

Conference

THE WAY OUT

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**THE PRISONER CLASS -
GETTING A JOB, GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY :
HAVING A FUTURE, GIVEN THE CHANCE**

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THE PRISONER CLASS - GETTING A JOB, GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY: HAVING A FUTURE, GIVEN THE CHANCE

PREAMBLE

Imprisonment is the punishment of deprivation of liberty. It is also the sanction of final choice to be exercised by the State only if all other non-prison options have been exhausted or if the crime commissioned is of such severity as to demand its use. Desirable outcomes of imprisonment should find offenders making restitution to crime victim(s) and the State whilst involved in processes to correct offending behaviour. In an enlightened Correctional System the latter of these matters should occur with a minimum of disruption to opportunities that would otherwise be available in the general community. In an intelligent correctional system access to opportunity should be significantly enhanced and exploitative of the multiplicity of resources already available in the community, both human and capital. With few exceptions the deprivation of liberty as a punishment for offenders is finite - the majority will eventually return to the community. This reality, of itself, provides the justification for active interventions both within the correctional and community contexts to redress unacceptable behaviours, whilst offenders are in the legal custody of correctional administrators.

The fundamental precept of this Paper is that criminal behaviour is principally a function of economic circumstance (poverty) and a lack of opportunity (that results from a failed education system, poor self-esteem and other social determinants). It will be advanced that deliberate and positive correctional interventions are feasible that can impact to reduce the likelihood of reoffence. This involves giving offenders a chance to acquire new skills and, given the opportunity, to productively apply these in the community. The correctional industry cannot provide the cure-all to social and economic ills. It can however replicate, in a controlled environment, (both in prisons but, more importantly, in the community) the circumstances whereby more acceptable and "normal" behaviours are learnt by offenders. In effect corrections should teach how to manipulate the real world, legally.

JUVENILE CRIME - THE WAY OUT OR THE WAY IN; THE WEST AUSTRALIAN "ANSWER"

The convening of a Conference on methods for integrating offenders back into the community at a time when the host State has enacted a significantly punitive piece of legislation, that will have the effect of increasing the prison population, is somewhat anachronistic and deserves specific comment.

The adoption of a logic such as that implicit to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill that would potentially see children languishing in prisons guarantees a grim social future. The recent actions of the Western Australian government in its "solution" to youth crime can only be described as draconian.

The message is clear enough and is epitomised in a reported quote by the then Acting Premier, Ian Taylor, that "the government has decided to excise the (certain

juvenile offenders) from society" (The Australian, editorial, 8/1/92).

The West Australian government is wrong. Greater attention should be given to the causes of crime rather than be reactionary to the symptoms. In its own Strategy document (Western Australia into the 90s) the government acknowledged that increased jail terms lead to increased crime rates, a matter agreed upon throughout the civilised world. The Premier of West Australia is quoted as saying that "locking up teenagers did not deter them from reoffending" (The Western Australian, 15.8.91, p.7).

Quite so, Premier. Why then would the West Australian government proceed down the path of legislative repression of the State's disadvantaged youth? At a time in history that is recording increased suicide rates, boredom, frustration and extraordinary rates of unemployment amongst the nation's youth, further repression is a dangerous proposition to the welfare of those affected.

Why not promulgate guidelines for police pursuits instead? There is evidence that strict guidelines introduced in the United States have reduced the number of car chases, accidents and fatalities without increasing the rate of car theft.

Why not consider the extension of Youth Social Justice Strategies in line with Commonwealth recommendations?

Why not buy a dozen vehicles and allow juveniles to drive in a controlled environment on a property in the country?

Why not follow the advice of your own advisory Committee on Juvenile Offenders and resource more appropriately such Projects as the Street Machine Program (especially in Perth CBDs), Fred Penny's Diversionary Programs for juvenile offenders and others?

Haven't we alienated enough segments of our society without disenfranchising more?

The Federal Attorney-General must intervene to override the West Australian legislation, an Act that may stand in contravention of various international covenants to which Australia is a signatory.

