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• Australia's National Prison Newspaper

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About Time

Higher Education and Reducing Recidivism

There is an appetite for rehabilitation through higher education among inmates, and the experts back it up.

By H.E.A.L

Higher Education Advocacy and Leadership (H.E.A.L) are a self-appointed delegation of people in prison originating from Goulburn Correctional Centre.

Originating in Goulburn Correctional Centre, we are the beginnings of a self-appointed delegation of inmates, bound together by a common goal: 'Higher Education Advocacy and Leadership'. We are H.E.A.L, and are advocating for external educational opportunities for all incarcerated people in Australia.

The nature of this open letter from us at H.E.A.L is to not only grow as a proactive inmate led organisation advocating systemic change, but also attain your encouragement and support. We are seeking the approval of both sentenced and unsentenced inmates, housed in NSW Correctional Centres, to be able to be engaged in 'External Tertiary study' via correspondence, either by a student portal which can be readily made available on inmate tablets as an approved browser site, or alternatively, mail exchange with an educational provider. Why? So, we, the incarcerated, may utilise 'dead-time', as a means to begin the vital process of self-rehabilitation, and upon release contribute to society in a meaningful way and reduce the rate of recidivism.

Continued on page 10.



Ike Curtis

States Set to Improve Computer Access in Cells

'When primary school pupils are utilising this technology ... the need for a degree of lateral thought in the custodial context may well have arrived' – NSW Chief Justice Andrew Bell

By Denham Sadler

Several states are looking to improve access to technologies in prison cells, with some also to provide limited access to the internet and email.

Numerous international studies have found that providing access to computers, laptops and tablets, and the internet and email, boost rehabilitation and help people prepare for reintegration into the community.

Despite this, access to these devices in prisons in Australia is limited, with most people in prison only able to access desktop computers in common areas only for legal and educational purposes.

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Letters

How Can We Afford to Connect With Family?

By Kerrin

Kerrin writes from Marngoneet Correctional Centre in Victoria.

To About Time,

My name is Kerrin, currently in Marngoneet Correctional Centre.

Nothing but positive feedback for your paper. I can only see it getting better with time. I only have a short stint of a few months, but like most find myself forced to become distant from my family, mainly due to unaffordable call rates. I work in metal fabrication, paid $33 per week (available spend). I smoked vapes outside, due to a nicotine dependency and I need my $17 box of lozenges weekly, so my usual canteen spend looks like this: $17 for lozenges, $2 for long-life milk, $4 for coffee, $2 for soap, $3 for the Geelong Advertiser (as it has tv guide for the week) and maybe a pack of biscuits (if on a sale) for under $2. This usually leaves me around a couple dollars.

For my phone, I'm lucky my partner pays for an engine number and mum has a home phone or I just wouldn't be able to speak to anyone. Thank god my son (three years old) is able to visit me with my mother fortnightly or I'd go mad. As his mother has a CRN from years ago, I'm unable to get zoom calls with him.

All my other family, being my dad, sisters, brothers and my 19-year-old twin boys have mobile numbers as their only way of contact, so I haven't spoken with them unfortunately. There are so many issues with the system, but these sorts of issues are definitely the main ones. I've found every prisoner has similar problems around the phone system.

Thank you for your piece on depression in the (October issue). It definitely did lift my spirits, after getting a better understanding of the condition and to know that there are so many prisoners in similar circumstances to myself. There is always a brighter day ahead.

Regards,
Kerrin

P.S. I also made sure I got the postage stamp and envelope so I could say thank-you for your paper. I really think it gives us all hope for change and a feeling that we do have a voice. We can only hope we are heard.

What Is the Meaning of Life? It's All in the Mind

By Thomas

Thomas writes from South Coast CC, in NSW.

The Meaning of Life can drive scientists crazy. You are not alone. Our questions, our fears, our thoughts are like demands, tormenting our souls, afraid to face them. We bury thoughts like secrets, every mind like a minefield waiting to be triggered, to explode. Quick to put a label on mental illness, but never truly understanding what it is! Are they really just crazy thoughts or are you wired to a computer you do not understand?

I believe mental illness begins with the fight (or) flight mode that most masculine beings would rather use than the word "fear". Whatever early traumas in our lives that led to these deep seeded anxieties are then amplified by drugs, and even by our lifestyle, environment and health.

Us criminals can't seem to comprehend or fathom how great our own brains are. It's almost as though consciousness is built as a protection mechanism for the body and the brain, receiving messages from all the senses in the body. It then adds up these equations (from people, steps, interactions, indifferences and so on), looking for threats to the body and, if found, will try redirect your path – you might recall a dream where you've had an altercation with someone, but even in the dream you dodge or stick up to that threat!

Those who lose control of the mind, like us, are afraid to look at themselves. Quick to judge everyone else's flaws but run when the mirror is turned on themselves. Mental health is all about being willing to understand yourself, going back to your earliest memories and trying not to regret them, but acknowledging and understanding tears, every struggle, every decision, mistake and every feeling you were going through – they were leading you to the reason why you ended up in here.

So you can leave your mind scattered, those thoughts creating chaos. Or harness your thoughts, understand your demands, put that puzzling mind back together to be one like the cosmos in its proper cosmic cycle.

Though I have no degree, no masters, never graduated, nothing, I've had enough time in here and experience in life and all to reflect and see myself in my truest light. For memories aren't stored to reminisce as most would think. The thing about why it is easier to find a traumatic event than a happy memory? It is so you know and prepare for your next hurdles in life. Those memories are not an experience that carries knowledge of mistakes you've made along the way in this thing called life. Those memories are now tools to overcome your future!

