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• Australia's National Prison Newspaper

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About Time

Port Phillip to Close as Australia Turns Away From Private Prisons

Advocates and experts have welcomed the move

By Denham Sadler

Port Phillip Prison will close at the end of next year as part of a growing move away from privately run prisons in Australia.

The Victorian government announced last month that the maximum security Port Phillip Prison in the state's south-west, run by UK-based company G4S, and the minimum security Dhurringile Prison, in the state's north, will shut.

The new Western Plains Correctional Centre, built over recent years by the state government at a cost of more than $1 billion, will open next year to accommodate many people currently incarcerated at Port Phillip.

The announced closure of Port Phillip came days before the findings of a coronial inquest into the death of First Nations man Joshua Kerr at the prison in late 2021.

The Coroner found that Kerr's death was preventable, and that his access to the medical treatment he needed was blocked by a "disproportionate focus on security concerns which obscured and hindered a clear and decisive assessment and management of his medical needs".

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Ike Curtis

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Port Phillip to Close as Australia Turns Away From Private Prisons

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Cover Story

By Denham Sadler

The Coroner also found that a lack of communication between correctional and medical staff had been an ongoing issue at Port Phillip.

Days before these findings, the Victorian government confirmed the prison would be closed by the end of next year.

"We are delivering better facilities for people in custody, a safer working environment for our staff and a safer community for Victorians," Corrections Minister Enver Erdogan said.

VACRO senior policy and advocacy advisor Abigail Lewis said the organisation would have chosen Port Phillip as the first prison to close in the state.

"It's got a really terrible reputation among people incarcerated there and people who work there," Lewis told About Time. "The infrastructure is ageing and from a reintegration perspective it's a particularly difficult prison to reintegrate from. It's a highly traumatic experience being incarcerated at Port Phillip."

Four people have died in custody at Port Phillip Prison in the past year, according to Corrections Victoria.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) also referenced long-running concerns over conditions at Port Phillip.

"We have represented clients who have been cruelly detained in conditions of solitary confinement and have suffered abuse and neglect at Port Phillip Prison," VALS principal managing lawyer Sarah Schwartz said.

"We hope this closure is a signal of the end of cruel and needless human rights abuses in Victoria's prisons. Victoria needs to rid itself of global private prison conglomerates, who prioritise profits over care."

The closure of Port Phillip has been possible because of a significant reduction in the number of people incarcerated in Victoria. At the end of May 2024, there were 5,970 people in prison, down from 6,456 people at the same time last year, and 6,633 in May 2022.

It's the second announced closure of a major private prison in Australia in the past six months, with the tide now turning against the practice of outsourcing the operations of correctional facilities to private companies, typically multinationals based overseas.

This has been welcomed by Lewis, with the closing of private prisons one of VACRO's main priorities.

"That's because private prisons can operate as black boxes," she said. "They don't have the same accountability, transparency and information-sharing measures and the public and Parliament can't hold them to the same standards as we can with prisons run by Corrections Victoria.

"We're certainly going to continue to push for de-privatisation of the prison system, but it's good to see Port Phillip is closing and G4S is out of the prison system.

"But a prison is a prison and they're inherently punitive and extremely harmful but for transparency, information and accountability, it's certainly preferable for prisons to be run by the government."

At the end of last year, the New South Wales government announced it would be bringing the Junee Correctional Centre, run by US firm GEO Group, back into public hands, with the state also confirming a preference of ending all its contracts with private prison providers.

Queensland has recently brought its two privately run prisons into public hands, while Western Australia did the same for all but one of its own private facilities in early 2020.

Across Australia, about 20 per cent of all people in prison are incarcerated in privately run facilities (compared to 8 per cent in the US).

It's far higher in Victoria, where about 40 per cent of people in prison are housed in privately run centres. The closure of Port Phillip will bring this down significantly to about 25 per cent, but still higher than the national percentage.

By the start of 2026 there will still be six private prisons in Australia, with two remaining in Victoria – Fulham and Ravenhall, the Clarence Correctional Centre in New South Wales, Mount Gambier Prison in South Australia, Parklea in NSW and Acacia Prison in Western Australia.

Denham Sadler is a freelance writer based in Naarm/Melbourne, focusing on criminal justice reform.

Letters

About Time will dedicate many of its pages to publishing the letters of people in prison, as well as from their family and friends. This is the centrepiece of the paper: a platform for people to share their experiences and learn from each other.



A Journey of Healing

By David

David writes from South Coast Correctional Centre (Nowra), NSW.

It is About Time incarcerated people are given the encouragement to share the truth of their experiences. Your paper will make this possible despite the obstacles you do, and will, face. Action, not only words, shows the power of one, then two, four, eight... paying it forward. Hope for the broke, that healing is possible both for victim and perpetrator.

We ought not be defined by our less good behaviour. Who of us may 'cast the first stone'.

My journey includes discovering I was adopted at 37 years old while preparing my mother's funeral in 1983. My father died in 1982.

My healing of active alcoholism in 1991, Mother's Day. Thanks to Archie Carmichael, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and many others over the past 33 years.

My incarceration stems from inappropriate same-gender attraction behaviour between 1978 and 1981. The context being my failure, which I own, from extremely poor judgement fuelled by alcohol and my fear of being known as a homosexual.

Fortunately, with professional therapy, spiritual direction of quality, consistently living the 12 step truth of healing and the non judgemental care and support of friends, I am free from all internal fear.

My incarceration is an objective form of amends. My personal amends to all was made over the past 33 years.

My sorrow is because I am sorry not expecting anything, not even forgiveness. Of course, that has been accepted when offered, an important gift for any healing.

My recovering from alcoholism led to me becoming a professional addictions counsellor from the Australian Institute for Counselling in Addictions (ACIA) with Distinction.

From 1996 to 2004, I served the addicts at William Booth, Surry Hills and Corrections NSW Long Bay, Ngara Mura Rehabilitation Centre.

Please, incarcerated men need to find their 'goodness' by a 'voice' for their own healing. 'About Time' will do this.

Shalom, David.

Knowledge is Power

Anonymous

The author writes from a prison in the United Kingdom.

Being in prison can leave you feeling hopeless, demoralised and, at times, lacking in self-belief. I know this from first-hand experience as I have been on an emotional rollercoaster, searching for something positive to give me hope, focus and a true sense of purpose. Education has helped me in so many aspects of my life and I have been on a learning journey since the day I decided to re-engage with education. The word 'journey' is key because it allowed me to create a real change in my life. That change did not happen overnight, it came about by me setting goals and putting 100% effort into studying. I set myself goals which subsequently led me to completing a number of educational qualifications.

Completing this work gave me a sense of pride, purpose and self-confidence. I completed Arts and Languages with a Distinction, which is something I am really proud of. This gave me the motivation to pursue a degree in Business Management (Economics). I am now in my third year of studying and the assistance and funding I initially received was instrumental in reigniting the flame I had inside of me to study and achieve. At first I was apprehensive about studying at university level, especially from the confines of a prison cell, however it soon became apparent that having something positive to focus on was the best escape mentally and physically given my circumstances.

Studying has not only given me a sense of purpose but has also given me important skills which are transferable, such as perseverance and problem-solving which I can use in everyday life as well as on my education journey. I was given the opportunity to learn and achieve and I grabbed it with both hands. Education is about much more than reading and writing. It is about growing as a person and using the knowledge we have attained in order to better our own lives and the lives of our peers. It is more important than just an ending; it is about the journey... our failures as well as our successes.

It is my long-term goal to become self-employed post-release and now I feel that I have the tools and skills to achieve this goal, regardless of my past. Education has given me a second chance and I hope it will do the same for my peers. The journey I have been on has made me believe ... I believe I have a purpose ... I believe I have been given a second chance ... I believe education is the key and although I am incarcerated, education has unlocked my mind.

From Inside Time.

About Time

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

We are the new national newspaper for people in prison across Australia. We want this to be a paper for people who are incarcerated, by people who are incarcerated. Our aim is to distribute the paper to every person in every prison and detention facility across Australia. This is our second edition, distributed to all prisons in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. We hope that Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory will join us soon.

Our team is made of a group of passionate individuals from around Australia, some of whom have been incarcerated, and others who have worked and volunteered in criminal justice, law and journalism for many years. We are always looking for others to join us.

Write to Us

If you would like to contribute to any of the sections of our paper, or if you would like to correspond with us or provide comments, please write to us at:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

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A Personal Reflection

By Nathan

Nathan writes from a prison in Victoria.

I am a prisoner in Victoria and I am 11 years into a 20 year sentence for murder. I sit in my cell and relive what I did every day. I am in this place because of drugs and alcohol. I opened myself up to a dark world of criminal behaviour and drug use. I didn't know what was at the end of this journey – prison or death. I feel like I was in a car doing 200 km/h straight at a wall. Everyone around me could see this wall, but I didn't want to believe it was there. I hit it, and I hit it hard. My journey started at the age of 13 years old. I didn't start using drugs because I had a bad upbringing, or my life was so bad that I had to use to numb the pain. I grew up a normal kid and my parents provided me with what I needed. My problem was I struggled to interact with others and I would do whatever I could just so kids my age would want to be my friend. When I started to become dependent on drugs, I started to do crime. When I would drink or smoke weed my crimes were small, they were things like graffiti charges, property damage and shop thefts, but when I became dependent on ice and opioids my crimes changed to stolen cars, assault, assault with a weapon, robberies and then eventually murder. The more serious the drugs, the more serious the crimes became.

I selfishly took a life out of this world. My actions affected a mother, a father, a family, and a community. I turned 20 in 2012 and I got sentenced to 20 years in prison in 2013. When I started heavy drug use, I alienated my family and friends, I stole and lied to those that I loved and held close to me. I would turn on those that would only want to help. I could never see what they saw because I was so heavy in my drug use that I never wanted to believe there was something wrong with me and I especially didn't want to blame my drug use as the problem. My family knew where I was going to end up, only if I had listened. It took me to take a life to change my life. It's upsetting to think I had to ruin a family to get my family back. Since coming to prison I have changed. I would be lying if I said I still don't battle with drug addiction issues. I was on the methadone program for a few years but I am now clean of all substances. I am constantly trying to better myself with education and I love my fitness. The boy that walked into this place is now a man and I can honestly say this place saved my life. A lot of families have gone through or are going through this exact same situation with loved ones.

This story is to help those that are at the start of their destructive behaviour, to help shed some light on this dark journey and to show them this life only ends one or two ways. Never in my wildest dreams would I have ever thought I would be in prison for the next 20 years. I lived the best years of my life in a cell but it doesn't mean I have to give up.

If you are going through the same things as I once did, there is help. Your family and those closest to you love you.

You're not alone in this journey we call drug addiction.

The Power of Music

By Dave

Dave writes from Loddon Prison.

I am a prisoner at a medium security prison in Victoria. I've decided to write about my experiences of learning an instrument while incarcerated. My motivation is to share my experience with other prisoners and hopefully inspire them. I also hope that Corrections may view it and give some more thought towards the importance of music and of music programs for prisoners.

We have three significant programs related to music here at the prison: a weekly jam session, an acoustic guitar-borrowing program and the prison radio program.

The weekly jam session incorporates a drum kit, guitars, bass guitars, a keyboard and various amps and other equipment. The guitar program is run by the recreation staff and involves us being able to borrow an acoustic guitar to have in our cell. It is assisted by rec staff who print out chord charts and songs to learn. The prison radio program is run by a teacher from TAFE. It is not exclusively music-related but many of us that are involved incorporate music into our radio shows in some way. Prisoners can access music via the prison radio station in their cell, local radio stations and also by purchasing CDs via special spends.

I have played drums for many years but it was always a dream of mine to learn the guitar. Since being here I've learnt to play guitar and write my own songs. The mental health benefits of this for me have been immense, particularly as for a few months of this time we were in COVID lockdown. I was able to study guitar tablature and chord charts and slowly teach myself to play. This helped alleviate the boredom and other issues I suffered throughout lockdown.

I have heard learning an instrument opens new pathways in the brain and I can most certainly notice this. It is apparent how important this process is for my mental health and overall wellbeing. It has helped me overcome some of my learning difficulties and helped me improve my self-esteem around that area. This has had a very positive carry on effect on my attitude towards education.