INTRODUCTION

In a background of rising unemployment (Australia, we are told, currently has the highest rate of unemployment of any of the developed countries), economic hardship and increased crime rates are leading more of the disadvantaged, minority and poor classes into prison throughout Australia. The prisoner population has become increasingly younger, more have less literacy acumen and fewer skills. The burgeoning of Australian prisons can be traced to the beginnings of economic recession in the 1970s. There are compelling arguments for the proposition that crime is socially and economically patterned. In these circumstances there is significant merit in the development of crime prevention initiatives that have regard to those factors that appear to influence the patterning of criminal behaviour - poverty, failed education systems, indifference (or open hostility) to youth issues, boredom and lack

of opportunity and so forth. Processes that promote the prevention of crime, in the longer term, will provide the only solution to decreasing the number of people in prison.

History records the appalling and inhumane conditions that have (and presently) exist(ed) in prison systems and the over-representation of the poorer classes and minority groups in that system. This is particularly true of Central and Eastern Europe and the names Kafka, Chekov, Solzenitsyn and more recently Vaclav Havel spring to mind. Professor Hans Tulkens, adviser to the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Professor at the University of Groningen, in his descriptions of present conditions in Eastern European prisons at a Conference in Budapest in September of 1990 (Hungarian Society of Criminology and Penal Reform International) reports conditions that indicate little change in these places. In the United States a staggering one and a quarter million people - over four hundred per hundred thousand of the population are locked up, often in overcrowded and dangerous prisons. It may well be that the maintenance and expansion of prisons in the United States is a cheaper alternative to the provision of an adequate social security system for the disadvantaged in that country.

In other parts of the world prison reform has been achieved particularly in Holland, Germany and Denmark with genuine attempts to treat people decently so that the time they spend in prison is constructive and humane.

The Australian Prison system was modelled upon the British penal system which was transported along with its country's prisoners some two hundred years ago. This colonial "heritage", which is pseudo-militaristic, is found throughout the world and is characterised by a preponderance of rules, uniforms and a deep undercurrent of inhumanity. In many British prisons (and until recently at Number 2 Division, Boggo Road) prisoners still go through the degrading experience of slopping out buckets which they have used as lavatories.

There is a terrible irony, nonetheless, that (probably as a result for a need for "legitimate" settlers in an emerging early Australian society) for a short period the Australian penal system developed as one of the most progressive in the world with "ticket of leave" options for convicts and resettlement packages that were designed to provide opportunity in a developing community. Many prominent early Australian business people and civic leaders were graduates of this system. Unfortunately this impetus was lost as free settlers moved to Australia and a class structure emerged.

It is a matter of historical fact that the eighteenth century felons transported to Australia who were the poor of British society were capable of changing their way of life, given the opportunity. They could, and did, make a significant economic contribution; they could and did, form stable social relationships. Robert Hughes book The Fatal Shore illustrates this matter very effectively.

PENAL REFORM IN QUEENSLAND

During the past two years the Queensland Corrective Services Commission has come

a considerable distance towards the reform and restructure of the prison system in that State. For decades prior to the enactment of the Corrective Services Act in 1988 and the creation of the Commission, prisons in Queensland had been severely neglected, facilities were antiquated and "reform" was not on the agenda. The former Queensland Prisons Department operated in a closed fashion whose principle objective was the "secure" containment of offenders through the rule of force (static security). In this environment punishment beyond that of imprisonment per se appeared to flourish, the public view was carefully shaped with the prisoner class exploited for political purposes and the social and economic conditions that predetermine offending behaviour received little or no attention. The Kennedy Review into Corrective Services in Queensland (1988) reported that more funds were allocated on feeding the dog squad under this regime than in the provision of education or training opportunities for prisoners (at less than .83 cents per prisoner per annum) [Kennedy, J. Interim Report ; Commission of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland, 1988, p.26]. Education Officers and Welfare personnel were not employed in the former Prisons Service until the 1980s and this, in itself, was tokenism, for whilst salaries for "professional" personnel were made available (as a result of a recommendation by Sir David Longlands in his review of the service in 1985) no additional funds were provided with which programs of substance could be commenced. In a review of Prisoner Education in Queensland in August of 1990, Eileen Byrne in speaking on the legacy to the Commission noted that :