"So use it!"

Everything happens for a reason.

Another Housing Crisis

By Kelly

Kelly writes from the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre in Victoria.

About Time Magazine,

I appreciate seeing my artwork in the recent edition of the Magazine :) Looks great. Thank you so much. My artist name is Aalayah and I am currently serving a sentence at DPFC. I sell my artwork via The Torch for Victorian prisoners, where my work can be found under my artist name Aalyah. It was such a pleasant surprise to see it. I will keep in touch as I am very eager to write some papers on the lack of housing available for women who go out on parole in Victoria. This is currently an issue I am facing and I would like to call it out and have it published. I was due for parole in March, and my parole is approved but there is no housing for me to go to. It's amazing how easily they can put me in jail and take away my house, cars, and life then not be held responsible to release me with the basic human necessities I need to live. If you could send me some information in regards to women's housing after prison, so I can start to put together a paper. Anything at all would be appreciated.

Kind regards,
Kelly, DPFC

Response from About Time:
Hi Kelly,
Thank you for your letter. We hope you received the information we sent you about women, parole and housing in Victoria. We are looking forward to reading your piece!
About Time

What I Learnt About Buddhism

By George

George writes from a Victorian prison.

I stumbled across Buddhist meditation in 2017 where I met Hojun, the Buddhist chaplain/monk who led the meditation and spiritual discussion. Since then, thanks to Hojun, I feel I have changed mentally and spiritually in nearly every way.

Some of the important changes I reflect upon are things like the acceptance of chance, and that everything is in a state of flux. This means we all change, with the difference being that I am now aware of the change, so I can manifest this in skilful ways.

Some other more challenging concepts include: I am not the story that I tell myself; I am not my possessions, friends, crimes, name, age or sex. I am not my past, or my future; and we are all here witnessing consciousness though our human senses. It is through this understanding I can truly begin to see life and how it truly is, letting go of the concepts I have of myself and therefore the judgements I have of others, allowing me to free myself from how I think others should act.

Being spiritual means to go beyond; which for me means to go beyond the beliefs I hold on to, the strongest of which make me suffer most. Some would say the goal is enlightenment, but there really is no goal; the path or the journey to non-self, freedom, liberation or enlightenment is where the work is. This work means letting go, practicing compassion, confronting my beliefs, and being rewarded for it.

Thank you, Hojun, for your inspiration, guidance, patience and your time.Thank you for guiding me through the changes I needed in my life, and by throwing the web of connection I know you have changed the lives of many in the most positive ways.

Kindest regards,
George ... AKA Shin Zen

Delusional Nut-Nut Club

By David

David writes from South Coast Correctional Centre in New South Wales.

Have you ever been accused of being "nuts"? Have they told you that you are "crazy"? That you need to "get help" – meaning you need to see a psychiatrist?

They then question the honesty of anything you might say? Any truth you say is considered "unsound" – a lie?

Have you owned up and pleaded guilty, honestly, only to have witnesses, police, the Crown, embellish the facts, and the truth/facts become a battle between winning and losing rather than about truth and justice?

Note the legal ads on social media: "No Win. No Pay". As though justice and truth are reduced to gambling: winning or losing!

Truth becomes the first victim of the "war" of the legal and justice systems.

This becomes evidenced by relying on the legislation of "Tendency, Context, Consequence" to attain a conviction.

This legislation is an abuse of the justice system. It ought to be repealed immediately.

It flies in the face of "innocent until proven guilty".

This turns the whole justice system on its head, and jurors are influenced by the clever use of semantics – using words and ideas which may sound influential and appear logical, but are founded on false premises.

For example, I may have robbed two news agencies. I honestly plead guilty.

But, because of my "tendency" to rob news agencies, they charge me with two unsolved robberies, of which I am honestly innocent.

With clever semantic arguments from the D.P.P. and Crown the jury finds me "guilty" because of my "tendency" of robbing news agencies. Truth is sacrificed on the altar of assumption.

Even worse, I feel I'm "blackmailed" into pleading guilty to obtain a percentage discount on my sentence, or to get it over with.

We humans are more influenced by emotion to make a "guilty" finding, rather than on the honest facts of evidence beyond reasonable doubt.

How many prisoners have been forced to take plea deals to get sentence discounts and plead guilty to crimes they honestly did not commit just to get it over and done with.

Some consequences to these injustices: Men's lives, their reputations, their families, and their friends are destroyed for life. They become so embittered. Angry. Lose all faith in our justice system and of ever believing in truth.

Has truth not only become the first victim of war but now a victim of our justice system?

When this happens, society suffers and chaos and anarchy grow. Leaders become dictators controlling the legal system, and our freedom becomes a travesty of justice. Then we may truly become "Delusional Nut-Nuts"!

God help us! Maybe joining my "delusional nut-nut" club will offer some solace?



Heads up for the Next Editions!
Dear About Time readers,

Thank you for all of your support and interest in the paper since we launched in July. The response has been overwhelming.

We've adapted and responded to your feedback each edition, and we will continue to do so.

Next month we will be releasing a **special extended Christmas edition** of the paper. It will come out around a **week before Christmas**, instead of the usual time of early in the month. We'll then be taking a break in January and return for a new and improved version of the paper in February next year.

We hope to hear from you as regularly as possible.

