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THE CORRECTION OR RE-EDUCATION OF YOUNG OFFENDERS

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1 INTRODUCTION

There is a recognition in all Australian criminal justice jurisdictions that juvenile offenders and young adult offenders have very specific needs. There is also a recognition that if rehabilitative programs offered to these young offenders are to be effective, these specific needs have to be taken into consideration.

Generally speaking, in Australia a young offender who has not yet legally become an adult, is the responsibility of the Juvenile Justice system, although the age at which a young person enters the adult correctional system varies slightly from State to State and Territory.

All Australian States place particular emphasis on programs which support these young offenders in acquiring valuable life and vocational skills, a work ethic and self sufficiency. This paper summarises the approaches different State jurisdictions in Australia take with regard to the management of, and program development for, young adult and juvenile offenders.

Particular emphasis is given to the Gurnang Life Challenge component of the Specialised Young Adults Program implemented by the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services. This program is unique in Australia, and as far as could be ascertained, there is no similar program operating outside Australia either.

Earlier this year, this New South Wales Program was evaluated by an organisation specialising in adventure based educational programs. From the results of this thorough independent evaluation, many valuable lessons can be learnt as far as the most effective and appropriate management of young offenders is concerned particularly with an intent to reduce their offending behaviour.

2 PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

Only in New South Wales can a young adult offender, as opposed to a juvenile offender, be housed in a separate gaol in the adult correctional system, away from all but carefully selected older adult offenders. This is done deliberately to minimise the involvement of young offenders in the criminal sub-culture with its risks of 'hardening' these young people, particularly if they are in gaol for the first time.

Although jurisdictions in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory have no separate correctional centres for young adult offenders, they do offer rehabilitative programs specifically designed to meet the needs of this
group. All jurisdictions have separate institutions for juvenile offenders. A summary of programs is listed below.

2.1 Victoria

The State of Victoria is about to open a Young Offenders Unit at the Port Phillip Correctional Centre in Melbourne for up to 43 offenders aged between 17 and 25. This Unit will emphasise participation in programs dealing with issues such as:
- raising self esteem
- literacy/numeracy problems
- anger management
- communication skills.

The Victorian Department of Justice requires managers of correctional centres to promote community involvement in the programs and activities for inmates and to encourage community agencies to provide a range of programs and support services to offenders. For example, young offenders on community corrections orders can be referred to community agencies for accommodation and counselling services. They can also be referred to community health centres for help with drug and alcohol related issues and general health matters. Young Aboriginal inmates have access to culturally relevant education and training programs.

2.2 Queensland

In the State of Queensland, the Department of Corrective Services is responsible for the management of adult offenders from the age of 17 who are sentenced to a term of imprisonment or admitted to a community supervision order. Legislation requires young offenders aged 17 to be separated from all other prisoners as far as possible. The Community Corrections section of Corrective Services in this State has developed specific programs for young offenders between 17 and 25 years of age.

The Management Alternative for Youthful Groups in Custody (MAYGIC) provided by Queensland Corrective Services, is built on experiential based learning in combination with work skills. It is implemented in a wilderness area to allow challenging physical activities. Successful completion of this program ensures a fast-track placement within community custody. The MAYGIC Program takes place over 8 weeks and alternates between adventure based learning and community service work.

In Community Corrections most young offenders are managed in accordance with their individual case management requirements. They can participate in programs involving
experiential learning, mostly provided by community agencies. However, one Community Corrections Region in Queensland has designed an adventure-based program in conjunction with a work preparation course to meet the needs of young offenders.

2.3 Western Australia

In Western Australia, many young first offenders receive police cautions. Others are referred to Juvenile Justice Teams which focus on bringing offender, victim and families together in a conferencing situation. These Teams were established to divert minor juvenile offenders from the formal court system. It is the role of these Juvenile Justice Teams to divert these young people from the criminal justice system, and in the longer term to prevent them from further criminal activities.