"The inheritance of a retribution-based policy from successive governments whose practice was consciously to under-fund the prison service, has left the Commission with ten out of thirteen Centres or prisons which have no purpose-designed educational facilities whatsoever. This is a particularly indefensible situation given that several have been built in the late 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, by which time the value of education and training in the rehabilitation process had been well established for some decades" (Byrne, E.M., Unlocking Minds: From Retribution to Rehabilitation, August 1990, p.39).

She continues by stating that :

"... Queensland now has to face the need to provide for the most basic facilities from a thirty-year backlog of non-spending in this area. The Commission cannot be expected to produce results in accordance with what is now normal correctional policy in Western Industrialised countries, unless it is given the capital program to provide the most basic accommodation needed in each Centre." (ibid, p.40)

It would be a fair assessment that the problems for the Queensland correctional industry (in terms of historical development and under-resourcing) are not dissimilar to other Australian jurisdictions.

The unfortunate reality is that, in these desperate financial times, no government, irrespective of its ideological position, is likely to resource to acceptable levels to enable suitable programs to be undertaken in the custodial correctional setting.

The only reasonable solution is for correctional service administrators to negotiate the

sharing of those pre-existing resources in the community (educational institutions, TAFE facilities, SkillShare facilities and so forth). In the case of the Queensland Correctional Service, the movement of prisoners to places other than correctional centres for educational or employment purposes is feasible under various provisions within the Corrective Services Act, 1988. Whether correctional administrators in other parts of Australia are ready to make the quantum leap from total incarceration of offenders to escorted and unescorted leave by a majority of offenders to participate in educational and employment programs outside the custodial setting (with their return to such Centres at night) is, however, somewhat questionable. In time expediency, occasioned by the enormous cost of refurbishment of existing correctional centres (or a massive capital program to replace existing Centres with new Centres) will determine this issue.

The Queensland Corrective Services Commission has placed a premium on the principle of dynamic security which not only requires the advancement of programs that would find offenders productively involved (in a participatory manner) within correctional centres but which would see the development of individual sentence management plans established for each prisoner that would, within reasonable parameters, establish the timetable by which prisoners could perform specified tasks for release from a custodial setting into a community correctional or other system. This approach is a relatively new concept internationally.

When a person enters a prison for any period it should be incumbent upon the correctional system to propose and implement, as soon as possible, a suitable management plan that establishes achievable goals which seek to both modify unacceptable behaviour and prepare the person for re-entry into a normalised community.

Inherent to this proposition is the ongoing assessment, monitoring and evaluation of a prisoners performance in training and program regimen that meet these criteria. This regimen should be tailored to the individual requirements of the sentence for each prisoner and must seek, as a desired outcome, to prepare for the persons reintegration back into the community. This must be achieved in a manner that, with some reliability, will adequately ensure that the person released no longer constitutes a danger to the community and is adequately skilled to assume a productive and responsible role in society.

For the vast majority of prisoners in Queensland this matter is now being addressed. For reasons already advanced, the difficulties for prisoners (and the administrators that govern them) in the provision of reasonable access to educational and other facilities within a custodial context are profound with such access financially prohibitive.

THE ARGUMENT FOR RESETTLEMENT

Measures that aid in the resettlement of offenders are designed to benefit the collective interest of the community and must not be, nor perceived to be, a vehicle for early release by offenders. The issues of correcting offending behaviour and reducing the burden on the public purse in the maintenance of the correctional

system are peripheral, albeit significant, matters to the principle concern of community safety. The advancement of this position, it is believed, will create a more rational debate from which would emerge greater public acceptability of initiatives proposed for prisoners.