All the best,

The About Time team

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 fifth edition, distributed to all prisons in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. We hope that Western 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

Subscribe

About Time is distributed free of charge throughout the prison system. It is available to other readers via a postal subscription service. Please email the below address for more information:

subscribe@abouttime.org.au

Advertise

Advertising in About Time is a unique opportunity to reach an otherwise shuttered population, while also contributing to a much-needed resource. Contact the below email address to find out more.

advertise@abouttime.org.au

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We are a group of volunteers, entirely reliant on external funding to produce, publish and distribute each edition. Please visit the below website to support us if you can.

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Guilty Until Proven Innocent: My Experience of Remand

By Donnie

Donnie writes from a Victorian prison.

As a person that has never been on the wrong side of the law, you may automatically believe that "guilty until proven innocent" is a fact of the justice system. But I have been remanded into custody now since late 2019 – with no opportunity thus far to prove my innocence. So when is my opportunity? At a trial which is still years away? How can I gather evidence to prove my innocence while in custody?

I have been for bail but it was denied on the grounds that the size of the charge is large and can carry a long sentence if convicted, and also the strength of the prosecution's case. But, the major factor was that I did not meet the "Exceptional Circumstances" rule to be granted bail.

My defence would be that my case (drug related) is circumstantial with no direct evidence. There was also no evidence of threat to the community, threat to individuals, no links to organised crime, no links to people with drug related convictions, no drug use or possession, and no criminal history, not even a past visit to a police station. So is all this innocent until proven guilty? Yes, one could make a bail application to the Supreme Court but what if one cannot afford it or you lack the required surety? I'm not eligible for legal aid and I cannot afford the cost of legal defence. So while I wait on remand for my time to prove my innocence, I stand to lose everything I've ever worked for – my business, my family's home, assets, years of my children growing up and finally, my sanity.

I acknowledge that I am the minority and am very thankful that I have a great external support system but being remanded into Victoria's prison system is no different from being convicted. If anything, it is worse.

The mundane tasks that we do to be a part of society and to provide for our families such as paying the bills and mortgage, pets, children, partners all become inaccessible even if your external supports are willing to take on your burden. Not being personally present makes external tasks often impossible. So when does innocent until proven guilty come into play? In my case it hasn't...yet.

Would it then be different if I was a celebrity? Or had high profile connections? Or maybe bags of hidden cash?

Before all this I was a husband, father, brother and son living an ordinary life but now I am "guilty until proven innocent'.

Living Expenses in Prison

By Bradley

Bradley writes from Risdon Prison, in Tasmania.

To Australia's National Prison Newspaper,

I recently received your newspaper. I noticed something at the bottom of the front page which caught my attention. It said 'we need your feedback!'. But, before I continue writing any further please allow me to introduce myself and say 'Hi'. My name is Bradley, an inmate from Tasmania Risdon Prison. I have been coming in and out of jail just about most of my life.

I want to raise awareness of the living expenses in our prison system. Our pay each week has been kept minimum for quite some time (years) despite prisoners raising their voice, there's nothing being done about it. We barely can afford much on canteen-by up and they also minimise what we can buy and what we can't buy. We have not got a big variety like other prison's, and for our pays: a standby allowance each week is $25.00. General jobs start from $32.50 weekly, $42.50 a week for yard and $47.50 for full time jobs which are the laundry jobs etc and that is for minimum security prisoners only.

Our biggest concern is that we are no longer able to afford many things from canteen-by ups. The inflation has raised the prices of things, but our payments are kept the same. We can only afford just the basic stuff – toiletries and a few things in the canteen by-up list. We are all fed up with this. On behalf of prisoners, I am hoping to be our voice. We feel powerless.

You would be lucky to have a job here. Not just that to make a single phone call to your loved ones, it's way too much: $3.60 to mobile just for 10 min. Most of us inmates would be relying on our families for support and those who don't have families and support on the outside struggle more than the rest of us. I understand we are prisoners and we have our rights and we don't expect much help, but that small help could be a big difference. Our hope and our voice lies at the hand of those who can make a difference and this is why I'm writing and trying to make a difference/change.

About Time Around Australia

By Jason

Jason writes from Darwin, Northern Territory.

Hello,

I just saw you on ABC News talking about a newspaper for prisoners. I didn't see the entire interview so I was left wondering a few things. Is the paper already in circulation or in the idea phase? Are you able to get it approved Australia wide? More importantly to me personally, is it approved in Darwin? There's a prisoner newsletter type publication called Paper Chained that can't be handed out en masse here but can be requested through our Prison Support Officer. Anything over 5 pages (including letters from family) isn't allowed. Staff issues restrict intel capabilities. How are you financed? Do prisoners buy/subscribe to the newspaper? Was great to see prisoners being spoken of in a constructive and positive way, as I'm sure you're aware that isn't the norm in Australia.

I look forward to hearing back from you and hopefully in reading your newspaper.

Jason

Response from About Time:
Jason won't be able to read this as he is currently in the NT. But we thought it would be important to answer some of his questions for everyone who can. About Time started in July 2024, and is currently approved for distribution in Victoria, NSW, ACT, Tasmania, SA and Queensland. We hope WA and the NT come on board soon. We're distributed through the prisons. We don't at this stage have the manpower to send out individual subscriptions to people who request it. About Time is also available on the outside on a website and via print subscriptions.

We are financed through donations, grants and advertising. We are not funded by Corrections authorities or the government. Every state and territory is different, but most prisons are provided one copy for two prisoners, South Australia has less. In NSW, it's available on the tablets. We hope you're all enjoying the paper, and we encourage any feedback and contributions.