During my time here we have created a couple of bands comprised of prisoners that were doing reasonably long sentences. I saw huge transformations in our behaviour and overall happiness while we were engaged in the music program. This had a lasting effect throughout each week. Our attitudes towards life in prison improved. Socially it was great, working on ideas throughout the week. It has been a lifeline for us.

The listening and/or playing and creation of all types of music in prison is of great importance. Music complements the environment. We listen to it in our cells, whilst training in the gym and some of us while participating in the playing or learning of an instrument. There is sometimes the unfortunate perception that certain genres of music contribute to negative emotions or behaviour. This belief, if adopted, makes it very easy to dismiss how important music is to us all and to our mental health. Hip Hop and Heavy Metal are often seen as some kind of threat. It's loud and sometimes lyrically controversial. Some older officers may not recognise it as music at all. The truth is that for many prisoners, this music is incredibly important, myself included.

Music brings prisoners together in a positive way. I often end up conversing with others who are into music or learning the guitar; we help each other with music tablature and chord charts. Sometimes these are people I may not have otherwise hve spoken to or found common ground with. I exchange ideas and songs with friends. Rather than relentlessly discussing prison politics, drugs and crime, we find we have something more constructive and meaningful in common.

I believe these programs can reduce a prisoner's likelihood of self-harm, drug relapse and violent incidents during a sentence. They provide us with the opportunity to develop new skills that can only go towards positive self-directed rehabilitation and an increased chance of a better, crime-free life upon release.



'Just Chillin' by Tony, $900, #5045, 75cm x 60cm, acrylic on canvas, available to purchase from Boom Gate Gallery

Mum's Story

By Michelle

Michelle is a mother whose son is incarcerated in Victoria.

How my son being incarcerated has and is affecting me

Well for the first year and a half I tried to cope and handle all of the shock, trauma and every emotion all by myself because I have faced hard times in the past but this was next level. I needed to go to my doctor and was prescribed anti depressants, which I take daily, and even though I struggle to let my thoughts go deep, they do help.

As a mother all I want to do is bring him (my son) home and tell him everything will be ok. I miss him every minute of every day. My focus is always on my son, even though I function every day by working and being around my family and trying to live my life as normal as I can, but it's not normal. I'm always preoccupied, thinking and wondering if he's ok and safe. I feel like I can't get 100% on with my life in peace until he comes home.

On a positive note, I feel like me, my son and my whole family have found our inner strengths from this whole tragedy. And at the moment I'm just living each day by day until my son comes home to his family.



Send Us a Letter

Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to our Letters section, please send your letters to the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au



Thank You for Your Letters

As of a few weeks prior to publication, we received letters from Jason, Matthew, Codey, Kevin, Ben, Julian, John, Joe, David, Michael and Storm. We know there are many more!

Thank you for all of your letters we received in response to the first edition, which included stories about your life and time in prison, poems, artwork, comments and requests.

While we cannot respond directly to all letters we receive, we will aim to publish as many as possible.

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide legal advice. If you need legal assistance please contact your local community legal service, legal aid, or your legal practitioner.

We encourage you to keep writing to us, and to encourage your friends to do the same.

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• News and Investigations

Each edition will contain news articles and investigative pieces. These are topical stories that will usually be about prisons and criminal justice. We will also summarise the latest criminal justice news around the country, focusing on the states where the paper is currently published.





NT

Two new women's prisons

The Northern Territory government has announced the repurposing of rehabilitation services in Darwin and Alice Springs into two new women's prisons. A total of 140 new beds for incarcerated women will be made available, with 130 women to be housed at the new Darwin facility and 30 in Alice Springs.

The move is part of an increased funding commitment to prison expansion in the NT, with $57 million allocated in the Territory's 2024-2025 budget to the establishment of two standalone women's prisons in Darwin and Alice Springs, and the refurbishing of Don Dale Youth Detention Centre as a training facility for incarcerated men. A further $34 million has been committed to upgrading the Alice Springs Correctional Centre.

The move to create two new women's prisons has been described by the NT Corrections Commissioner Matthew Varley as the largest infrastructure expansion in the Northern Territory's prison system over the past decade.

Questions remain about the implications of this move for delivery of alcohol and drug services in the NT. Mission Australia Residential Rehabilitation Service (MAARTS) rehabilitation facility offers a 12-week program with 40 beds available to assist individuals, mainly those exiting custody, to overcome drug and alcohol dependency.

The ABC has reported that the upcoming closure of MAARTS will leave four residential rehabilitation clinics remaining in Darwin, with services struggling to cope with overwhelming demand.



VIC

Victoria is set to raise the age of criminal responsibility

Victoria is set to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 after the measure was introduced to parliament in June as part of its new Youth Justice Bill. If the bill is passed, Victoria will become the first state and third jurisdiction (after the ACT and NT) where young people aged 10 and 11 cannot be held criminally responsible for their offending. The Victorian Government had previously said it would raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 by 2027 but this reform was not included in the bill, raising concerns among many Aboriginal justice advocates and legal and health experts who have been calling for the age to be raised to 14 immediately. The Youth Justice Bill also includes a new system of warnings, cautions and diversions to keep more young people out of the criminal justice system. The bill will also introduce an electronic monitoring trial of young people on bail, new police transport powers for young people aged 10 and 11, and make it easier to transfer children aged 16 and over to adult prisons.



NSW

Open letter to overturn No Body, No Parole laws presented to NSW Parliament

Over 100 people have recently signed a letter to NSW Parliament seeking to overturn No Body, No Parole laws. These laws prohibit parole for people who have been convicted of homicide but have not provided information on the location of the victims' body. The laws were enacted to encourage people to reveal the location of victim's bodies, in order to provide closure for their families and loved ones.

However, the letter, initiated by the Bridge of Hope Innocence Initiative, and notably signed by Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton and Kathleen Folbigg (two of Australia's most famous wrongfully convicted people), argues that the law is not working as designed and has negative impacts on those wrongfully convicted.

"The letter contends that the laws have prevented people who maintain their innocence (and who may be innocent) from receiving parole."

The open letter calls for the removal of these laws and urges the NSW government to restore the discretion of the State Parole Authority in determining whether people affected by these laws deserve parole.

Laws criminalising coercive control now in effect in NSW

Coercive control is now punishable by up to seven years imprisonment. Coercive control is a form of domestic abuse; a pattern of behaviour that includes financial control, intimidation, threatening to harm people's pets or loved ones, tracking someone down, and isolating them from friends and family. The law criminalising coercive control was passed in 2022 and came into effect on 1 July 2024.

Help Line: 1800 737 732

Changes to Bail Laws for people charged with serious domestic violence offences

Bail is now harder to obtain for people charged with serious domestic violence offences. Serious domestic violence offences are those carrying a maximum penalty of 14 or more years imprisonment. These include sexual assault, kidnapping and the new offence of coercive control. These offences are now included in the list of 'show cause' offences. For a 'show cause' offence, the bail decision-maker must refuse bail unless the accused shows why detention is not justified. People released on bail for show cause offences are subject to electronic monitoring.

The changes also expand the categories of offences eligible for bail decisions to be 'stayed.' Stayed means the accused remains in custody while prosecutors prepare a Supreme Court detention application to challenge the person's release on bail. The categories of offences include serious domestic violence and sexual assault offences.



ACT

Restorative justice funding gets a boost

The ACT government has allocated $630,000 in additional funding to restorative justice measures. Restorative justice refers to an approach that gives people harmed by criminal offences, and those responsible, the chance to engage in a meaningful way about the offending and its impact.

"Restorative justice provides an important mechanism for persons harmed by domestic, family and sexual violence to seek accountability and redress," said the Attorney-General Shane Rattenbury.

"A recent evaluation by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that restorative justice met a range of needs of victim-survivors that were difficult to achieve in other parts of the criminal justice system, including feelings of safety, being heard and regaining a sense of control."

The funding will provide for additional resources for the ACT's restorative justice scheme, with an aim to increase accessibility for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Specifically, the funding is intended to cut down on wait times and improve accessibility.

In addition to the funding boost, the government has also appointed RMIT University's Centre for Innovative Justice to conduct a review of the ACT's Restorative Justice Scheme. One of the focuses of the review will be research into alternative civil justice options for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Justin Cordy inquest

The inquest into the death of Justin James Cordy ran from 8 to 19 July 2024. Mr Cordy died by suicide in his cell at AMC on 26 February 2023 and was subject to an investigation by the state Coroner. A Coronial Inquest is a process whereby the Coroner's Court, run by a Coroner, investigates the causes of death, determines if the death could have been prevented, and provides recommendations to government about how to prevent further deaths from occurring. The inquest heard evidence that staff failed to check on Mr Cordy for over an hour because they were on their lunch break, despite being on an hourly observation plan. Mr Cordy did not indicate he was suicidal when triaged by a mental health nurse.

"At the start of the inquest, Mr Cordy's ex partner, Sheryl Cordy, spoke about the impact of the death on the family, calling him an "amazing father, loved by his children" and that Mr Cordy had a "great sense of humour and lit up the room"."

The inquest investigated the causes of Mr Cordy's passing, and if his death could have been prevented. About Time will keep readers informed about findings from the investigation once they are published.



WA

Stricter laws in force designed to protect retail workers

In Western Australia, stricter penalties for shoplifting and assaults on retail workers came into effect from July. People who assault retail workers face penalties of up to seven years in prison, or 10 years if undertaken with associates or if the offender is armed.

Previously, assaulting a retail worker in the cause of their duties attracted a maximum 18-month prison sentence and a fine of $18,000.

Prison is now also an available sentence for shoplifting. Previously, 'shop theft' was a 'fine only' offence. Now, people can face jail time if they have two or more relevant priors. The maximum penalty is two years imprisonment and a $24,000 fine.

The changes to the law came after a survey of retail workers reported over a 50% increase in the number of assaults from the two years prior.



QLD

New footage of treatment of children in custody sparks criticism

New footage from Queensland's adult police watch houses published by Guardian Australia and SBS The Feed has shown children subjected to harsh conditions. In one clip, a 13-year-old girl with a disability, Sam*, harmed herself on the floor of an isolation cell. In another, a boy with asthma was shown having difficulty breathing in a cramped cell after a fire. The State Government had suspended its Human Rights Act to allow children to be detained in these cells, often alongside adults.

Watch houses, designed as temporary holding facilities, have become over-crowded due to high-arrest police operations. Children, particularly those with disabilities, can experience extreme distress in these conditions.

The State's Human Rights Commissioner and the Office of the Public Guardian have condemned the treatment, while the Queensland Youth Justice Minister Di Farmer has emphasised that appropriate oversight mechanisms are in place to prevent this conduct.



SA

Boost in investment to the criminal justice system

The South Australian Government has announced that it is expanding the Yatala Labour Prison by 312 beds, and the Adelaide Women's Prison by 40 beds, taking their capacities to 1,158 and 316 beds respectively. This increase in capacity is part of the state's largest ever investment in its prison system totalling $226 million. Work will begin on the Adelaide Women's Prison in January 2025, and work at Yatala commences August 2026.

The investment is intended to reduce the burden on the prison system. The Chief Executive of the Department of Correctional Services states that the Department is committed to reducing reoffending by 20 per cent by 2026.

This sentiment is not shared by all. The National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls (National Network) urged the state government to divest from the prison system, and instead redistribute the funds towards community-based support and services as the investment may perpetuate a cycle of harm.

Similarly, the Justice Reform Initiative argues that the government's investment is not consistent with its commitment to reduce reoffending rates, but instead is an expensive and ineffective method of breaking the cycle of reincarceration.

The South Australian Government has also announced that it is investing more than $15 million over the next four years into the justice system. This investment includes $5.8 million into the maintenance of, and upgrades to the Justice Audio Visual Link network used to facilitate appearances in court for individuals who have been detained, or are otherwise unable to access the court.



TAS

Prison lockdowns bad for health, new report finds

The recently published report of the Office of the Custodial Inspectorate found that lockdowns are detrimental to the health of incarcerated people. The report consists of a summary of findings from five prison inspections from 2022-2023 and provides 117 recommendations for improving the wellbeing of people in correctional centres.

Lockdowns were found to occur for days at a time during which prisoners were left in isolation in their cells.