The Warminda Intensive Intervention Centre in Western Australia runs a program called Chance of Going Straight for offenders between 16 and 21. Participants have to take responsibility for their actions and address their substance abuse and possible drug addiction.

The Western Australian Juvenile Community Based Services Directorate provides funding to a number of non-government agencies which offer preventative services to juveniles at risk of becoming involved in criminal activities.

An Aboriginal Family Supervision Program has been piloted in two metropolitan and one country location. This program targets young Aboriginal offenders between 16 and 21. Departmental staff in each area work with these young offenders and their families and assign appropriate mentors to support the young people in addressing their offending behaviour.

A general mentor scheme for juvenile offenders (10 to 18 year old) is to provide guidance and assistance to youth who have a history of offending. The Rural Placement Program gives an opportunity to young offenders up to 21 years of age to reside and work on remote rural properties. This program offers employment and work skills and is intended to develop self respect and self esteem.

2.4 South Australia

In South Australia there are two programs for young offenders who have been convicted for the first time - the Mobile Work Camp and Operation Challenge.
The former allows a selected group of low security inmates to carry out work in remote communities in this State and fosters the development of work and independent living skills.

The latter, *Operation Challenge*, provides a structured and disciplined regime. The young people participating in this program are also given an opportunity to learn educational and social skills and to improve their general health and well-being.

The South Australian Department of Correctional Services has established useful partnerships with community agencies for the joint delivery of core programs to offenders in the community and in correctional centres. In addition, 'throughcare' is provided via a range of government and non-government organisations for services such as:

- accommodation
- financial counselling
- drug and alcohol treatment.

2.5 **Northern Territory**

In the **Northern Territory**, juvenile detainees (13 to 16 years) are accommodated in three separate facilities. The majority of juveniles are being diverted by the courts to non-custodial community corrections.

Offenders in the 17 to 24 age group are held in the main correctional centres. Programs meeting their needs focus on

- educational and vocational skills
- alcohol and other drug abuse issues
- mental health
- anger management
- life skills

The majority of programs offered have substantial cross-cultural components as young indigenous offenders are over-represented in the criminal justice system of the Territory.
2.6 New South Wales

2.6.1 Juvenile Justice

In the State of New South Wales, the Department of Juvenile Justice which is separate from the Department of Corrective Services, operates custodial facilities for offenders who have committed offences under the age of 18 and provides a range of programs to meet the needs of its clients within the context of addressing offending behaviour.

These include:
• self awareness/reasoning
• coping skills
• social and living skills
• reintegration into the community.

An example of a successful program in this respect is the Robinson Program for boys under the age of 15 with extremely challenging behaviour. This program provides a structured therapeutic environment with consistent routines and discipline.

A Youth Justice Conferencing scheme has been developed and enshrined in legislation to divert juvenile offenders from the more formal processes of the criminal justice system. Youth justice conferencing brings the offenders, their families and the victims together, face-to-face. Together, the offender and victim must agree on a suitable outcome that can range from an apology to reimbursement or community work.

2.6.2 Corrective Services

2.6.2.1 A Specialised Young Offenders Program

When the Young Adults Program in New South Wales was first introduced in 1991, the Government at the time announced that young adults were to be separated from the mainstream gaol population. The argument was then, and is now, that by placing young ‘impressionable’ inmates in specialised programs, they could participate in activities without being influenced in their decisions by older, more ‘hardened’ offenders. Consequently, the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services devised an inmate management program specifically for young offenders.

While the Young Adults Program has undergone several changes since 1991 at its core remains an attempt to progressively place more responsibility and accountability on each individual offender. Another unchanged cornerstone of the Young Adults Program
is the concerted effort to involve relevant community agencies, institutions, and employers in the Program. This is to assist in breaking down the isolation from the general community which many inmates experience and it also provides a link to community resources when the young offenders are released from full-time custody.