Fundraising From the Inside

Written on behalf of classmates at South Coast CC Intensive Learning Centre.

To 'About Time' jail newspaper,

I'm an inmate currently at South Coast Correctional Centre in sector 5 "C classo". I'm writing on behalf of my classmates here at the Intensive Learning Centre (ILC), and just wanted to spread the word, that we as a class created a chocolate fundraiser, as part of an assessment task, to raise money for a local charity that supports sick and disabled kids and their families. We fundraised just over $1000 dollars for this charity. I thought I could write in to you so it can get posted in the newspaper and with any luck get some boys in any centre to push for a fundraiser for a local charity near them. It's a great cause and everyone benefits from it. The boys get some chocolate and lollies and a local charity gets a well-deserved donation.

Thanks for taking the time to read and hopefully see it in the paper.

Cheers,
South Coast ILC



Thank You for Your Letters

As of a few weeks prior to publication, we received letters from A.S., Leslie, Vincent, Tony, Kerrin, Lance, Wayne, Brodie, Mathew, Craig, Shona, Bradley, A, Geoff, Sean, Donnie, David, Chambers, Merari, Chris, Dylan, Adam, StoneWall'd, Russco, Thomas, Zachary, Gareth, A.S.P, Zia, Mack, Megan, Luke, Oz, Ben and many more.

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

Unfortunately, we are unable to return your letters or 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.

If you would like to contribute to our Letters section, please send your letters to the following 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

Need for Day to Day Healthcare Support

By Alexander

Alexander writes from Risdon Prison, in Tasmania.

Dear Editor,

I am an inmate at Risdon Prison, Tasmania, and I am writing in relation to Inmate Health Care Plans.

I developed a significant health issue while an inmate of this institution, one that will require a surgical procedure. Initially the condition was very painful and debilitating. I struggled to walk, struggled to get to the shower, to muster, to the kitchen and to work. This condition is one that can be fixed quite quickly, however discomfort is daily.

In the days leading up to medical intervention, and immediately following, I definitely needed support, especially for the first few weeks, when the pain was at its worst. The support came solely from other inmates, and from the nurses with limited access to effective pain release. Eventually, after phoning the Ombudsman I was moved closer to the nursing station.

I had to move my own property, at a time when walking was painful.

Since then, medical support has been organised and is mostly coordinated, and is improving. The nurses have been efficient and I am grateful for their work.

A setback caused significant pain and stress, and begged the question: Why wasn't a day to day care plan put in place? At no stage during what was a difficult time, did anyone speak to me about basic supports such as cell hygiene, making a bed, minimising movement and access to a toilet while at work. I had to push hard to find someone to listen to me. I felt this wasn't taken seriously.

I understand the bigger picture medical plan – visits to a doctor, hospital, specialists when required, nurse support for immediate pain relief, that's part of a medical system's normal role. But the day to day living support is very important and was neglected. Even though I asked, I felt that nobody heard. I have put this question to our prison health system, and I am still waiting for a reply.

Prison is difficult enough when one is fit and healthy, it is almost impossible to get through when one is very unwell. I don't want inmates to experience unnecessary pain and discomfort as I did.

Developing case management plans shouldn't be difficult. They should provide a team focus for those individuals who need additional support for a period of time. They should include the inmate.

Yours faithfully,
Alexander

A Thank You From the Outside

By Ruby

Dear Writers,

My name is Ruby. I am a subscriber of About Time on the south coast of NSW. I do not have any lived experience of incarceration, nor do I personally know anyone who has.

I want to thank you for writing to the paper. Your stories are important, and they help people like me understand how fundamentally flawed and archaic the prison system is.