"The report outlined how lockdowns prevent incarcerated people from accessing doctors and other healthcare services and often cause declines in their mental wellbeing."

One example was of a person who tried to pull out his own teeth. The report blamed the lockdowns on staff shortages.

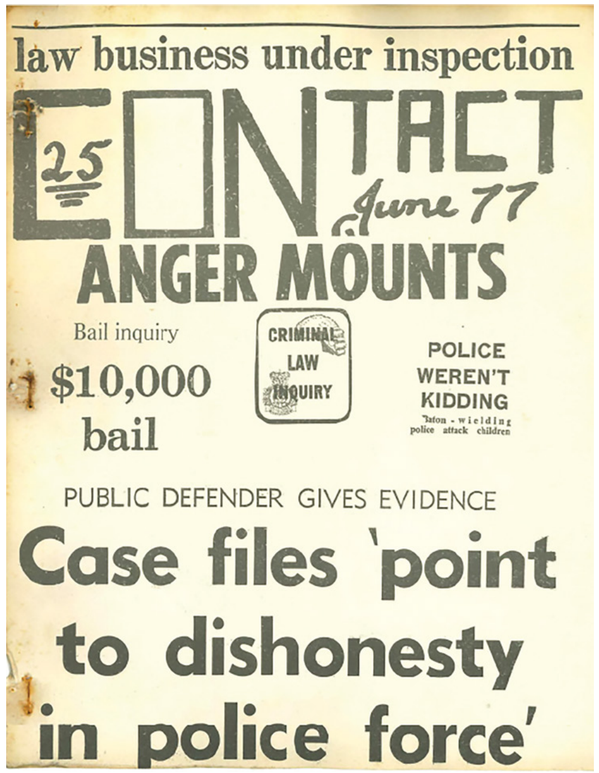
The Office of the Custodial Inspectorate is an independent oversight body that reports each year on the running of custodial centres. The government does not have to act on the recommendations of the Office of the Custodial Inspectorate. The report also noted that only 12 of the 46 recommendations from a 2017 investigative report had been fully implemented.

The History of Australian Prison Publications

News and Investigations

By Damien Linnane

Damien Linnane is the editor of Paper Chained, a quarterly journal for art and writing which is made available to all people in NSW prisons. Damien was sentenced to two years in prison in 2015 for crimes that were described by the sentencing magistrate as an act of vigilantism. During his sentence he wrote a crime novel, *Scarred*, and then taught himself to draw. He is currently completing a PhD on the history of prison newsletters in Australia.


law business under inspection

CONTACT

25

June 77

ANGER MOUNTS

Bail inquiry

$10,000 bail

CRIMINAL LAW INQUIRY

POLICE WEREN'T KIDDING

'Jaton - wielding police attack children

PUBLIC DEFENDER GIVES EVIDENCE

Case files 'point to dishonesty in police force'

Contact (No. 25, June 1977)

It doesn't feel like it's already been eight years since I was in prison myself, wishing there was any way that people in custody could express themselves and feel heard. I asked around if there was any kind of prison newsletter or magazine, but nobody had even heard of one. So I resolved to create one myself after my release in late 2016, but thankfully there were two newsletters that started around that time. The first was Inside Out, a quarterly newsletter aimed at LGBTQ prisoners, though open to everyone, which still runs today. The other magazine was Paper Chained — a quarterly journal for art and writing. I became peripherally involved in the magazine before the first issue was released in early 2017, and was offered the opportunity to take over as editor in 2021.

Not long after taking over as editor, however, I drifted back to thinking how there'd been no newsletter, or even the memory of one, when I'd been inside. It occurred to me that myself, the previous editor of Paper Chained, and the amazing women who put together Inside Out, couldn't be the only people in Australia who thought a publication might be helpful for those in custody. And as it turns out, we weren't. Researching the history of prison literature in this country has turned into somewhat of an obsession, and I'm now using what I've discovered to write a PhD and also a book about the subject. So far, I've located more than 900 unique issues of over 80 prison newsletters and magazines, the first of which was The Compendium, created in 1912.

Tracking all these issues has been no easy task.

"It's difficult to find information about prison magazines. Many did not last long. The Graduate, a publication released at Pentridge prison in Victoria in 1973, lasted only one issue before it was banned."

All but one of the original copies were confiscated and destroyed. Rogues, a newsletter created at Long Bay, NSW, in 1989, managed three editions before being shut down. A fourth was put together in secret, though the magazine's run ended soon afterwards when its editor, Phillip Player, was released. Such is the fate of many prison newsletters. Often, nobody is willing to keep a publication running once an editor is moved or released. And eventually the editions that were published fade into obscurity. Many never make it outside the prison walls, and are lost forever.

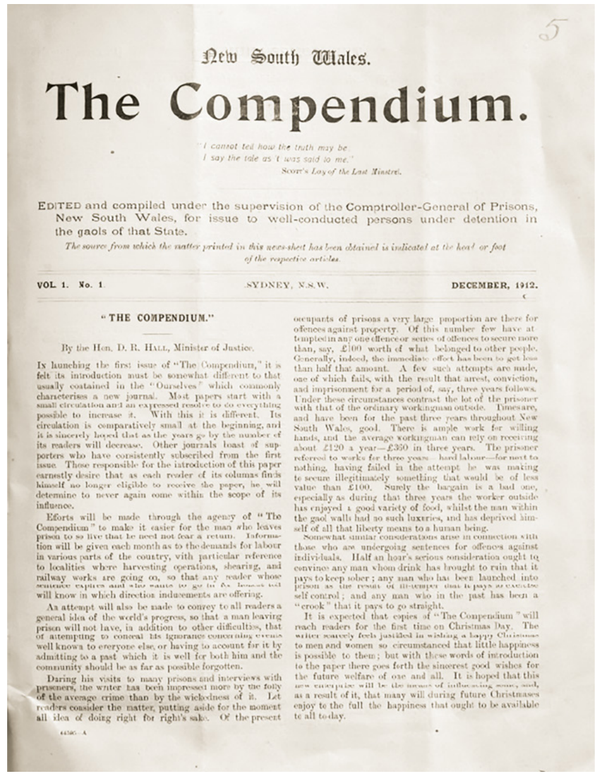
There have been some long-running prison publications. Framed, a quarterly magazine created outside prison for people inside, managed an impressive run from 1989 until 2004. The magazine's fate was sealed when it was banned in NSW prisons in 2002, and its eventual closure saw Australia without a regular nationwide prison publication until the launch of Inside Out and Paper Chained.

There's been some interesting titles over the years, and also some repetition in publication names. The founders of About Time approached me for advice before starting up this newspaper, saying at the time they were thinking of calling it The Insider. They changed their minds after I informed them that The Insider is the name of the longest still-running prison newsletter in the country. The Insider is the newsletter of Risdon Prison Complex in Tasmania. It has been running since at least 1990, and over 600 issues have been produced. The Insider also happens to be the name of a newsletter produced in the mid 2000s at Bunbury Regional Prison in Western Australia. As most prison publications don't travel far outside the walls of their respective institutions, it's highly likely the two publications were unaware of each other. Indeed, alongside the current Inside Out publication, there are at least six other historical magazines which were given the name Inside Out, which simply seems to be a title many people thought was witty and original. To the best of my knowledge, no two of these seven publications, which spanned over seven decades and across four states, were even active at the same time.

Australia's history of prison publications is not well known. My research intends to change that. There's currently an online resource in the US titled American Prison Newspapers, which hosts over 15,000 issues of prison newspapers and publications, free of charge, for researchers, historians and the general public. Once I've finished my research, assuming I can get the funding and ethics approval, I intend to build an Australian equivalent of this, making everything I've found freely available.

While I've found many publications in libraries and archives, many have also been discovered through word of mouth and personal. So if you have access to any prison magazines or newsletters, historical or current, or know someone who might, please reach out and let me know so that I can help grow this collection. And if your prison has a current publication, please post a copy of it to the Paper Chained address:

Paper Chained
PO Box 2073
Dangar, NSW 2309


New South Wales.

The Compendium.

"I cannot tell how the truth may be;
I say the tale as 't was said to me."
Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel.

EDITED and compiled under the supervision of the Comptroller-General of Prisons, New South Wales, for issue to well-conducted persons under detention in the gaols of that State.

The source from which the matter printed in this work-sheet has been obtained is indicated at the head or foot of the respective articles.

VOL. 1. No. 1 SYDNEY, N.S.W. DECEMBER, 1912.

"THE COMPENDIUM."

By the Hon. D. R. HALL, Minister of Justice.

In launching the first issue of "The Compendium," it is felt its introduction must be somewhat different to that usually contained in the "Ourselves" which commonly characterises a new journal. Most papers start with a small circulation and an expressed resolve to do everything possible to increase it. With this it is different. Its circulation is comparatively small at the beginning, and it is sincerely hoped that as the years go by the number of its readers will decrease. Other journals boast of supporters who have consistently subscribed from the first issue. Those responsible for the introduction of this paper earnestly desire that as each reader of its columns finds himself no longer eligible to receive the paper, he will determine to never again come within the scope of its influence.

Efforts will be made through the agency of "The Compendium" to make it easier for the man who leaves prison to so live that he need not fear a return. Information will be given each month as to the demands for labour in various parts of the country, with particular reference to localities where harvesting operations, shearing, and railway works are going on, so that any reader whose sentence expires and who wants to go to A, knows not will know in which direction inducements are offering.

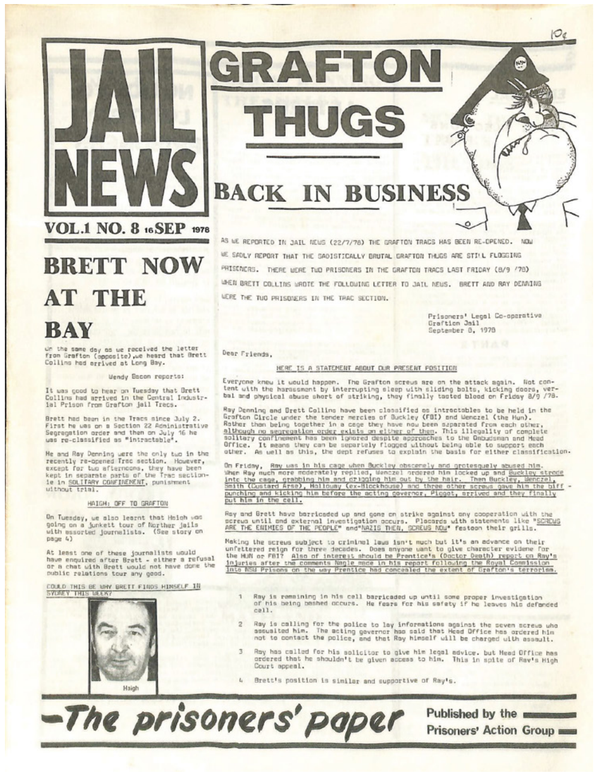
An attempt will also be made to convey to all readers a general idea of the world's progress, so that a man leaving prison will not have, in addition to other difficulties, that of attempting to conceal his ignorance concerning events well known to everyone else, or having to account for it by admitting to a past which it is well for both him and the community should be as far as possible forgotten.

During his visits to many prisons and interviews with prisoners, the writer has been impressed more by the folly of the average crime than by the wickedness of it. Let readers consider the matter, putting aside for the moment all idea of doing right for right's sake. Of the present occupants of prisons a very large proportion are there for offences against property. Of this number few have attempted in any one offence or series of offences to secure more than, say, £100 worth of what belonged to other people. Generally, indeed, the immediate effort has been to get less than half that amount. A few such attempts are made, one of which fails, with the result that arrest, conviction, and imprisonment for a period of, say, three years follows. Under these circumstances contrast the lot of the prisoner with that of the ordinary workingman outside. Time-and, and have been for the past three years throughout New South Wales, good. There is ample work for willing hands, and the average workingman can rely on receiving about £120 a year—£300 in three years. The prisoner referred to works for three years hard labour—for next to nothing, having failed in the attempt he was making to secure illegitimately something that would be of less value than £100. Surely the bargain is a bad one, especially as during that three years the worker outside has enjoyed a good variety of food, whilst the man within the gaol walls had no such luxuries, and his deprived himself of all that liberty means to a human being.