In New South Wales, about 30% of all inmates are under the age of 25. All inmates under the age of 25 are covered by the Department's policy Managing Young Adults in NSW Correctional Centres. That means, all offenders under 25 and who are in any correctional centre anywhere in New South Wales, will have had the opportunity to participate in programs which are designed to cater specifically to the needs of younger inmates. However, not all young offenders are able to participate in the Gumang Program because spaces are limited. Only those young offenders who have been to the Parklea Correctional Centre in Sydney and the Oberon Correctional Centre in the mountain ranges about 300 km from Sydney have been through a staged integrated program which combines outdoor adventure based activities with work, vocational education and community service projects.

Participation in this program is determined by the case management process, rather than inmate choice.

2.6.2.2 The Gumang Life Challenge Program

A large gaol in Sydney is linked with a smaller remote country gaol for a staged integrated program. The smaller gaol accommodates 60 young offenders and 40 carefully selected adult inmates. These 40 inmates form the 'adult nucleus' of the program and they contribute to a positive and safe environment for the young offenders. The program in the country gaol is called the Gumang Life Challenge Program. In addition to the custodial staff which this centre like any other correctional centre requires, the program is run with two highly experienced adventure-based educators.

The Gumang Life Challenge Program in Oberon which runs over four months is the most intensive component of the Specialised Program. It is the only integrated program for offenders under 25. It requires its participants to achieve to set standards in small groups in a remote bush setting.¹

¹ A video of the Oberon Gumang Life Challenge Program is available from the New South Wales Department of Corrective Services, Public Relations Section, level 11, 24 Campbell Street, Roden Cutler House, Sydney NSW 2000
2.6.2.3 Integration of Physical Challenge and Structured Education

In summary, the Gurnang Program focuses on the integration of the following:

- encouraging inmates into positive and pro-active living skills through extensive and demanding experiences
- exposing the inmates to environmental, physical, social and individual challenges
- creating a positive learning environment
- enabling inmates to recognise the learning and skills they have achieved throughout the program
- enhancing the inmates' employability by developing their communication skills and providing accredited vocational training, eg use of a range of power hand tools and machinery relevant to the timber industry and horticultural and bricklaying courses
- supporting inmate students undertaking external educational and vocational courses
- providing personal development programs related to self responsibility, attitude and positive thinking, respect and tolerance, assertiveness, goal setting and future planning, problem solving and anger management.

The integrity of the program is guarded by a very structured and rigorous process of accountability which includes regular reviews and progress reports.

Not all participants in this program graduate successfully. Yet those who complete the program but miss the requirements for successful graduation will have gained something useful according to the best of their abilities.

Young offenders participation in the Gurnang Program must be in the last 18 months of their custodial sentence. After the outdoor adventure-based stage of the Specialised Young Adults Program, the young inmates may return to a metropolitan correctional centre for possible release to community supervision or work release.

3 PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG WOMEN

All the programs and activities mentioned so far are offered to young male inmates. It is fair to say that due to their relative low numbers in the Australian correctional system, women generally and young women in particular, do not have access to the same range of programs available to men.

Increasingly though, all correctional systems in Australia place a greater emphasis on developing specific case management plans and while there are no gender-specific programs for young female offenders in the adult correctional system, their needs can
be met by programs and services which deal with issues such as:
• raising self-esteem
• literacy and numeracy problems
• anger management
• substance abuse
• communications abilities
• development of vocational skills
• involvement of Indigenous Elders in the delivery of programs to young Aboriginal female offenders.

In New South Wales, the Department of Juvenile Justice has a Young Women in Custody Program which provides services in the areas of
• health
• counselling
• education
• vocational training
• employment opportunities.

4 EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

Increasingly, as part of maintaining high quality organisational performance, government departments in Australia evaluate their programs and services systematically and as a matter of course. Below is a summary of the evaluation processes applied to gauge the effectiveness of programs and services for young offenders in Australia.

4.1 Victoria

While there are no specialised programs for younger inmates in Victoria, evaluations are undertaken for all programs the Victorian Department offers particularly in the areas of drug and alcohol, vocational education and training programs.