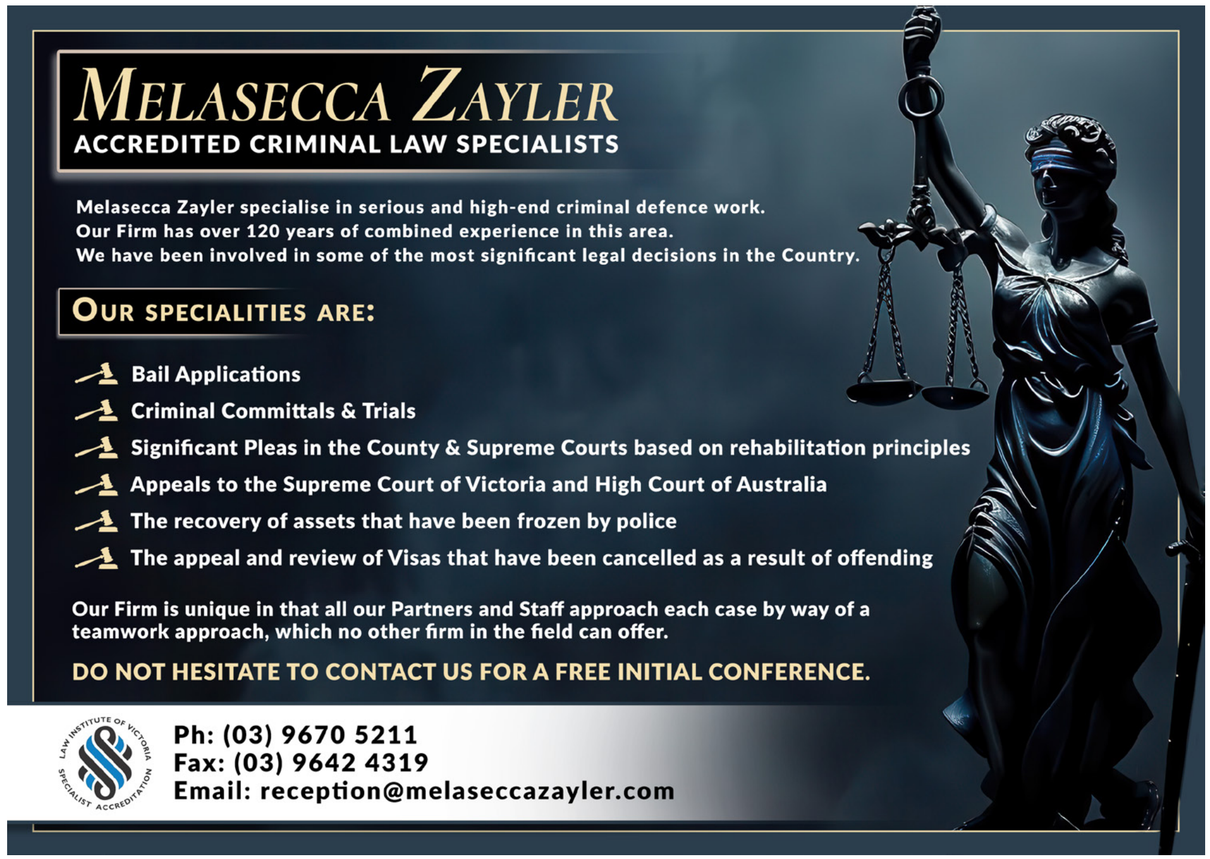
Kelly (Issue 4), your article taught me so much about working full-time in prison, and I felt rage at every word I read. I read your article aloud to my best friend. We spoke about it for a long time. Henry (Issue 3) and Dave (Issue 2), I also read her your articles. She's an art therapist. 'This is the power of art and music!' we cheered. Chris (Issue 4), Happy Birthday brother. You are a beautiful writer, please keep writing. Shea (Issue 4), your strength comes through in your vulnerability, and I hope you write again.

I will not pretend to understand what it is like on the inside, but reading your stories has been profoundly helpful in building empathy and understanding, not only in my life, but in the lives of those around me. I know I am not the only reader who feels this way. Thank you, all of you, for writing. Every issue I am left sitting here thinking, what can I do? How can I help? How can I put pressure in the right places to change things?

Do you have access to many books on the inside? I would love to learn more about prison libraries.

Thank you for your vulnerability, I can't wait for the next issue.

Ruby



News and Investigations

States Set to Improve Computer Access in Cells

Continued from page 1.

By Denham Sadler

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

Some states and territories provide access to computers in cells with approval, while others enable people in prison to apply for access to a laptop in their cell. None of these devices have access to the internet or services such as email, and many do not have word processing capabilities.

In New South Wales, a man incarcerated at Goulburn Correctional Centre recently won his case to require the state government to provide him with a laptop with word processing and data storage in his cell. The judge presiding over the case, Chief Justice Andrew Bell, said there was an ever-growing need for better technology to be provided to those in prison.

"There must surely come a time in the third decade of the third millennium when a party to complex litigation in this court can no longer be expected to conduct it without continuous or at least significant regular access to a laptop with internal storage facilities and word processing capabilities," Bell said.

"At a time in our history when primary school pupils are utilising this technology in the classroom, it seems that the need for a degree of lateral thought in the custodial context may well have arrived."

There is a growing push for better access to computers, laptops and tablets in prison cells for legal, educational and rehabilitative purposes.

About Time asked each state and territory government about current access to computers, laptops and tablets in prisons, and plans for improvements. Several jurisdictions, including Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania, confirmed plans to increase access to devices such as tablets, and to the internet and email.

Earlier this year a trial began in Victoria's minimum-security prisons giving those incarcerated access to email and pre-approved websites to help prepare them for their release from custody.

"People in custody are encouraged to maintain ties with family – this helps with their transition into the community after completing their sentence," a spokesperson for the Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety said.

"To support this, Corrections Victoria has trialled the expansion of limited access to computer services at three lower security prisons to facilitate email with family and friends on their approved list and legal representation."

In New South Wales, some inmates have been given tablets which can access a small number of pre-approved websites, along with the offender telephone system, games, books and library services.

These tablets were first rolled out in 2020 in the wake of the Covid pandemic, and there are now more than 12,000 across the state's prison system.

"Corrective Services NSW keeps a finger on the pulse of emerging technological advancements that could positively impact inmate rehabilitation and custodial settings," a Corrective Services NSW spokesperson said.

"We carefully assess and introduce new technologies and initiatives with a focus on striking a balance between inmate rehabilitation and security, acknowledging that community safety must always come first."

There are also plans to provide people in prison with tablets in Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT.

A Queensland Corrective Services spokesperson told About Time that in-cell technology such as handheld tablets will play a key role in its future plans, and that the soon-to-be-opened Lockyer Valley Correctional Centre will be the first in the state to provide these tablets to people in prison.

The tablets will provide access to account balances and canteen ordering, education, legal and wellbeing materials and restricted free-to-air television.

"Providing these devices aims to enhance the safety of the operating environment by enabling individuals to maintain important family relationships and be more self-directed in their access to essential services," the spokesperson said.

"Preliminary work has started to explore opportunities for prisoner in-cell technology in correctional centres across Queensland."

The ACT government is in the "early stages" of providing in-cell technologies to those incarcerated in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. These technologies will include tablets that have rehabilitative, educational, administrative, recreational and communication programs.

And in Tasmania, the recent state budget provided funding to investigate options to increase in-cell technologies in the state's prisons.