Somewhat similar considerations arise in connection with those who are undergoing sentences for offences against individuals. Half an hour's serious consideration ought to convince any man whom drink has brought to ruin that it pays to keep sober; any man who has been lunched into prison as the result of ill-temper that it pays to exercise self control; and any man who in the past has been a "crook" that it pays to go straight.

It is expected that copies of "The Compendium" will reach readers for the first time on Christmas Day. The writer sincerely feels justified in wishing a happy Christmas to men and women so circumstanced that little happiness is possible to them; but with these words of introduction to the paper there goes forth the sincerest good wishes for the future welfare of one and all. It is hoped that this new enterprise will be the means of influencing some, and, as a result of it, that many will during future Christmases enjoy to the full the happiness that ought to be available to all to-day.

The Compendium (Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1912)


JAIL NEWS

GRAFTON THUGS

BACK IN BUSINESS

VOL.1 NO. 8 SEP 1978

BRETT NOW AT THE BAY

Wendy Bacon reports:

It was good to hear on Tuesday that Brett Collins had arrived in the Central Industrial Prison from Grafton Jail Trocs.

Brett had been in the Trocs since July 2. First he was on a Section 22 Administrative Segregation order and then on July 16 he was re-classified as 'intractable'.

He and Ray Denning were the only two in the recently re-opened Trocs section. However, except for two afternoons, they have been kept in separate parts of the Trocs section- ie in SOLITARY CONFINEMENT, punishment without trial.

HEIGH: OFF TO GRAFTON

On Tuesday, we also learnt that Heigh was going on a lunkat tour of Sydney jails with assorted journalists. (See story on page 4)

At least one of these journalists would have enquired after Brett - either a refusal or a chat with Brett would not have done the public relations tour any good.

COULD THIS BE WHY BRETT FINDS HIMSELF IN EVERY THIS WEEK?


Heigh

AS WE REPORTED IN JAIL NEWS (22/7/78) THE GRAFTON TROCS HAS BEEN RE-OPENED. NOW WE SADLY REPORT THAT THE SADISTICALLY BRUTAL GRAFTON THUGS ARE STILL FLOGGING PRISONERS. THERE WERE TWO PRISONERS IN THE GRAFTON TROCS LAST FRIDAY (8/9 /78)

WHEN BRETT COLLINS WROTE THE FOLLOWING LETTER TO JAIL NEWS. BRETT AND RAY DENNING WERE THE TWO PRISONERS IN THE TROC SECTION.

Prisoners' Legal Co-operative
Grafton Jail
September 8, 1978

Dear Friends,

HERE IS A STATEMENT ABOUT OUR PRESENT POSITION

Everyone knew it would happen. The Grafton screws are on the attack again. Not content with the harassment by interrupting sleep with sliding bolts, kicking doors, verbal and physical abuse short of striking, they finally tasted blood on Friday 8/9 /78.

Ray Denning and Brett Collins have been classified as intractables to be held in the Grafton Circle under the tender mercies of Buckley (CSI) and Wenczel (the Hun). Rather than being together in a cage they have now been separated from each other, although no segregation order exists on either of them. This illegality of complete solitary confinement has been ignored despite approaches to the Ombudsman and Head Office. It seems they can be separately flogged without being able to support each other. As well as this, the dept refuses to explain the basis for either classification.

On Friday, Ray was in his cage when Buckley obscenely and grotesquely abused him. When Ray much more moderately replied, Wenczel neared him locked up and Buckley stepped into the cage, grabbing him and dragging him out by the hair. Then Buckley, Wenczel, Smith (Custard Arse), Mallinsky (ex-Blackhouse) and three other screws gave him the bliff - punching and kicking him before the acting Governor. Pigotts arrived and they finally put him in the cell.

Ray and Brett have barricaded up and gone on strike against any cooperation with the screws until and external investigation occurs. Placards with statements like "SCREWS ARE THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE" and "NAZIS THEN, SCREWS NOW" festoon their grills.

Making the screws subject to criminal laws isn't much but it's an advance on their unfettered reign for three decades. Does anyone want to give character evidence for the MUR on FAIT? Also of interest should be Prentice's (Doctor Death) report on Ray's injuries after the Pigotts Nazi mob. In his report including the Royal Commission into the Prisons on the way Prentice has concealed the extent of Grafton's terrorism.

1. Ray is remaining in his cell barricaded up until some proper investigation of his being beaned occurs. He fears for his safety if he leaves his defended cell.
2. Ray is calling for the police to lay informations against the seven screws who assaulted him. The acting governor has said that Head Office has ordered him not to contact the police, and that Ray himself will be charged with assault.
3. Ray has called for his solicitor to give his legal advice, but Head Office has ordered that he shouldn't be given access to him. This in spite of Ray's High Court appeal.
4. Brett's position is similar and supportive of Ray's.

The prisoners' paper

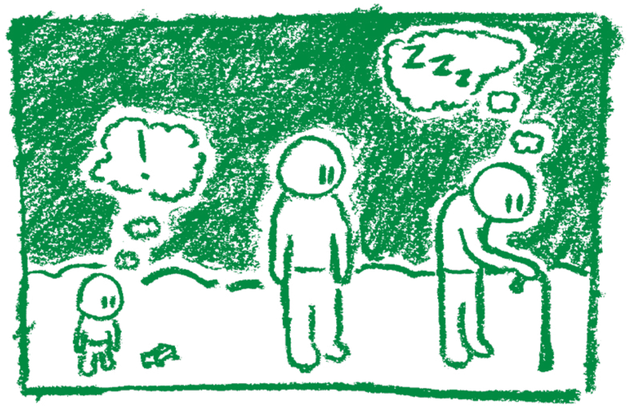
Published by the Prisoners' Action Group

Jail News (Vol. 1, No. 8, September 1978)

Experiences

This section publishes stories about individuals' experiences with the criminal justice system.

There are so many ways that people have interacted with the system, and so many stories to tell. Experiences aims to tell those stories, presented as beautiful feature articles.



Mirrors on the Inside

'Do we like what we see, or do we need to look away?'

By Sam Harris

Sam Harris is a retired inmate.

One of the things I noticed as I entered my grimy first cell in jail was that there were no glass mirrors on the walls.

I quickly found out that glass mirrors are banned in jail; no doubt because glass can be easily smashed, shattered and used as a weapon. Assaults are commonplace, and the guy with the sharpest weapon usually wins the fight. It pays to be vigilant; perhaps this is also why cells also have no wall clocks.

The mirrors in jail are mirrors in name only. They are impenetrable flat sheets of polished stainless steel, or polycarbonate, screwed at the edges into the surrounding concrete wall. They are usually placed on the wall just above the wash basin where they share space with multicoloured graffiti.

A misty film that cannot be wiped away covers the metallic slab, and inmates therefore can't see their facial details clearly. No matter how close you get to the mirror, the finer details of our faces remain blurred. The "protective reflection" covering the cold, bare metal renders us faceless.

Areas of the steel sheets are often stained, rusted or warped, making one's face also appear distorted. One must comb one's hair from memory. But, after all, this is jail, and who will care if one's scalp part is crooked? In this place, everything is crooked.

A mirror is often the ultimate tool contributing to our feelings of self-worth. When we look into the mirror, we suddenly have nowhere to hide. We are met with a reflection, not only of our physical appearance, but also of all the thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves.

Do we like what we see, or do we see only our flaws? Can we look ourselves in the eye without wincing, or do we need to look away quickly because of our guilt and shame?

Perhaps it's a good thing we can't see ourselves clearly. Maybe it's a small mercy not to see ourselves as we really are in this squalor. That way, we remain oblivious to our vacant looks, frowns and increasingly lined faces. We are only vaguely aware of our silvering hair, sunken eye sockets and roughly shaven faces. Maybe it's kinder not to be confronted with the fear, the sorrow, the uncertainty, and the disillusionment that fills our eyes.

"We become invisible to ourselves, just as we're told by the guards to become invisible to each other. We're likely to give up looking into mirrors here in jail, trying to find ourselves."

We can't recognise who we are any longer or what we've become. Instead, we are left only with the memories of who we'd once been, and how we once appeared to a world that now rejects us.

And yet, despite this personal ambiguity, it is ironic that being in prison enables some of us to see ourselves in a different light. We see more clearly than we've ever seen before. We see our pride, our selfishness, our anger and our nakedness.

Although most of us can't make out what's dimly reflected before us in our stainless steel mirrors, some of us can still look inward to see clearly the things that really matter. Some of us, previously blind to our shortcomings, have had our sight restored. Maybe we can do without glass mirrors, after all.

Faceless, perhaps, but on the inside, newly awoken.



Boxing Yard (Blood, Sweat & Tears)' by Koko, $400, 5343, 90cm x 62cm, acrylic on canvas, available for purchase at Boom Gate Gallery

Moving On



Experiences

By Stacey Stokes

Stacey Stokes is a transgender girl who did eight years in a men's prison. She now works on VACRO's lived experience panel, and sits on the advisory boards of Beyond Bricks and Bars, and the Chief Psychiatrist. Stacey runs the T4T support group and writes a Substack, Stacey Stokes.

When I was arrested, I had a job, a family, friends.

When they sent me to jail, I lost it all. Because that's the true punishment. You lose your life. You break the law, so you are destroyed.

I wanted to actually die. Finish the job. There was nothing left anyway. No reason to live. And prisons don't give you a reason to live. They just remind you it's all your fault. You've lost everything and it's all your fault. Now sit in jail for five, 10, 15 years and watch tv. But I didn't die. I didn't give up. I struggled on. I tried to make the best of the situation. I took every defeat and rolled with it as best I could. Because there were lots of defeats. Some worse than others. Some made me want to die again.

I sat and reflected on my life for eight years. I thought about what I had done and how I got to where I was. I was determined not to live the same life, not to try to mirror or regain what I had lost. I needed to change my attitude and adapt.

And then I was released.

After eight years. I was not at all prepared for it. Immersed in prison culture for such a long time. Having no long-term contact with people in society. Things were different. Attitudes, values, they had all changed. My prison culture did not fit well with some people, my jokes were just not funny to them. Their problems seemed so superficial and stupid to me.

I realised that not only had society changed, but I had changed. That prison wasn't a compete waste of time.

And I could use some of these changes to my advantage. For example, I'm not still procrastinating over what I want to be when I grow up at 30 years old like some people I've met. I'm just happy I can actually choose what to be. Having no agency for eight years, I'm just happy I can choose for myself again. If I work as a cleaner at 2:00am am, then it's because I chose to. Not because I was coerced into it with threats of disciplinary actions.

I also learned resilience. I have got a lot of bad news since I got out, and each time I am told I was handling it really well. Why? Because when you have gone from sleeping in a house with your family, to sleeping in 'separation', in a cell with no shower, tv or window. Only a pillow and an itchy horsehair blanket and a steel toilet with no seat on it, everything else is now an improvement. No one can understand this, they cannot conceptualise how sad I once was.

Now I work as a lived experience consultant for various Organisations. I live in a lovely apartment in a fancy suburb. I ride a brand new 2024 model motorcycle. I am surrounded by amazing friends who support me.

My life is so different now. But that's the point. My life was toxic before, that's why I went to jail. I wasn't happy. I was angry and drowning in my own misery. I had to let go of the past. I have a second chance because I gave myself a second chance. Not because they hand them out as you leave prison. Or because I did my time, now everything is forgiven, and I can go back to business as usual. My life is different. Nothing is the same. It's not a second chance, it's a second life.

Now, I am happy, I am succeeding in life. I'm not special, or better than anyone. There is no reason why no one else can one day have another shot at life. I still struggle with the past. It's hard to move on. It was not easy. But it's what I needed to do. I saw my ex one day when they got on the same train as me. They didn't recognise me. I called parole and told them straight away, they assured me I'd done nothing wrong, I was just on the train going about my day. But as I thought about it, all I wanted to do was try to help them. Try to give them a second chance at life. They looked so sad. It really crushed me.

But when I thought about it more, I realised, it's up to all of us all to move on in our own time. But moving on helped me so much.

Sometimes, just knowing other people feel the same way you do, is enough to help.

Get Published in About Time



Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to About Time, please send your letters to the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

You can provide any contribution at all: letters, short stories, poetry, artwork, puzzles, games, jokes, cartoons, investigative stories, reflections, advice, or anything at all.