The circumstances for the prisoner class in Australia are not as severe as their counterparts elsewhere in the world. In some countries the death penalty still exists with many prisoners awaiting execution. In other places mutilation is a frequent punishment. These are matters that are not of direct concern to these discussions but are raised in passing as there are some within Australian society who are actively campaigning for harsher punitive measures including the reintroduction of the death penalty.

This Conference should register its abhorrence to the call by a Western Australian Minister to reintroduce the death penalty in the wake of the enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill.

THE SHAPING OF PUBLIC OPINION

It is appropriate to make mention of the public view of the correctional industry at this point. In spite of the implementation of important reform initiatives particularly in Queensland (through its Corrective Services Commission) the public view of correctional services remains cynical. Having accepted the flawed arguments of former prison and political administrators, which allowed the archaic and repressive prison system that existed for many decades in Queensland and elsewhere to be maintained, it is not surprising that the public view towards offenders (and prison administration) remains jaundiced. This is a matter which has not been assisted by the frequency of escapes in recent times and the proliferation of negative reporting in the popular press.

An uninformed public fed on hysterical hype from those with a vested interest to sustain the myth that prisons are full of dangerous and unproductive people (media outlets eager to sell papers as well as politicians eager to advance their political careers on the back of the prisoner class) have hardened its attitude towards offending behaviour.

It is not popular to talk of penal reform and the "rights" of offenders.

A cynical view of an industry that seeks to create a safer community should not be further sustained. The media have a significant part to play in the shaping of public opinion. This is an onerous responsibility that demands a qualitative and balanced presentation of available information. Groups such as those represented here at this Conference have an obligation to advocate and advance those processes that seek to redress offending behaviour and restore peaceful relations in society. Information remains a powerful tool for change.

THE PROCESS OF RESETTLEMENT

The period between an established minimum incarceration in a custodial

environment (which should be determined in all cases at the time of sentencing) and an actual conditional release should be the time during which the benefits derived from training and education in the custodial setting could be practically applied using more intensive and structured assessment and monitoring in semi-custodial and non-custodial settings (part of which should be undertaken in the general community).

In Queensland this process involves a progression from fully escorted leave of absence, through limited unescorted leave of absence to accommodation in fully supervised Community Corrections Centres, Halfway Houses for currently serving prisoners (under sections 61 and 69 of the Corrective Services Act, 1988) and eventually home detention pending parole in share unsupervised housing in the community (initially operated by community agencies and eventually in the offenders own home). For many Australian jurisdictions the implementation of this process will require radical legislative reformation. Queensland may provide a reasonable model for this reform.

The graduation of an offender through different levels of incarceration approaching the deinstitutionalised environment must be dependent upon the adherence to performance criteria in the preceding security level. The overriding consideration for placement in accommodation of lower level security must be the assessed threat of the offender to the safety of the community and the offenders capacity to perform productively at each level. It would be expected that the skills developed during the period of a custodial correctional detention would be marketable to the extent that employment of the person in the community would be possible (and conditional to the graduation by the offender to the level of community correctional detention).

THE PROGRAMS OF ACRO

ACRO is a significant provider of services for the prisoner class in Queensland through its housing programs for currently serving prisoners, its Job Clubs and its resettlement programs which are operated from within Queensland Correctional Centres.

(i) Housing for Currently Serving Prisoners - The Halfway House

The organisation has entered into contractual arrangements with the Queensland Corrective Services Commission to manage and operate Halfway Houses for currently serving prisoners (which provide a caretaker presence but no security presence) and has lodged Expressions of Interest to contract with the Commission in the operation of Community Corrections Centres (that provide a security presence).

Forming the lowest rung of a stepped security system designed by ACRO and implemented through legislation by the Queensland Corrective Services Commission, the Halfway House for currently serving prisoners has been successfully operating since 1989 in Brisbane and 1990 in Cairns. A new facility is soon to be opened in Rockhampton. At these facilities offenders serve the final part of a sentence before either a Home Detention application is considered or Parole is granted. The accommodation provides a constructive and supportive environment for the transition between institutional and community settings in which living skills and

acceptable social behaviours are experiences by (and are required of) eligible residents actively involving members of the normal community. Participation in this Project provides additional and valuable information that has relevance to a Parole consideration.