4.2 Queensland

An internal evaluation of the MAYGIC Program after 12 months of operation revealed a recidivism rate of 20% among participants who had completed this program which is considerably lower than the overall recidivism rate for Queensland in the past three years. An external evaluation revealed that the program had a significant positive behavioural effect in most (72%) of the offenders who participated in the program, both while in custody and when they returned to the community, compared to the behaviour of non-participants.
4.3 Western Australia

The Western Australian Juvenile Justice Teams were evaluated after two years of operation. For example, 92% of the offenders said they were satisfied with the way they were dealt with by these teams. 81% of the victims of the crimes committed by the young offenders said that they thought the action plans developed for the perpetrators were fair and 83% said they were satisfied with the way the Juvenile Justice Teams had dealt with the matter.

4.4 New South Wales

4.4.1 Juvenile Justice

An external evaluation of the New South Wales Robinson Program indicated a decrease in the severity of offences, a 50% decrease in minor misdemeanours after entering the program and stabilisation of escape and self harm attempts.

4.4.2 Corrective Services

In New South Wales an evaluation of the Young Adults Program was among the first Departmental activities to be subject to a comprehensive internal review. This review showed that some of the stages of the program needed adjustment and redefining but overall, that the program is based on solid research and policy direction.

In addition, the Gumang Life Challenge Program, the specialised part of the Department's Young Adults Program, has been assessed by an independent organisation. In brief, this particular evaluation looked at issues such as:
- suitability of location
- standard of operation in comparison with contemporary best practice
- personal effectiveness and self concept of participants
- safety of participants and staff
- staff and training issues
- staff skills and performance
- program cost efficiency
- review of role of case officers.

In summary, the assessment indicated that the Gumang Life Challenge Program is integrated both in concept as well as in its internal processes:
"The delivery of the program is well tuned to the needs and abilities of the client group, with language of instruction, instructional style, use of equipment and aids, and pre-planning of training experiences all being carried out at a highly competent level."

At first glance, it could be assumed that there is something ‘different’ about the participants in the Gumang Program. Clearly, they have criminal convictions and are living in an institutional setting. There is evidence from other research that inmates in corrective institutions often have somewhat different developmental characteristics from the population at large, such as lower educational levels, higher levels of childhood abuse, and lower socio-economic standing. Therefore in the evaluation of this Program the participants were compared to a sample of senior high school students close in age to the young inmates. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of a review of their personal effectiveness.

There are four areas for which the findings of the evaluation might be of particular interest to other criminal justice jurisdictions in Australia as well as overseas:

4.4.2.1 Choice of Location for Program

As the Gumang Program combines the development of living, social, educational and vocational skills with a physically challenging adventure based educational component, the choice of an appropriate location, adherence to stringent safety standards and the provision of appropriate expedition equipment are of utmost importance. Expedition planning must be well considered with suitably graded levels of difficulty. The evaluation rated these aspects highly in the context of accepted industry standards.

The relevant research and literature suggests that outdoor adventure based education programs are most effective when they are conducted in “a place apart” from normal, especially urban, living. This is not to be confused with a boot camp type approach to the management of young offenders.

While many of the young offenders participating in the Gumang Program are initially very concerned about being sent to a place which is far from family and friends, by the end of the 16 week program many of the most important learning outcomes which were measured by the independent evaluation relate strongly to the adventurous nature of the program and the bush/mountain location of the correctional centre.

The evaluation clearly shows that there are developmental outcomes which can be directly attributed to the remoteness of the area and the adventurous activities of the
program. This is true even considering the sometimes extreme weather conditions in these mountain ranges - it gets very cold in winter with occasional snow fall and very hot in summer with the risk of bush fires.

4.4.2.2 Relevance of the Program for Young Offenders of Various Ethnic Backgrounds

The adventure based outdoor stage of the Young Adults Program has very strong 'Australian' characteristics related to the unique conditions of the Australian bush, bush life and bush culture. Many of the young offenders in the New South Wales correctional system are either not born in Australia or, although born here, may have strong cultural ties to the countries from which their parents have emigrated.