Guide for Those on Remand

How to deal with this most testing time



By J.J.A.L.

J.J.A.L is a person serving a life sentence at a prison in the United Kingdom. This piece is part of his extensive Guide to Prison, which About Time will be re-publishing on occasion.

Remand. Difficult times. Difficult times!!! Being on remand, in my opinion, is one of the most trying and testing parts of being in jail. You've been denied bail, the life you were living on the outside has just slipped through your fingers and everything feels like it has gone. Well, at least for you, it has. It's a time when you are going to be on your own. Even if you have co-d's (co-defendants) at some point you are going to be alone and that can test anyone's mental health. Some can't handle it and reach breaking point before it's really started.

Depending on your life prior to being put on remand, you will probably be anxious about how this part of your life will turn out in the next few months. You will be thinking about your women, kids, family and friends, plus any business matters you have left but, most importantly, you should be thinking about your court case, and is your legal team good enough to defend you? On top of all that you have to wake up in the morning and get used to your new surroundings quickly. The sounds, the screws, the food, men, don't worry too much, it's been done a million times before you, and will be done a million times after you. It can be done!

One thing I used to think to myself is "I'm not settling in here" or "I'm not getting too comfy here cos I'm not looking to stay." Those are natural thoughts to have if you love and miss your lifestyle. To be honest the best thing you can do is to settle in and get used to your surroundings. Phone your family and let them know that you are ok, try not to over think about your situation, MAN UP, seriously MAN UP.

"When you speak to your partner, your children or your parents all they want to know is that you are alright."

Get the information from the officers on how to arrange a social visit for your loved ones and take it from there.

It's important not to stress out too much, or for too long. It's unhealthy. You must remember that you are going to be fighting a court case, which can be a tricky and difficult thing to do. Even if you are not going to fight the case and go (plead) guilty, going to court can be quite intense. You are going to be speaking with your legal team a number of times, go through a lot of legal documents, which is also tricky and difficult, then eventually you'll have to go to court. Going to court means being woken up at 5am maybe earlier to go to reception and be placed in a holding cell with a number of prisoners who are in a similar situation. You will then be put in a sweat box (secure vehicle) to get to court which will be very tiring, only to more than likely come back to do the remand thing all over again until your trial or sentencing date.

"Be strong and be prepared."

My advice would be to speak with prisoners on your section, ask them how things work, there will be one or two that have done it all before. Some will look big, mean, hard and angry, others will look small, and timid, scared and scruffy. Do not judge a book by its cover. I've learned that everyone knows something about something and can help in some way.

There is a balance you'll need to find because it's important to keep yourself guarded and protected. Mingle (mix) with your peers but use your brain to work out who's who.

Don't borrow anything from anyone. Get some money sent into your prison account (bank transfer, it's easy), if you had some cash on you when you got arrested then you should be able to spend that (unless it's been taken for evidence). If you don't have any money then you are just going to have to go without for a while. It's harsh but you will live. Get yourself to the library for some books to read, and try to get yourself to the gymnasium if (I will get into the gym side of things later).

Read your case papers and ride your time bruv!

From *Inside Time*.

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• Reintegration

This section is intended to assist readers who will soon be released. We want to help prepare you for the outside. We will rely on relevant experts to provide monthly themed educational content about reintegration services and opportunities.



From Prison to the Outside: Dealing With the Loneliness

By Community Restorative Centre (republished from the 'Survival on the Outside' guide)

Feeling isolated and lonely is very common after you've left prison. In prison you didn't expect to open up to people and enjoy their company. Now you're outside, it takes time to relax and be friendly to people.

Small talk doesn't happen much in prison, and once you leave it takes time to learn what to talk about, and how to chat. Having someone who can support you during the first months when you leave prison can really help. If you don't have family or a friend who can do this, look for a support service that may be able to help.

If your aim is to go straight, you may not want to hang around your old mates, but you may feel like you don't have anyone else. If you've got a mate who's also wanting to go straight, you can support each other. If you need someone to talk to right now, ring Lifeline on 13 11 14 for 24-hour confidential telephone counselling.

Lots of people on release from prison feel isolated and lonely, especially if they aren't living with family. Some people have ended up reoffending just to return to prison where they know people and don't feel out of place. Meeting people and making friends is hard for most people, and it's even harder when you've been in prison.

Your 'prison self'

In prison you may have acted tough, hiding your feelings so that no one thought you were an easy target. Being like that protected you and helped keep you safe. But outside prison, behaving that way isn't necessary and may scare people off.

What you need to 'make it' in the community is the very opposite of what cuts it inside. Being open and friendly is more likely to get you what you want than behaving as you would in prison. To get to know people and make some friends you'll have to slowly take a few risks and open up to people.

Small talk

Talking about the weather, the football or what you did on the weekend doesn't happen in prison much. In fact, what passes for normal conversation in the general community can seem trivial and annoying when you've spent time in prison, where survival was the main concern. Learning what people in the community talk about takes time, and feels strange.

"It will take time to get used to the different social rules that operate outside prison. Listen to other people. How do they start a conversation? What gets talked about? You'll soon get the hang of it. Don't forget that most people, 'straight' people included, feel shy or don't know what to say from time to time."

Choose a support person

While you're in custody, you can choose to have a meeting with a person who'll be your key support when you get out. They could be a family member, trusted friend, or community member. Talk to people supporting you about your expectations for life on the outside, and follow this up with them when you get out. Having someone to call when things get difficult can be a real help. Don't forget that you can always call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

Old mates and new mates

A lot of people who want to go straight when they come out worry about seeing old associates from criminal or drug-using circles. They know if they hang around those people, there's a strong chance that they'll end up reoffending. On the other hand, if they don't see any of their old associates, they'll have nobody. At least with their old connections they feel comfortable and know the score.

There are no easy answers to this one. Building up a new circle of friends is not easy, but it can be done. Here are a few tips:

- Make it clear to your mates that you don't want to fall back into old ways, but don't expect them to make it easy for you. People who are still using or breaking the law are more likely to want to drag you back down than wish you well in your new life. That's reality. After all, if you succeed, they might feel uncomfortable about their own lives.
- Be selective about who you keep in contact with. It's not hard to tell who is good for you and who means trouble. Another person who's also committed to staying out can be a great help. Build on your contacts with those people who you believe are likely to stay out and who are serious about going straight.
- If you're going to meet someone who still uses drugs, think about how and when you have contact. It might be better to see a person in a café rather than in their lounge room, where it's all too easy to light up that bong or have that hit.
- Form a relationship with a support worker you can trust. Although workers are professional people who are paid to help you, a real bond of trust can develop.
- NA, AA and other 12-step programs have a 'sponsoring' system in which more experienced members of the program provide support and guidance to newer members. If you have drug or alcohol problems, attend a meeting and see if there's someone there that you like. They may be able to sponsor you. Contact AA on (02) 9799 1199 or NA on 1300 652 820 for a referral to your nearest meeting.

See the below link for some good ideas about meeting new people.

www.succeedsocially.com/meetpeople

Finding something positive to do

If you have spent a long time involved with crime and other people who are offending, it can be hard to find other, more positive things to do after you have been released. Being involved in pro-social things like sports and hobbies can be a good distraction, help you to meet new people and get fit. If you are in NSW, see the NSW Sports and Recreation website for many different kinds of sporting organisations.

Health

Health is a key to resilience. However, good health can be one of the hardest things to maintain in prison. This section is dedicated to different aspects of physical and mental health, from exercises and yoga, to strategies for dealing with trauma. This section aims to provide health inspiration and guidance for people trying to stay healthy in the challenging setting of prison.



How to Stay Resilient and Manage Mental Health in Prison

An interview with Jacob Little

By Felicia Zsha' Mirzze

Storyteller, Trauma Counsellor, Advocate.

Today I sit down with Jacob Little to have a yarn and share some knowledge about resilience and how he managed his mental health in prison.

A bit about Jacob: Jacobs's dad went to prison when he was just 10 and he soon followed a similar path. At 17, Jacob entered the prison system, and was looking at a 20 year sentence under the VLAD laws (Vicious Lawless Association Disestablishment Law), an unprecedented mandatory sentencing scheme in Queensland aimed at those associated with gangs. These experiences and more, motivated him to use his compensation money from institutional child abuse to start About Time for Justice, an organisation which helps survivors seek justice and start healing.

Q: How did your early life experiences shape your views on resilience and coping?

Jacob: Growing up in housing commission in Newcastle, also known as "the Zoo" was an environment that normalised crime and gangs as well as domestic violence. Most of the mums and dads (and even some of the kids) were drug dealers. They were in jail, on Centrelink and using. I remember there was a public toilet in there that was all smashed up and full of needles. I had started visiting jail to visit my dad who had just kicked off his sentence.

"I use these experiences to turn a negative into a positive, by telling myself that if I can get through that I can get through anything."

For example, on the weekend I ran my second Gold Coast marathon and got a personal best. The one thing that kept me going in the tough times and all of the jail sentences was being able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, no matter how dark it may seem.

Q: How does fitness contribute to your mental well-being and resilience?

Jacob:

"Running and staying active have been game-changers for my mental health."

Completing marathons gives me a sense of accomplishment and shows me that I can set and achieve goals. It also helps reduce stress and improve my mood, making me more able to cope in challenging situations. It's a healthy way to deal with stress instead of resorting to past unhealthy coping mechanisms which are only ever short-term fixes.

Q: During your time in the prison system, what were some of the most effective ways you found to cope with the stress and challenges of incarceration?

Jacob:

"Routine was key. I stayed active, kept my mind busy, and set small, achievable goals."

Writing letters to friends, family, and even myself helped me to process my thoughts and emotions. I got through it by reading and educating myself, which kept my mind going and gave me a sense of purpose.

Q: How did you manage your mental health during your time in solitary confinement?

Jacob: When I was in solitary I felt like there was no help at all. I had to support myself. Training and talking to myself, out loud and in my head, and saying 'this can't break me'. Even though I was scared and lonely at times and kept thinking that my life was going to be like my Dad's, I got through it by telling myself that there was light at the end of the tunnel. My Dad wrote to me consistently, which helped. I was lucky that I got to speak to my family once a day and I had one boxy (a box visit) per week.

Q. How important were support systems, such as family, friends, or mentors, in your journey to recovery and success?

Jacob: I have a really strong network of friends and family at the moment and attribute that to my wins on the outside. It is important to maintain connections as it's a big part of the puzzle.

"Surround yourself with people that are good for you, who want the best for you and who want to see you do well."

They've kept me motivated and on track. It's important to both have mentors and be mentors. Nobody who reached out to me when I was younger had lived experience, but I know that if they had, I would have listened to them. I would have listened to someone who had been in those dark lonely watchhouses, putrid cells and been treated like we do. If I had someone like that, I would have known that there is a life outside of this and that our stories matter. That is why I encourage you to get out there and tell your story.

Q. What would you suggest to someone who feels isolated and without support?

Jacob: Reach out to one of the boys that you trust. Someone who understands and knows how you are feeling, and have a yarn.

"Know that you aren't alone in your experiences and the more we share the less alone we will feel."

Journal how you're feeling, write it, get it out.

Q. How do you plan to continue to use your experiences to advocate for and support others who have been treated unfairly by the system?

Jacob: My father and I are both survivors of institutionalised childhood abuse and know the impacts that has on you as a kid and later in life. I want to help as many people as possible to start their healing journey. I'm setting up programs using the things my Dad and I used when we got out. We know one size does not fit all but we have put together a bit of a framework on what we know works. We have stopped going to jail after being heavily involved in drugs, alcohol and gangs and we want to share this knowledge with others.



Q. What are some things people can start doing today to start their healing journey?

Jacob: Focus on the present and take it one day at a time.

"Find something that gives you purpose, whether it's education, or physical fitness."

Stay connected with your loved ones as much as possible and build a support system, even if it's just a few people.

Creating a simple power list and executing that every day will help you create a healthy routine so that you can get a win everyday. This daily routine is something you can carry with you anywhere you go, and when you get out.

- Participate in education programs.
- Talk to someone about topics on the outside – topics that are not related to crime, like your family or what you're going to do when you get out.
- Staying clean or eating healthy for that day.
- Reading a page of a book each day.
- Write down a list of things that you are grateful for, even if it's something small and you feel like there is not a lot to be grateful for. Maybe it's just for making it through another day closer to your release.