The West Australian government did not outline any plans to roll out tablets in its prisons or expand access to in-cell technologies in response to questions from About Time.

Current rules around accessing computers and laptops in prisons vary greatly across the country.

In most states and territories, those in prison can access desktop computers in common areas for education or legal work. Several states also allow people in prison to apply for access to a computer or laptop in their cell for these same reasons.

Across NSW prisons, there are about 1000 computers for work and study, and 150 computers for accessing legal information in out-of-cell hours. There are also more than 185 e-brief laptops for accessing legal information in cells.

In Victoria, some inmates can apply to buy a computer to use in their cells for legal case preparations and education, with strict guidelines.

In Queensland, those in prison can access computers in education buildings by request for legal and approved educational purposes. They can also apply to rent an in-cell, offline computer for $4 a week for these purposes.

In Western Australia, those in prison can have a computer in their cell only in "exceptional circumstances", such as to help with their legal defence or to view legal documents. WA prisons have computers in education centres for people engaged in education and vocational training programs.

"The use of a Corrective Services-issued computer is considered a privilege that may be removed at any time and is limited to the approved prisoner," a WA department spokesperson told About Time.

In Tasmania's Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison, 90 percent of people incarcerated have a computer account, and two-thirds of those in Ron Barwick Prison have such an account.

Computer access in prisons in Tasmania is generally from common areas, while those enrolled in education programs can apply to access a loaned offline computer in their cells.

The ACT government allows approved inmates to access desktop computers in general accommodation units and a computer lab. This is for educational and legal purposes, and to access email and approved news, sport and electoral websites.

New Evidence Shows Racial Profiling by Police Continues

The Racial Profiling Data Monitoring Project recently published new data on Victoria Police's use of racial profiling.

By Dr Tamar Hopkins

Dr Tamar Hopkins is a project worker at the Centre Against Racial Profiling in Victoria. She was the founding lawyer of the Police Accountability Project at Flemington & Kensington Community Legal Centre in Melbourne Australia in 2009.

Racial profiling is a concern for policing across the country. Racial profiling means using race or ethnicity as a reason for suspecting someone of having committed an offence. In August 2015, Victoria Police 'banned' racial profiling. This ban was part of a package of reforms generated as part of a 2013 settlement in a racial profiling court case brought by a group of mainly African young people called 'Haile-Michael v Konstantinidis". Despite the ban, advocates in Victoria continued to assess if Victoria Police continued to use racial profiling. On 8 October 2024, the Racial Profiling Data Monitoring Project, published four years of Victoria Police search data to see whether there was evidence that racial profiling continues. The Project found evidence that Victoria Police is still engaging in racial profiling.

How did it work?

The Project got Victoria Police search data that it had obtained under the Freedom of Information Act from 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023. They examined this data to see whether a person's racial appearance impacted on the 'rate' or 'reasonableness' of police searches.

The Project analysed the data for racial profiling using two methodologies: a 'hit rate' analysis and a 'census benchmarking' analysis.

A 'hit rate' analysis means looking for the number of times contraband was found during a series of searches. This analysis makes an assumption that when the police conduct a search on 'reasonable' grounds they are more likely to find a contraband item. The Project states that while this assumption cannot be made in individual cases, 'hit rate' is a reasonable proxy for search reasonableness over a large number of cases. Consequently, a lower 'find' or 'hit' rate indicates that overall, police are conducting less reasonable searches.

The other method is 'census benchmarking' analysis. A census benchmarking analysis compares the proportion of searches for each group in the population and compares this with their proportion in the overall population.

What was the result?

From a 'hit rate' analysis, the Project found that police searches of people perceived to be African, Middle Eastern, Indian and Asian have lower hit rates than searches of people perceived to be Caucasian.

Using the 'census benchmarking' method, the Project found that in 2023, police searched First Nations people at 11 times the rate of Caucasians. Furthermore, police searched people they perceived to be African at 8 times the rate of Caucasians, people they perceived to be Middle Eastern at 5 times the rate of Caucasians and people they perceived to be Pacific Islanders at 4 times the rate of Caucasians.

The Project states that its findings are evidence that Victoria Police continues to engage in racial profiling despite its 2015 ban. Furthermore, it claims that the disproportionate searching of First Nations, African, Middle Eastern and Pacific Islander communities is likely to directly impact an increased engagement of these communities with the criminal legal system.

The Project's findings suggest that racial profiling in Australia is likely to be at least as problematic as other multicultural societies where data exists. The Project argues that consequently, addressing racial profiling deserves far greater institutional attention in Australia than it currently receives.

If you have been subject to racial profiling in Victoria, please write to:

Police Accountability Project
2/508 Queensberry Street
North Melbourne VIC 3051

If you have been subject to racial profiling in other parts of Australia please write to:

Racial Justice Centre
Level 21/133 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

The project's data can be viewed at racialprofilingresearch.org

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News and Investigations



WA

Justice Department addresses challenges of increasing identification of prisoners with disabilities

A recent review from the Office of Custodial Services (OICS) states the Department of Justice has implemented a positive initiative that identifies and helps people in custody with an intellectual disability.

The report adheres to the Royal Disability Commission who are addressing the challenges through positive initiatives including early identification of the disabilities. The identification process includes the use of a functional impairment screening tool and has noted an increase in the number of individuals identified with possible cognitive impairments.

“The screening tool is undergoing a validation process ahead of information being shared with the custodial staff across youth and adult facilities.”

