have not been implemented. There were no spare rooms to allocate for a club room. A recent proposal to centralise the activities in the auditorium area should eventually see the auditorium more fully utilized as a club room under the supervision of Activities Officers. Already the Activities office has been moved into the auditorium area, which allows greater supervision of the issuing and return of sporting equipment.

Inmates from the units and wings have been involved in ongoing touch football and cricket competitions. Tennis is also played on the cramped, concrete sports area. The grassed oval is almost ready for sporting activities and Gala Days and this will alleviate pressure on space in the concrete areas. Inmates also participate in outside activities, such as Indoor Cricket competitions with the town teams and assisting with Riding for the Disabled.

Activities Officers take part in the organisation of Gala Days, which are eagerly anticipated by the inmates. Families and friends of inmates are invited into the gaol for a barbecue style picnic day, complete with merry-go-rounds and swings for children. Seven Gala Days have been held since the gaol re-opened.

5. Reception

No contract has been formulated so inmates do not, as was planned, enter into the Bathurst Programme voluntarily.

Initial receptions are completed, whenever possible, by the Principal Prison Officer (Prison Processing), the Assistant Superintendent (Industries) and the Welfare Officer.

A booklet outlining information considered useful for inmates new to Bathurst Gaol was drawn up by the Senior Prison Officer in Prisoner Processing. It was issued to inmates on arrival. The booklet was withdrawn about a year ago as this information was out-of-date. Some revision was done but to date this booklet has not been re-issued.

6. Visits

Visits have remained a right for all inmates. When limited work existed within the gaol, visiting hours were on a daily basis from 9.00 a.m. - 11.30 a.m. and 12.15 p.m. - 3.30 p.m. Inmates had access to unlimited visits, the duration of which depended on the facility's capacity.
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