Q. If you could share one key message what would it be?

Your story matters, you matter and you have the power to change your future.

"Every day is a new opportunity. Stay strong, stay focused, and never stop believing in yourself."

Felicia is a woman with a conviction history and walks side-by-side with the people she serves. She has lived experience of trauma, violence and the justice system. She uses this lived experience every day in her work to connect with, mentor and advocate for people who find themselves at the intersection of crime, violence and incarceration.

If you think you might be eligible for Victims of Crime counselling (this is available whilst incarcerated) or support after your release, or if you need NDIS support, don't hesitate to reach out. Write to Felicia at:

Trauma Recovery Network
PO Box 139
Sanctuary Cove QLD 4212

Alcoholics Anonymous

Is drinking costing you more than money?
Are you sitting in your cell due to alcohol related issues?

Don't suffer any longer, Alcoholics Anonymous members visit prisons across Australia. Contact your local Chaplain, case manager or a custodial staff member to enquire if any AA meetings are being conducted within your facility.

Alcoholics Anonymous 1300 22 22 22 aa.org.au

ELBOB & STEPHENSON LEGAL

- CRIMINAL LAW
- TRAFFIC LAW
- PROPERTY LAW
- FAMILY LAW
- CONVEYANCING
- WILLS & ESTATES
- BUSINESS LAW
- COMMERCIAL LAW

Contact our Legal Hotline 24/7
1800 117 533

Back on Track

By The Prison Phoenix Trust

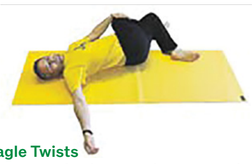
Back pain can be miserable. Most of us experience it at some stage, because of injury, a bad mattress or just bad luck. This routine will help release and realign the back, helping you to feel better. It is especially good for sciatica, (shooting pains along the back of the leg). Don't do anything that feels painful or unstable, and keep attention on your breath as you go. We'd love to hear from you about how you get on.



Supine
Lie on your back with your knees to the sky. Be aware of your spine and each part of your back in contact with the surface. If your back is particularly bad this may be all you are able to do. That is fine. Stay for 10 deep, slow breaths.



Knee Raises
Hug one knee in tight to your chest. Hold for 5 slow breaths. Repeat on the other side.



Eagle Twists
You can make this twist less intense by just having the legs held together, not crossed. 5 breaths each side.



Resting Pigeon
Rest your ankle on the other knee and bring the knee towards the chest using your hands. Hold for 5 deep breaths, building up to 10, and staying with the tight feeling in the side of the buttock.



Full Pigeon
This is one for when your back is feeling pretty much okay – if you're not sure, skip it! tuck one foot in front of you, with your knee out to the side. Breathe into the stretch for 5 slow breaths.



Sphynx
Hold for 5 deep breaths.



Child
Stay like this for 10 deep, slow breaths. You can put a pillow or your fists under your forehead if it doesn't reach the floor.



Sitting
Sit like this, relaxed and upright, and keep your attention on your breathing. Try to make the out-breath longer than the in-breath. If it takes you five counts to breathe in, try to breathe out for eight. Do this for a couple of minutes then let go of control and just breathe. Sit like this, focusing on your breath, concentrating on the feeling of it, for five minutes or longer if you like.
If you are in pain, and can do nothing else, try to sit like this and concentrate on your breath. It's amazing how much better you can make yourself feel, with your own breath, and a little patience and time!

Side Plank Training

By L J Flanders, from the book *Cell Workout*

Following on from last month's article on Plank training, this month we are focusing on the Side Plank and three variations of it.

Where the Plank focused mainly on the abdominals, the Side Plank focuses on the obliques (the muscles that are located on the sides of the midsection of the abdomen). Training this muscle will strengthen the core and also plays an important role in averting back pain. The Side Plank can be as easy or as hard as you want to make it. It is an isometric core strength exercise that involves maintaining a position for the desired amount of time.

By varying the duration of each Side Plank, the workout below can be adjusted to suit all levels of fitness.

Perform all 3 of the Plank variations back to back for the desired amount of time before resting for 30 seconds.

If you want to see a notable difference, perform 2 – 3 times a week. If you wanted to take the exercise up a notch from the isometric exercises described below, you can raise and lower the hips to increase the burn!

SIDE PLANK WORKOUT

Warm Up
l5 minute jog on the spot
l5 minute mobilisation exercises

Workout
A1: Side Plank
A2: Full Side Plank
A3: Full Side Plank With Leg Lift
Rest: 30 seconds

A1: Side Plank
A2: Full Side Plank
A3: Full Side Plank With Leg Lift
Rest: 30 seconds

A1: Side Plank
A2: Full Side Plank
A3: Full Side Plank With Leg Lift
Rest: 30 seconds

A1: Side Plank
A2: Full Side Plank
A3: Full Side Plank With Leg Lift
Rest: 30 seconds

A1: Side Plank
A2: Full Side Plank
A3: Full Side Plank With Leg Lift
Rest: 30 seconds

Cool Down
l5 minute jog on the spot l 5 minute static stretches

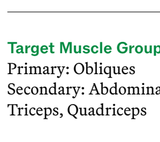
Training Guidelines
Intensity: Moderate – High
Duration: Beginner 30 seconds
Intermediate: 45 seconds
Advanced: 60 seconds
Rest Between Sets: 30 seconds
Frequency: (per week): 2-3
Method: Isometric training



SIDE PLANK

Target Muscle Groups
Primary: Obliques
Secondary: Abdominals, Deltoids

Steps:
1. Lie on your side, with your legs straight and feet together. Rest on the forearm of your lower arm, with your elbow directly under your shoulder and your other arm by your side.
2. Engage your abdominals and look straight ahead. Maintain a straight line with your head, neck and body. Push down through your forearm and feet, to raise your hips off the floor and your legs are straight.
3. Continue the movement, holding the position for the desired length of time. Release the tension slowly. Repeat, alternating sides.



FULL SIDE PLANK

Target Muscle Groups
Primary: Obliques
Secondary: Abdominals, Deltoids, Triceps

Steps:
1. Step 1: Lie on your side with your legs straight and feet together. Straighten your lower arm, with your hand directly under your shoulder and rest your other arm by your side.
2. Step 2: Engage your abdomi- nals. Maintain a straight line with your head, neck and body as you push down through your lower hand and feet, to raise your body up until your legs are straight.
3. Step 3: Continue the movement, holding the position for the desired length of time. Release the tension slowly. Repeat, then alternate sides.



FULL SIDE PLANK WITH LEG LIFT

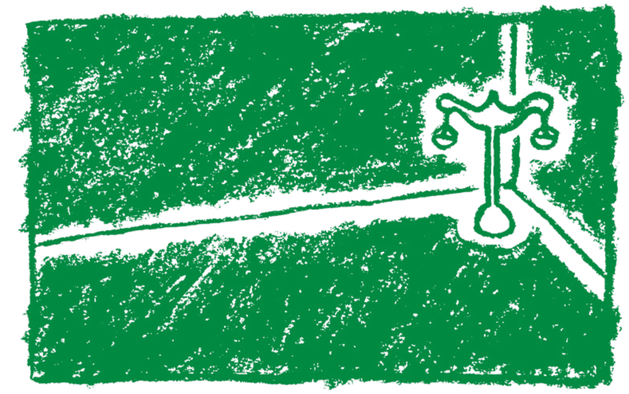
Target Muscle Groups
Primary: Obliques
Secondary: Abdominals, Deltoids, Triceps, Quadriceps

Steps:
1. Assume a full side plank with straight arm position.
2. Maintain a straight line with your head, neck and body, as you push down through your arm and feet, to lift your body up until your arms and legs are straight.
3. Lift the upper leg up inline with your hips, keeping the rest of your body still.
4. Continue the movement, holding the position for the desired length of time. Release the tension slowly. Repeat, then alternate sides.

All exercises reprinted with permission from *Inside Time*.

• Legal Corner

Through these articles, we provide information on relevant areas of law. This first article provides basic information to make it easier for family and friends to support you. There are differences in the ways the systems operate depending on where you're located (VIC, NSW, ACT or TAS), so we hope this is useful and relevant to where you are. We've only included these jurisdictions, as the paper is only available in prisons in these states/ territory at this time.



How to Complain to the Ombudsman

Reporting complaints against government decisions and actions

By About Time

What is the Ombudsman?
The Ombudsman is an independent organisation that oversees complaints against government decisions and actions. Each state/territory has their own Ombudsman. The Ombudsman responds to a complaint by investigating from both sides what has happened and why.

What can I complain about?
People in prison can complain to the Ombudsman about certain decisions of prison authorities. These are administrative decisions, meaning decisions made from certain legal powers that impact your rights. These include (but are not limited to!):

- ability to access a certain program in prison;
- amount of time allowed out of your cell;
- access or management of your prison money; and
- conduct of prison staff during searches and seizures etc.

Note: The Ombudsman cannot take complaints on issues that relate to staff shortages or the physical condition of the prison as these are not 'administrative acts' (acts done by someone who has certain powers under the law). These types of issues are matters for the Minister for Corrections, who can also be written to.

What's the point of making a complaint? What will happen?
The Ombudsman will assess your complaint to see if it's an issue they can assist with. If so, they will also ask the prison for their version of events. They will see if the prison can change their practices and will go on to make further recommendations. However, prison authorities do not have to do what the Ombudsman recommends. Their powers are quite weak.

You might get a letter saying that the complaint is 'resolved' or they will 'close' the complaint without things changing much. If you're unhappy with the decision, you can ask for an 'internal review', where a senior Ombudsman reviews the decision. But that might not change their decision either.

While the system can be frustrating, it is always good to let the Ombudsman know about an issue so it is on record, even if you think nothing will happen. It can contribute to a number of other complaints around similar issues, and raise 'systemic' concerns that the Ombudsman then investigates. Anything from an Ombudsman investigation may also serve as evidence if you take something to court later.

> **"Know that you always have a right to complain and while you may not get the result you wanted, you are standing up for what you believe is right, which no one can take away from you."**

How can I make a complaint?
Firstly, the Ombudsman will only take on a complaint if you've raised it with the prison first. You should make this complaint in writing and most likely to the General Manager. Ask someone to help you with your complaint if you need.
Then you wait. The Ombudsman will usually only help after enough time has passed, usually 30 days. After this time, if you haven't heard anything from the prison, you should complain. If you received a response from the prison for your complaint and you're not happy with it, you should complain to the Ombudsman.

However, if you have an urgent issue like you have been told you are being transferred to another prison, or you have been denied access to items you require for medical reasons for example, and you have not been able to resolve these issues with the prison, you should still contact the Ombudsman. They may be able to then contact the prison so that this type of decision can be delayed while a review can be made.

The Ombudsman will not touch anything that is going to court. It is always a good idea to make a complaint to the Ombudsman before taking anything to court. The Ombudsman could help solve a problem easier, while court procedures are long and difficult and potentially expensive. If you still have to go to court, the Ombudsman will then have evidence of your complaint which might help you.

What should I include in a complaint?
You should include the following:

- your name and prison identification details;
- a short statement of what happened including the date, time, place and any required background;
- steps taken to raise the issue with the prison; and
- evidence of the complaint to the prison (e.g. a copy of your complaint and/or a letter from the prison noting they have received your complaint or in response to your complaint).

Where do I make the complaint?
You can write to your relevant Ombudsman. We've listed the addresses here. Prison officers are not allowed to open your letters to the Ombudsman. Prison phones have free calls to the Ombudsman.

VIC
Victorian Ombudsman
Level 2
570 Bourke St
Melbourne VIC 3000

ACT
ACT Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

NSW
NSW Ombudsman
Level 24
580 George Street
Sydney NSW 2000

TAS
Ombudsman Tasmania
GPO Box 960
Hobart TAS 7001

Important
The above information is of a general nature and is not a substitute for legal advice.

What You Need to Know About OPCAT:

The UN treaty that aims to prevent human rights abuses in prisons

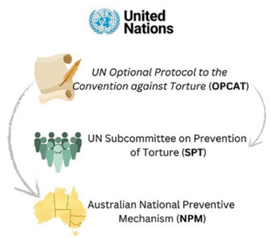
By Andreea Lachsz

Andreea Lachsz is a Quentin Bryce Law Doctoral Scholar. She is researching a PhD on the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in places of detention.