At the Brisbane House programs such as jobseeking, budgeting, shopping, group interaction and drug and alcohol counselling are undertaken. At the moment all residents at this facility are working, paying board and helping to support their families.

In Cairns, Family Support Programs, at the request of the Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and the Murrie (Aboriginal) Community (through a network of Agencies) are undertaken from the Rose Blank Halfway House. A chemical dependency program developed from a family disease concept has also been undertaken. This program is delivered at the Lotus Glen Correctional Centre and the Yarrabah Community Settlement. Residents at this facility who are not employed participate in a Job Club operated by ACRO in Cairns.

Should Expressions of Interest by the Association to operate Community Corrections Centres be successful, community based housing options will be significantly expanded for the prisoner class. Other community organisations (Aboriginal Tribal Council, St Vincent de Paul etc.) are already providing this form of supervised accommodation for offenders. Community Corrections Centres, whilst having less of a security orientation than that of custodial correction centres, have greater strictures and controls on the movement (or freedom) of residents than Halfway Houses.

(ii) Post Release Housing

ACRO also operates housing for those fully released from the correctional system. Given the graduated re-entry process already described, accommodation at these Centres is limited to one (1) month.

(iii) Resettlement Program

The Association's Resettlement Program has been introduced to provide structured programs for long-serving prisoners in the final twelve months of a custodial sentence. The project is designed to prepare for the re-entry of long-serving prisoners back into the community. Consisting of modules delivered monthly at the Centre by ACRO Staff and accredited volunteers, the Program deals with such matters as self-esteem and the like (with guest speakers on each of the other weeks during the month). The Resettlement Program is the formalised link between the prisoner class and the community within custodial Correctional Centres. Following completion of the formal Resettlement Program, day trips are organised to take prisoners out to venues such as real estate offices, Department of Social Security offices or Commonwealth Employment Service offices.

It is essential that prisoners (who, with few exceptions, will eventually be released) are exposed to a normalised family and community setting as soon as practicable following sentence so that the social and economic burden that is necessarily

generated as a result of an imprisonment is not sustained unnecessarily in the community upon release. During the mandatory custodial detention period suitable strategies must be implemented to provide regular and meaningful contact between the offender, the community and his/her family. This is the primary focus of the Resettlement Program.

(iv) Job Club for Released Prisoners

Work not only provides an income but also status, an identity and a focus for social activity. People who have been in the prison system have higher levels of unemployment than other groups. The attainment of employment is essential for the successful reintegration of offenders.

The issue of employment by ex-offenders has been given a priority by ACRO. A number of concepts were considered including the Second Chance Register. Whilst this initiative appears to have merit, it was not considered by ACRO to be a proactive enough project to deal with employment issues for offenders. It also does not provide the infrastructure of resourcing to enable offenders to seek out their own employment. It is a project premised upon a benevolence model which removes much of the responsibility for the attainment of employment away from the offender.

ACRO chose instead to seek out a more direct employment initiative that would totally involve the offender in the process of job readiness, canvassing and jobsearch. It was recognised that offenders reach a point at which they have had enough of offending behaviour and want to become part of a normalised community. As such they are highly motivated, more so than others within the unemployed class, and simply require materials and guidance in the attainment of their objective.

During 1991 ACRO secured funds from the Commonwealth Department of Education Employment and Training to operate a Job Club for released prisoners in South Queensland. This was the first such Job Club specifically for the prisoner class in Australia. The success of the Application is a measure of the preparedness of DEET to innovate on behalf of disadvantaged social groups. However, there were those who believed that "crims" were unemployable and, in spite of their accepted "disadvantaged" status, offenders were not generally targeted for specialised assistance by CES officers. The creation of this specific Job Club gave control to the prisoner class and access to a greater range of options than they had experienced before.