For example, the evaluation showed that while 73% of participants commencing the 4 months Gumang Program indicated they were born in Australia, only 61.5 % said they felt they were “ethnically Australian” and only 46.8% ‘felt’ fully Australian. However, there was no statistically significant difference as far as their ethnic and cultural backgrounds were concerned between those successfully completing the program and those who could not meet the standards required for graduation. It can therefore be concluded that despite the remote bush location and the distinct Australian character of the program, all young offenders entering this program have an equal chance of achieving the goals set by the Gumang Life Challenge Program.

4.4.2.3 Role of Staff

While the Gumang Program is conducted by staff with expertise in the area of adventure based education, the role of custodial officers is also crucial not only as far as the actual expeditions are concerned. The evaluation clearly showed that the young offenders participating in the program are looking for guidance and role modelling from all the officers working in this young adults program.

The results of the evaluation indicate that positive relations with officers has significant effect on whether or not the young offenders participating in the program increased in their open thinking, self efficacy, social effectiveness and emotional stability - all areas in which the program wants to make an impact to provide the young participants with the skills to lead productive lives once released from custody.

It is interesting to note that the officers who work in the Gumang Program gave permission on a strictly confidential basis for the participating young offenders to rate the officers' performance. The results are noteworthy:
on the whole, the young offenders gave officers generous praise in a situation where they had nothing to gain from doing so

the young inmates expressed a value system which could be expressed as a sense of professionalism, that is, officers were not judged on being ‘nice guys’ but on whether they were involved, attentive and generally trying to do a good job.

During the time, the young offenders spend in the Gurnang Life Challenge Program, their case is managed by a team of case officers. The case officer is likely to be the officer with whom the inmate has the most consistent contact.

The availability and involvement of officers seems to be a key factor in the inmates’ personal growth and development and their acceptance of responsibility for their actions.

According to the evaluation, a positive relationship between inmates and staff cannot be overestimated. The results suggest that the more positive the relationships between program participants and officers are from the very beginning, the more likely it is that there will be gains in personal effectiveness during the program. This is the case overall, and particularly the case in terms of the key areas of open thinking, self efficacy and social effectiveness. This may well be one of the most important findings of the evaluation study.

4.4.2.4 Lasting Effects on Program Participants

The young offenders participating in the Gurnang Program were assessed at different stages of the program in areas such as self efficacy, social effectiveness, active involvement, stress management and co-operative team work. The results showed that, although the scores in these areas fluctuated (sometimes significantly), overall they increased and did not drop below the initial scores. In addition, when all the individual scores in these areas are considered, the final overall score is significantly higher than the one measured prior to the first adventure expedition of the Gurnang Program.

5 CONCLUSION

It is quite clear that programs specifically designed to meet the needs of young offenders which combine physically challenging activities with highly structured educational and developmental programs are successful in challenging attitudes and behaviours. These programs provide young adults with the skills to take up their post release responsibilities without engaging in criminal activities.
For any jurisdiction planning to introduce a similar program concept for young offenders, the selection and training of staff must be a major consideration.

The developmental outcomes and the outcomes in terms of the objectives of the Young Offenders Program in New South Wales, for example, are high; the program represents good value for the resources allocated. The immediate costs of operation are low and are comparable to other (outside the correctional system) adventure based program operators. Much depends on the resourcefulness of the Adventure Based Educators and the custodial staff.

There remains a need to further develop the methodologies and design for longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of these programs in which recidivism is not the sole indicator of their success. This is a challenge not only for corrective services but for all government departments involved in the provision of human services. Corrective Services can provide the most appropriate and effective personal development programs to young adult offenders but only the concerted effort of all government departments can make the community resources and social services available to support the reintegration of young offenders back into the community once they have served their custodial sentence.