The human rights of people in prison

When people are imprisoned, they lose their freedom, but they do not lose all of their human rights. International human rights law makes this very clear. Also, in some Australian states and territories, like Victoria and the ACT, there is human rights legislation that prohibits the torture and ill-treatment of imprisoned people.



What is OPCAT?

The United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).

OPCAT is an international human rights treaty that aims to prevent torture and ill-treatment of detained people.

The OPCAT intends to achieve this through regular visits by external organisations to see how things are going in prison and how they can be improved. The idea is also that if a prison knows that external, independent people will be coming to visit, they will be less likely to treat people in prison badly. It's about monitoring of prisons.

There are both 'international' and 'local' oversight organisations that can enter prisons under this treaty. The international body is made up of independent experts from around the world, and is called the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (or SPT). The local organisation (or organisations) is called the National Preventive Mechanism (or NPM).

Countries like Australia can voluntarily sign up to the treaty. If countries sign up to the treaty, they must then do certain things. In 2017, Australia committed to meet the human rights obligations outlined in the OPCAT. Today, 94 countries have signed onto OPCAT.



So, does Australia have a national oversight body?

As Australia has signed up to the OPCAT, it is obligated to create a local body – the Australian NPM. The Australian Government delayed doing this, and then asked the UN for more time. The delayed, extended deadline to have a fully up and running oversight body across the whole country was January 2023. There is still no working oversight body, however there is slow progress towards one.

The Australian NPM would be divided up into parts at state and territory levels, as well as the national level. The Australian, ACT, Tasmanian, South Australian, Western Australian and the Northern Territory Governments have 'nominated' some organisations to be part of the Australian oversight body. However, most of the bodies that have been chosen do not have enough funding or do not have the necessary legal powers and protections to do the OPCAT work effectively. The Victorian, NSW and Queensland governments have not yet chosen their NPM bodies.



Has the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture visited Australian prisons?

If signed up to the treaty, a country needs to allow the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture to visit all places of detention. The UN visited Australia in October 2022, but had difficulties accessing prisons and detention centres. Because of this, it decided to suspend its visit. Then, in February 2023, it officially ended its visit. This is only the second time the UN body has ever terminated a visit, in any country.



How does the national body do its work?

By regularly visiting places of detention like prisons, an NPM aims to prevent ill-treatment. Unlike many other bodies, such as complaints bodies or courts, it does not advocate for individual people or respond to complaints/incidents.

It aims to identify systemic issues and makes recommendations to prison management and governments on how to prevent ill-treatment before it happens.



The OPCAT is an international human rights treaty, and so the NPM will look at a prison through the rules and standards in international human rights laws. For example, an NPM will rely on the rules in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (also known as the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).



An NPM should be able to regularly visit places of detention, during the day or night, on both weekdays and weekends. It should have the power to enter a prison for both announced and unannounced visits. It should be able to publish its reports, including its findings and recommendations.



An NPM should have access to all places of detention, including private and public prisons (as well as all sections of the prison). It should also have access to all information and records regarding treatment of detained people and conditions of detention (e.g. all video footage from CCTV and hand-held cameras, and electronic systems and files). An NPM will also make its own observations during its visit to the prison (e.g. whether the prison is clean, how staff speak to detained people).



Importantly, an NPM must be able to have private interviews with all detained people, staff and contractors.

And the OPCAT prohibits any sanctions or punishment against a person or organisation for communicating/sharing any information with the NPM, regardless of whether the information they provided was true or false.



Where to from here?

OPCAT can benefit everyone – detained people, their families, staff working in prisons, prison management and governments.

Evidence shows that regular visits to prisons by NPMs can strengthen protections for detained people.

Expert feedback from the NPM bodies provides useful guidance to prison management and governments on how to prevent ill-treatment from occurring in the first place.

Many people and organisations have been advocating for full implementation of OPCAT in Australia. Hopefully governments across the country will work together to find a way forward.

Unfortunately (at least for now) OPCAT remains a missing piece of the puzzle.

Future content:
If there is a topic or area of law that you would like us to write on, please reach out to us!

Email:
info@abouttime.org.au

Mail:
About Time
PO BOX 24041
MELBOURNE 3000

Until next time.



• Creative

This section will publish creative contributions mostly from currently and formerly incarcerated people. It will include short-stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, art, and much more. If you have something creative to submit to us, we would love to read it, or see it, and publish it in About Time.



Eco-cow

A short story

By Kyle

Kyle writes from Goulburn Correctional Centre, NSW.

The two men popped open the Tesla's doors, *thump thomp*, and stepped out into a blooming orchard. The air was a herbal tea. Honey bees bobbed between the peach pink flowers.

Thunk thonk bip-bip, and the guy wearing the "One Earth, One Home" t-shirt blurted, 'really cool car.'

The man wearing the suit shrugged his hands.

'But you know what's even cooler?'

The man gestured up the grass path that cut through the orchard and into a meadow.

'Yeah,' the guy put his finger up, 'but they're not over there,' and he grinned and turned and walked off into the rows of trees.

The man glanced back toward the meadow before he moved to catch up with the guy, '...good about owning a Tesla, but light ICE vehicles only make up one tenth of greenhouse gas emissions, whilst methane from cattle is responsible for sixteen percent! And so we all need your investment if we're going to tackle climate change...' The man had heard the same spiel on the drive in. It went in one ear and out the other until, '-first one to see it!'

He blinked. He was at the foot of a ladder. It was set against one of the trees. He looked to the guy. The guy looked to him.

The steel rungs were warm from the sun. The bees were buzzing about his face. He reached the top and peered about at the dense foliage.

'Just pull apart the branches,' came a voice from below.

The man pulled apart the branches to expose red meat muscle twitching, jittering, swelling, and contracting. It shivered.

Freedom Is Not a Box

By Taylor

Taylor's brother is incarcerated in New South Wales.

Freedom has been likened
To a bird, a plane, a song,
It has been once personified
As a road that's very long.

Freedom has been likened
To people: from war, death, or insanity,
To others it is being absolved
From rules for eternity.

Freedom has been likened
To doing whatever you please,
The moment Morgan Freeman finds that box
Under the big oak tree.

Freedom can be political
Ceased oppression, locks, and chains,
A nation's struggle to move away
From colonialism's gains.

On a Sunday morning, I see my brother.
In the walls of a correctional centre
All dressed up in green,
And seeing his smiling face for me
Is a feeling oh so free.

When he is released
I will be there – hand outstretched and seeing
That freedom is not a place, a box, a road,
But lives in his entire being.

You Were Never There

Anonymous

The writer is an incarcerated woman who writes from a prison in Melbourne.

You were never there to tuck me into bed
No, you were never there at night when I was scared
Mama, where were you when I needed you most
Mama tell me why all alone I had to cope

The other kids at school, well they all had a mum
The other kids, the other kids all had someone
I never had a close friend, one to call my own

Someone just to laugh with – I always cried alone

When I needed bandages there was no one round
No-one to feed me chicken soup when I was down
Mama you left me, I might as well have died.
Mama when you left me I wonder if you cried.

Then when I got older the emptiness it grew
In every room, in every crowd I was dying to find you

All the endless, empty bars in this empty city
Faceless people on the streets and roads that hold no pity.

Still alone I travelled following the sun
Each time loneliness came to me I'd just up and run
Mama did I do something wrong, tell me was I bad
To make you give away the little child you had.



• Write to Us

We are a new paper; a new idea. We welcome all of your thoughts about how we can make this as successful as possible. Is there something you want removed from the paper? Something you want added? Let us know.

And also, please let us know if the paper is being circulated properly in your prison. Is everyone receiving a copy, or are there issues with distribution?

We want to hear from you. Write to us via the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

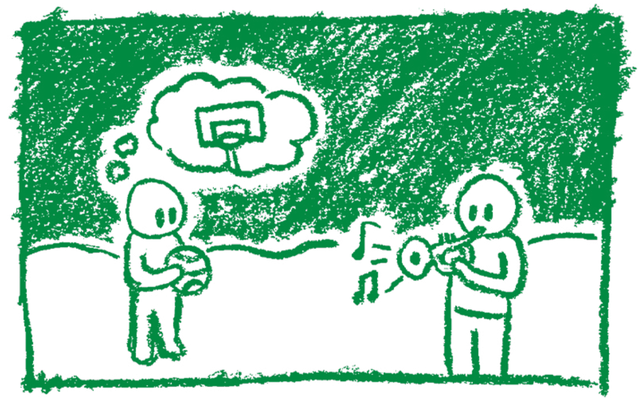
Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

• Culture

Culture is wide ranging. Sport, film, literature and the arts are all part of our culture, and much more.

This section is dedicated to exploring and writing about the culture that people are engaging in, in Australia and around the world.



Plays at Pentridge

The power of the spoken word in prison

By Michelle Wright

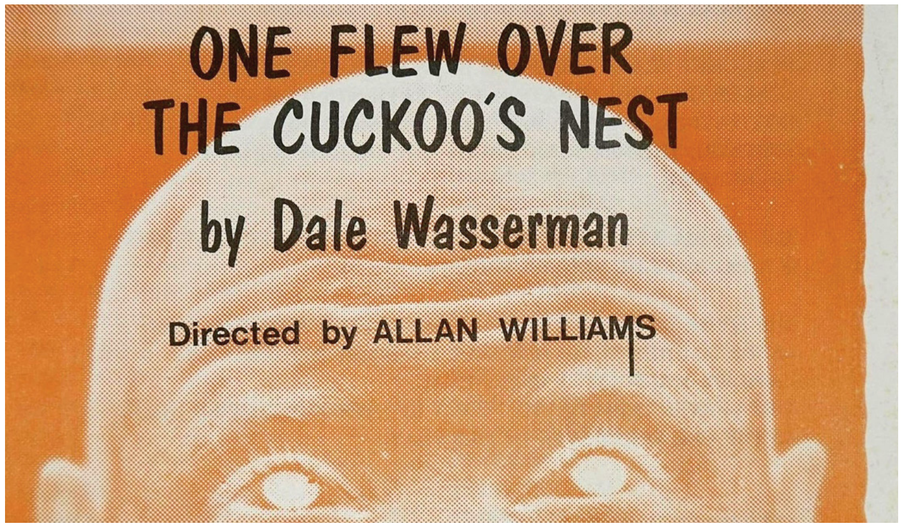
Michelle Wright is a short story writer and novelist. She takes public tours of Pentridge Prison and has run creative writing workshops over several decades.

Melbourne's Pentridge Prison still holds powerful memories for many thousands of people.

The prison's towering bluestone walls were an imposing presence in Coburg, and almost all Melburnians have a story to tell about this notorious place.

My own connection to Pentridge dates from 1982, when I was 18 years old. At that time the prisoners in A Division had a theatre group called the Mess Hall Players. That year, they were putting on One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, an extremely powerful play set in a 1960s psychiatric institution in the US. There were several female roles in the play, and I was one of three young women who joined the theatre group to act alongside the prisoners.

We went into A Division every day for four months to rehearse and then perform the play. Over that time, we got to know the prisoners well and learned a lot about their lives and conditions inside. We saw them first and foremost as our fellow actors and almost forgot where we were until it came time to leave each evening, the heavy metal gates of A Division clanged shut behind us.



Program Cover, June 1982 Production at Pentridge

The play ran for five weeks, with audiences of about 200 people each night. It was a very professional production and got fantastic reactions from the public.

The most memorable performance for me was opening night, always a nerve-wracking time for the cast and crew. As per tradition, the audience that evening were the other A Division prisoners. We'd never met them as they were already locked in when we arrived for rehearsals each afternoon. But the guys in the theatre group had obviously been telling them about us, and they were very excited about finally seeing us.

The lights came up for the opening scene and my fellow actress and I walked out onto the stage, completely unprepared for the reaction our entrance would provoke. The guys in the audience went wild – clapping, whistling, yelling and stomping their feet. The whole stage was shaking and we couldn't hear a word of the lines we were saying. We forged ahead, but it was a pretty dramatic first few minutes.