The Job Club acts as a self-help workshop aimed at assisting long-term unemployed ex-offenders and probationers to obtain a satisfactory full-time job in the shortest possible time. Each Job Club operates for four weeks (three week Club and one week of administration for the Job Club Leader). During this period Job Club participants receive support, help and encouragement from a "Leader" and other members. The Leader provides each participant with instruction in specific job search techniques utilising structured "models" to be followed in letter writing, resume preparation, interview presentation and so forth. Facilities such as word processors, telephones, facsimiles, postage, photocopying etc. are provided free of charge to

Club members.

Job Clubs are about "learning by doing". Job hunting requires the ability to integrate a series of complex skills that are best learnt in a structured environment that gives emphasis to the special factors of motivation, maintenance of behaviour and effort, positive feedback, imitation and practice. Mainstream Job Clubs have a good reputation for getting long term unemployed people back into the workforce.

A normal requirement for participation in a Job Club is that members have "marketable skills". Together with some tailoring of Job Club Policy and Procedures to accommodate the specific needs of the prisoner class, the concept of skills that are "marketable" was challenged by ACRO. As any practitioner in corrective services will tell you prisoners generally do not have much self-esteem and disclosure of what might be seen as "marketable" is difficult. The Job Clubs operated by ACRO have proceeded upon the notion that provided a person has a majority of limbs in tact and/or has a brain they have marketable skills.

The Wacol Job Club has been in operation since July 1, 1991. During this period the Club has maintained a 70% success rate.

The latest Club has achieved a 100% success rate in securing full-time employment for its participants. During a time of recession, during a month of traditional market inactivity (January) and given the ex-prisoner tag on participants, this is an outstanding achievement.

The Cairns Job Club commenced operations on January 1, 1992. It is situated in a region with higher than average unemployment and has, in its first Club, achieved a 50% success rate.

DEET is currently negotiating a Job Club for Released Prisoners in Rockhampton.

All Australian jurisdictions are urged to pursue the development of Job Clubs for the prisoner class. Whilst longitudinal analysis of the Project will not be possible for some years it is asserted that the attainment of employment and the social status that follows will guarantee that a person will not reoffend and will become a productive member of society.

INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS

Various international instruments provide the guiding principles in the civilised world by which penal reform is driven and the justification for those matters discussed in this paper. Such instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted by the United Nations in 1966, and came into force in 1976) the UN Minimum rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (adopted by the first Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders [1957] and again in an enlarged version in 1977), the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of all persons under any form of detention or imprisonment (adopted by consensus by the General Assembly of the United Nations [1988]), the

Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the European Prison Rules (Recommendation No. R [87], 1987).

Those principles that should be cited for the purposes of the discussion at this Conference are embodied in the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners as adopted by the United Nations (Resolution 1984/47) and are reproduced, in part, below :

- “58. The purpose and justification of a sentence of imprisonment or a similar measure deprivative of liberty is ultimately to protect society against crime. This end can only be achieved if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, that upon his return to society the offender is not only willing but able to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.
59. To this end, the institution should utilise all the remedial, educational moral, spiritual and other forces and forms of assistance which are appropriate and available, and should seek to apply them according to the individual treatment needs of the prisoners.
60. (1) The regime of the institution should seek to minimise any differences between prison life and life at liberty which tend to lessen the responsibility of the prisoners or the respect due to their dignity as human beings.
- (2) Before the completion of the sentence, it is desirable that the necessary steps be taken to ensure for the prisoner a gradual return to life in society. This aim may be achieved, depending on the case, by a pre-release regime organised in the same institution or in another appropriate institution, or by release on trial under some kind of supervision which must not be entrusted to the police but should be combined with effective social aid.
61. The treatment of prisoners should emphasise not their exclusion from the community, but their continuing part of it
63. (1) The fulfilment of these principles requires individualisation of treatment and for this purpose a flexible system of classifying prisoners.”