Director General Kylie Maj states that, “the Department is committed to identifying prisoners in custody for cognitive or intellectual impairments and enhancing their management, including participation in rehabilitation programs.”

The Criminal Law (Mental Impairment) Act 2023 that came into effect on 1 September runs along with the stated efforts of the Department’s commitment to protect the human rights of people with mental disabilities in the justice system.

The Department’s Corrective Services has launched a training program for staff that includes “raising awareness and providing them with the skills, knowledge and tools to manage and respond to this cohort in a sensitive manner,” Corrective Services Commissioner Brad Royce said.

Intellectual disabilities were found to be particularly prevalent in Western Australia’s youth custodial estate. The Department is collaborating with the Youth Detention State Forensic Mental Health Services to improve screening and assessment procedures for young offenders through a culturally appropriate screening program.



TAS

Changes planned for Youth Detention

The Tasmanian Government has announced its intention to change its plans for the future of youth detention in Tasmania, but details are yet to be confirmed.

The recent Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings heard evidence of widespread abuse and harm at Ashley Youth Detention Centre, prompting the then-Premier Peter Gutwein to announce plans for its closure.

The Government had intended to replace the youth prison with five separate facilities across the state, including another detention centre in the south, two facilities for children on bail, and two supported residential facilities. However, since the proposed closure of Ashley was announced in 2021, there has been limited detail provided to the public about the development of the planned facilities.

Despite these plans, the Minister for Children and Youth Roger Jaensch has recently indicated a potential shift in youth justice policy. At a budget estimates hearing in early October, the Minister said the Government may instead focus on strengthening existing community-based supports for children rather than building new facilities.

While community services in Tasmania have cautiously welcomed this shift, they have stressed the need for urgent increases to current funding to provide children the support they need, highlighting the high level of unmet need for services – particularly housing – impacting young people’s wellbeing and involvement in the criminal legal system. Community leaders and experts also remain concerned about the safety of children who are currently detained at Ashley and have continued to call for expanded services to support their needs.



VIC

Commitment to reduce cost of phone calls announced by Victorian Government

The Victorian government recently provided a strongly worded commitment to reduce the costs of phone calls in prisons. The commitment is part of the Inquiry into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems: Yoorrook for Justice Victorian Government Implementation Progress Report. The report is part of the government’s response to recommendations from the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the first formal truth-telling process into injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria.

The relevant section under ‘Reforming the Criminal Justice System’ reads:

Recommendation 42 calls for government to ensure people in prison and youth justice centres, including Aboriginal people, can make telephone calls for free or at no greater cost than the general community. In response to this recommendation, government will subsidise phone calls in the short term for people in prison so they can better connect with their loved ones. Longer-term solutions are also being explored through negotiations with commercial providers of prison telephone services. A free call allowance is already available in Youth Justice centres.

At this stage, About Time has no further information about how or when the government will start subsidising phone calls.

Nicola Gobbo (Lawyer X) sues Victoria Police

Between 2005 and 2010, Nicola Gobbo represented various individuals from Melbourne's underworld, including Carl Williams and Tony Mokbel. She was also an informer for Victoria Police, providing the police with information about her current, and previous clients. Notwithstanding Ms Gobbo's breach of her professional obligations, a royal commission investigated Victoria Police's conduct and found that 1011 convictions or findings of guilt may have been impacted by Ms Gobbo's use as a human source.

Ms Gobbo has now sued the Victorian Government for damages to her health and career due to the Victorian Police using her as a police informer, and revealing her identity as Lawyer X. Ms Gobbo's team claims that the Police groomed her and used their position of power to exploit Ms Gobbo's vulnerabilities.

Ms Gobbo's trial began on 1 October 2024 and she has given evidence that she has developed PTSD having to live in isolation for the last six years, with Victoria Police threatening to take her children from her custody. The trial is ongoing.



ACT

Gathering on Youth Justice calls for Reform

This month saw 120 representatives gather in Canberra to urge governments to prioritise youth justice reform. The event was co-hosted by the National Children's Commissioner, Anne Hollands, and the Justice Reform Initiative. This event follows the release earlier this year of the Commissioner’s report, 'Help way earlier!' How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing, which emphasises the urgent need to move away from punitive and ill-effective approaches to youth justice and instead prioritise approaches based on children’s rights and evidence.

The Commissioner has described the treatment of 10-year-olds in Australia’s justice system as one of the most urgent human rights issues facing Australia.

As reported by the National Indigenous Times, the Justice Reform Initiative chair Robert Tickner said Australia was failing its children with its approach to youth justice and that the Commissioner's report makes clear the Commonwealth needs to "step up and show national leadership".

"Too many children around Australia are managed in prisons, rather than receiving the support and care and opportunity they need in the community," Mr Tickner said.



QLD

New scanner technology could mean the end of strip searches for contraband for female prisoners

Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre is the first in Queensland to trial newly-implemented body scanning technology that can detect contrabands without requiring female prisoners to remove their clothing.

The scanner is roughly the same size as airport security and can detect weapons, drugs and mobiles.

This means a possible end to invasive and traumatic searches of vulnerable female prisoners, with better results than traditional strip searches.

This came after a report on the traumatising experiences girls and women had with invasive strip searches in the criminal justice system.

Queensland Corrective Services Commissioner Paul Stewart APM believes that the introduction of non-invasive screening technology will provide better support for all officers and prisoners involved.

“[Queensland Corrective Services] has a zero-tolerance for contraband entering our correctional centres,” Stewart said.