In the final scene, the main character, McMurphy – a loud, confident and rebellious inmate – has been brought back to his room after being lobotomised. His friend, Chief Bromden, knowing McMurphy would rather die than be reduced to this state, decides to smother him with a pillow.

During this scene, every single man in the audience was absolutely silent. There was not a single sound in the entire theatre. And although the noise at the start of the play had been pretty impressive, that silence at the end was truly overwhelming. All these years later, the memory still gives me goosebumps.

While the Mess Hall Players, A Division and Pentridge are now history (Pentridge closed in 1997), plays are still being performed in prisons. I recently saw a performance of *The Sky Chose Me* at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Melbourne. Somebody's Daughter Theatre worked with the women to create and perform this moving, funny, thought-provoking play and the art exhibition that accompanied it.

Somebody's Daughter Theatre has worked with women in Victorian Prisons and post-release to create theatre, visual art, music and film since 1980. The work they create together is stunning, and the impact they have had on these women's lives over the past 40 years is immeasurable.

In Pentridge and at Dame Phyllis Frost, I've seen what a powerful impact the written and spoken word can have in prison, for those who perform and those who witness the performances. Here's hoping that there will be many more opportunities like these in the future.

• Mob

Welcome to the Mob section!

Here is a section made by Mob for Mob! If you'd like to contribute, please write to us. In this edition, we've included paintings from The Torch, ways to contact a lawyer if you're in NSW, and an explainer on Aboriginal Self-Determination.



Journey Lines
By Putecharung
Kamu
2024

Everyone's journey is unique, this painting symbolises the individuality of everyone's journey.



Birthing Journey
By Roxann
Yorta Yorta / Gunaikurnai
2024

This represents a mother's journey of childbirth and the creation of her young through the pain endured throughout her and her children's journey.

A New System for Making Calls to the ALS From Prison

By the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT)

In March 2024, the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT ('ALS') launched a new system for handling phone calls from prisons. This system is designed to provide help faster and more smoothly. If you are an Aboriginal person in a NSW prison, you can still reach the ALS on the same CADL list number: #12. In the ACT, dial 6120 8800.

Your call will be answered by a new team of ALS staff dedicated to answering prison calls. This team is called the Inmate Referral and Advice Service. They are available Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. If you call outside of business hours, you can leave a voicemail.

If your question is about your current criminal law case, you will be transferred to the ALS office that is running your case. If the team can't reach the ALS office or lawyer you need right away, they will send an email with your message.

There is also a solicitor available who can provide information and referrals, advice and some legal assistance to Aboriginal people in custody.

For example, you can call if you have a question about:

- Civil law;
- Issues with police;
- Housing;
- Compensation;
- Issues in prison;
- Criminal law;
- AVOs;
- Other legal problems.

So if you are an Aboriginal inmate in NSW or the ACT and you have a legal problem, call the ALS.

Aboriginal Legal Service
(NSW/ACT) Limited

The Right to Self-Determination

Information provided by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

While the information sometimes refers to Aboriginal Victorians, it is relevant to all First Nations people across the country.

What is the right to self-determination?
While the right to self-determination remains undefined under international law, it can best be described as the right of a 'people' to collectively exercise control over, and make decisions regarding, matters that affect them. It is the right of a people to determine their destiny.

The right to self-determination is different to other traditional human rights. Most human rights are concerned with rights of individuals or 'persons' within a society. Self-determination is a collective right of 'peoples' under international law.

No universal definition of 'people' exists under international law. The common features of 'peoples' include distinct communities composed of individuals with:

- common tradition and culture;
- ethnicity;
- historical ties and heritage;
- language;
- religion;
- sense of identity or kinship;
- the will to constitute a people;
- common suffering.

Indigenous peoples were recognised as 'peoples' under international law by the United Nations General Assembly and bearers of the right to self-determination in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007.

Why is the right to self-determination important to Aboriginal communities in Victoria?
The right to self-determination can serve as a means by which Aboriginal communities can restore Aboriginal authority over Aboriginal affairs through Aboriginal-determined institutions.

Contemporary Victorian government practices treat Aboriginal people as minorities – a group or category of individuals making up a small portion of Victorian society and in a non-dominant position – that have suffered violations of human rights and dignity as a result of their status. Minority rights traditionally require the government to determine the means by which to protect the rights of minorities. While representatives of minority groups are allowed to participate in discussions concerning how issues affecting the group are addressed, there is no requirement for a government to reflect the opinions and decisions voiced by a minority group in legislation, policy or practice.

> "As 'peoples', Victorian Aboriginal communities are legally entitled to more than a seat at the table."

The right to self-determination of Aboriginal peoples in Victoria mandates that Aboriginal communities and their self-determined institutions:

- Actively participate in decision-making processes that affect them; and
- Possess the right to free, prior and informed consent over administrative and legislative measures that affect them.

What are the current issues relating to the Aboriginal right to self-determination in the Victorian legal system?
There are many themes of Aboriginal self-determination that have emerged in advocacy by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and other organisations. For example, self-determination is key in addressing Aboriginal deaths in custody. In 1991, Recommendation 188 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) stated that governments should negotiate with Aboriginal communities to determine guidelines, procedures and processes to be followed in the modification, design and implementation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal communities. The Recommendation was premised upon self-determination. VALS and other organisations continue to advocate for this.

If you want to find out more, feel free to contact your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. The ALO/AWO at your prison should have those contacts if you need them.



Journey of Discovery
By Aalayah
Wiradjuri
2024

This is a combination of our Indigenous symbols that I have learnt about in jail. I have learnt their meaning and how they were used within our community. I often think to myself that I am the luckiest person in the world to have a culture so beautiful and rich. Our connection to all things is so spiritual; the whispers from the trees and vibrations from the ground. I can feel my Ancestors calling me home.
The symbols in my artwork represent; (Starting from the top right-hand corner and going clockwise):

- Human Footprints
- Child
- Person
- Kangaroo Tracks
- Waterholes / Campsites
- Emu Tracks
- Spears
- Journey Path

Totems are also very important in our culture. When travelling into another Mob's Country it is important to give respect to that Mob's totem, as you would your own. Our totems are animals such as the goanna, kangaroo and emu. I feel strong and empowered learning about my culture.

• Play

Quiz

1. Fill in the blank from Seinfeld: ‘These ... are making me thirsty!’
2. What country has won the most Olympic gold medals?
3. How many kilos of skin cells does the average person lose each year?
4. What is the hardest natural substance on earth?
5. What animal is known as the unicorn of the sea?
6. Complete the lyrics, ‘Woah, we're halfway there’...
7. What is the capital city of Saudi Arabia?
8. Which Australian city experienced a major earthquake in 1989?
9. The Walls of Jerusalem are located in which Australian state?
10. Name Australia’s most popular YouTuber who used to be incarcerated.

(Bad) Jokes

1. What did one plate say to the other plate? Dinner is on me.
2. Why didn’t the teddy eat dessert? He was stuffed.
3. Why did the maths book look so upset? Because of all its problems.
4. Why are dogs bad dancers? They have two left feet.
5. Where do sharks go on holiday? Fin-land.

Word Morph

Morph one word into another by changing one letter at a time.

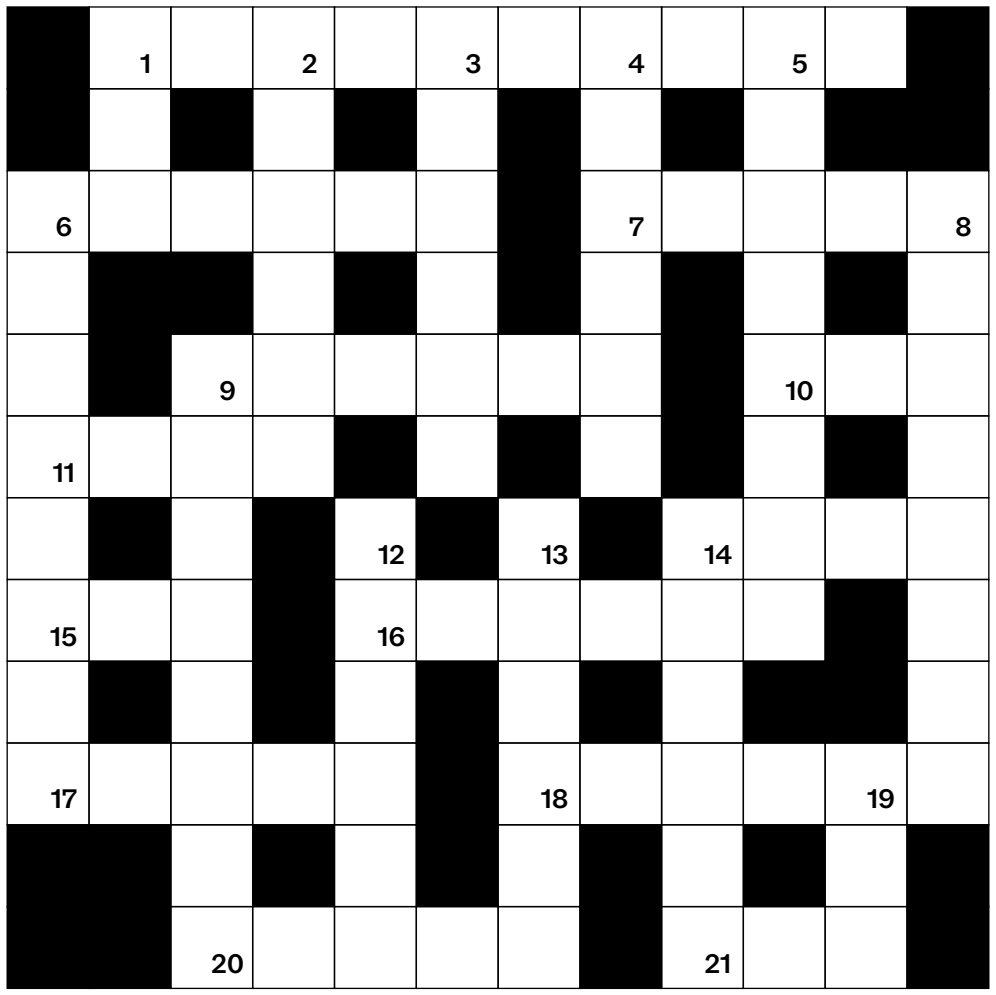
①	BUNCH
②	
③	
④	
⑤	PEACE

Crossword

ACROSS
1. Vest
6. Achieve
7. Tumbles
9. Large Wooded Area
10. Rowing pole
11. Paradise
14. Certain
15. Toddler
16. Frozen spike
17. Challenger
18. Process food
20. Passenger ship
21. Born as

DOWN
1. Risk
2. Mythical creature
3. Champion
4. Swivel
5. Literary postscript
6. Forefather
8. Army officer
9. Celebratory event
12. Stringed instrument
13. Twitcher
14. Catchy phrase
19. Take legal action

From Inside Time.



Boggle

Discover as many words as possible. A word can only be formed if each letter is side-by-side, above or below, or on the diagonal with the next.

From Inside Time.

H	O	E	L	A
D	W	T	B	X
U	G	J	L	Z
Z	B	M	N	C
A	Y	V	I	L

Caption This...

Submit a caption to this photo, and we will print the three finalists (including the winner) in the next edition.

Submissions:
Please send your submissions to the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au



Last Month's Submissions:
Thank you for your entries into last month’s caption competition!

WINNER!
‘Hate to eat on the fly but...’ Joe, MRC, Victoria

Runners Up:
‘Bin-chicken Lettuce Tomato! (BLT)’ Michael, prison unknown, NSW

‘We can’t go on meeting like this, people will talk’, Ben, Risdon, Tasmania

Crossword Answers (ACROSS)

1. Body warmer
2. Attain
3. Trips
4. Forest
5. Oar
6. Eden
7. Sure
8. Tot
9. Nee
10. Digest
11. Liner
12. Icicle
13. Rival

Crossword Answers (DOWN)

1. Bet
2. Dragon
3. Winner
4. Rotate
5. Epilogue
6. Ancestor
7. Sergeant
8. Festival
9. Violin
10. Birder
11. Slogan
12. Sue

Quiz Answers

1. Pretzels
2. USA
3. 4kg
4. Diamond
5. Narwhal
6. Woah-oh, livin' on a prayer
7. Riyadh
8. Newcastle
9. Tasmania
10. Spanian