Those matters of concern to the discussion on the detention of juveniles are not reproduced but are referenced for the earnest attention of all jurisdictions. These are embodied in the International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights and the International Covenant on the Rights of the child. Some further attention to Recommendations 62 and 92 of the royal Commission on Black Deaths in Custody might also prove useful.

There is a particular difficulty in applying an innovative correctional program against a backdrop of oppressive and conservative sentencing legislation. This presents a distinct challenge for Australian jurisdictions whose legislation is not uniform and may

be in conflict with the principles espoused in international covenants to which Australia is a signatory.

Reference must be made again to the recently enacted Western Australian legislation relating to juvenile offenders. The effect of this legislation will be to send more people into prison, particularly Aboriginals. One must question the resolve of a government to contemplate the "Way Out" of prisons when it is actively seeking to netwiden with a "Way In" for a new wave of offenders, who will, by virtue of the prison experience, become more violent and will be an impost on the taxpayer's dollar for a longer period.

SUMMARY

Imprisonment is increasingly recognised as an expensive and ineffective way of treating crime. The challenge for penal reformers throughout the world in the nineties will be to move people out of prison to a different kind of punishment that would keep offenders with (and supporting financially) their families, living in their communities, whilst allowing them to make restitution for their actions. In Australia this may require significant legislative change to enhance existing correctional approaches and to enable "front end" options (at the time of sentencing) to be pursued to reduce the temptation to use imprisonment for those for whom this sentence is unwarranted (and as a consequence to enable the offender to retain employment and other productive links) whilst promoting the development of creative programs initially in custodial settings but primarily focused within a community context.

Having regard to the various international conventions (that have equivalence in Minimum Standards adopted as Queensland Corrective Services Commission policy) it should be considered a reasonable proposition that adequate, non-arbitrary, standardised and fair methods be implemented in a determination of sentence management programs for all prisoners. Such programs should be individualised with appropriate assessment performance evaluation and monitoring procedures being adopted.

A gradual re-entry by offenders back into the community can be achieved with a legislative capacity that endorses community based and managed facilities providing a range of security levels. The structured movement from secure detention to unsupervised detention should be performance driven.

All programs of reintegration must be practically designed and give emphasis to the attainment of skills and employment to reduce the potential for reoffence.

In the absence of available educative and programs facilities in correctional centres (and given the current difficult economic circumstances that make it unlikely that a capital program to upgrade facilities will be undertaken) access by prisoners to pre-existing community resources presents as a viable alternative (Universities, Colleges and so forth).

All Australian jurisdictions are urged to develop Job Clubs and other innovative Projects that actively seek to provide employment and educative opportunity for offenders, particularly juveniles.

Governments should resist the temptation to indulge vocal minority groups or seek to advance their own careers through the enactment of repressive legislation that would increase the number of persons incarcerated in prisons. It is a more reasonable proposition to seek to redress social inequality and deal with the causes of crime than to treat the symptoms of crime. Giving opportunity to the disadvantaged, providing employment and addressing social failures (education) are the contemporary tools to minimising criminal activity, not imprisonment.

ACRO (Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offenders)

formerly The Prisoner & Family Support Association (QLD)

ACRO is a federation of community and individual concerns whose goal is to understand and respond to problems in crime, to work with people who have come into conflict with the law, to review, evaluate and advocate for changes in the Criminal Justice System and to engage in public education on matters involving criminal law and its application.

ACRO Core Values :

1. People have the right to live in a safe and peaceful society as well as a responsibility implied by this right to respect the law.
2. Every person has intrinsic worth and the right to be treated with dignity, equity, fairness and compassion when involved with the Criminal Justice System.
3. All people have the potential to become responsible citizens.
4. Every person has the right and the responsibility to be informed about and involved in, the Criminal Justice process.
5. Justice is best served through measures that resolve conflicts, repair harm and restore peaceful relations in society.
6. Independent, autonomous, non-government organisations have a vital role in the Criminal Justice System.