“The trial of the technology remains consistent with the recommendations of the Women’s Safety and Justice Taskforce final report, ...focusing on the introduction of non-invasive screening technology and ending the practice of removing clothing searches for women prisoners.”

Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre will trial the x-ray body scanner technology for three months on women, and an evaluation report will be produced to facilitate its rollout to other centres.



NT

NT to Lower Age of Criminal Responsibility to 10

The newly elected Country Liberal Party have begun to implement their law-and-order agenda, with the government officially introducing legislation to lower the age of criminal responsibility to 10 this October. The move comes as the government begins a series of sweeping crime-focussed reforms including introducing breach of bail as an offence for children, expanding the presumption against bail to include more offences, and introducing tougher penalties for certain crimes, including mandatory sentencing for assaults against emergency workers.
Critics have voiced concerns about the impact of these changes, noting the limited evidence that such tough-on-crime approaches actually work to address root causes of crime.

As reported by the Guardian, the National Children’s Commissioner, Anne Hollonds, has criticised in particular moves to lower the age of criminal responsibility:

“We all want to live in safe communities, but this plan by the NT government goes against what all the evidence has shown we need to do to achieve that”

“The younger a child comes into contact with the criminal justice system, the more likely they will go on to commit more serious and violent crimes. “Lowering the age of criminal responsibility to 10 years will not make communities safer, it will only see rates of child offending increase. These are primary school age children, and harsh, punitive responses are not the answer.”



SA

Proposed Changes to Sentencing Act

The state government will vote on amendments to South Australia's Sentencing Act 2017 after concerns were raised about Victim Impact Statements. The Commissioner for Victim Rights and victims’ advocates have told the government that victims are too often being denied the opportunity to present a Victim Impact Statement in court, causing significant distress. Commissioner for Victims’ Rights Sarah Quick highlighted the importance of victim impact statements, stating that “having the opportunity to explain the harm in their own words can help victims regain some sense of power and control.”

Currently, the Act states that a victim may give a statement if they have experienced an injury, loss or damage related to an “indictable offence”. This condition has meant that if the defendant is charged with an offence that does not have a causative link to the injury, loss or damage – for instance being charged with driving without due care rather than dangerous driving causing death or serious injury – the victim is unable to present their statement.

The amendment to the Act will include a new clause, which "allows a person, who has suffered injury, loss or damage, from that death or injury, to provide a written personal statement", which removes the requirement for a causative link with the indictable offence.

The Commissioner welcomed the reforms, stating that they “demonstrate the importance of victim’s rights to be heard during the sentencing process.”



NSW

Domestic Violence offenders subject to Electronic Monitoring

A 45-year-old corrective services officer has become the first person in NSW to be subjected to electronic monitoring under new tough bail laws announced in May.

The new laws would target people charged with serious domestic violence offences.

Alleged perpetrators will wear ankle bracelets and have their movement tracked.

In addition to being monitored electronically, the new laws also propose that the presumption of bail would be reversed, meaning someone charged with domestic violence must show cause as to why they should not be detained.

The alleged perpetrator, who worked at a prison in western NSW, faced a local court on Friday for five charges of sexual intercourse without consent and one charge of aggravated sexual assault.

All six charges were alleged to be acts of domestic violence.

He is also not allowed within 500 kilometres of the alleged victim’s regional town, except for specific court proceedings.

Heads up for the Next Editions!

Dear About Time readers,

Thank you for all of your support and interest in the paper since we launched in July. The response has been overwhelming.

We’ve adapted and responded to your feedback each edition, and we will continue to do so.

Next month we will be releasing a **special extended Christmas edition** of the paper. It will come out around a **week before Christmas**, instead of the usual time of early in the month. We'll then be taking a break in January and return for a new and improved version of the paper in February next year.

We hope to hear from you as regularly as possible.

All the best,

The About Time team

● Experiences

Higher Education and Reducing Recidivism

By H.E.A.L

Higher Education Advocacy and Leadership (H.E.A.L) are a self-appointed delegation of people in prison originating from Goulburn Correctional Centre.

Continued from page 1.

In the years since we have been incarcerated, housed here at Goulburn Correctional Facility for two of those years, we have had little to no opportunity to rehabilitate ourselves into better people through the medium of further education.

During our interactions with numerous inmates these past 24 months, we have learned that we are not alone in the pursuit to rehabilitate through the medium of education. There is a high interest among sentenced inmates to further educate themselves, and many have expressed that they would, if they could, undertake 'External Tertiary studies' to not only better themselves, but also benefit the community upon release by finding adequate employment. Again, this would reduce the risk of recidivism.

After we and other inmates wrote to Southern Cross University (provider for 'External Tertiary' courses in NSW, QLD, WA, and VIC) we learned that they are more than willing and able to operate throughout various prisons in NSW alongside University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ), Curtin University, and University of South Australia (UniSA) via a CSNSW security checked 'white listed website' or even through a secure digital portal which could be made available to inmates on their In Cell-Tablets. During this research period we also discovered further 'paper based' correspondence options via University of Southern Queensland and Curtin University which are currently not being offered to inmates in NSW. We would like to make note here that the cost of these courses provided by Southern Cross University, etc. will not affect in any way, shape, or form, the allocated annual budget, as prisoners are also entitled to university study on a Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and Higher Education Loan Program (HELP), nor increase the workload of the Centre's staff beyond enrolment.

It is of our understanding that Goulburn Correctional Facility, and NSW more to the point, has not yet a structural system in place to provide sentenced inmates the possibility of participating in higher education, and we completely comprehend ideas like this may at first seem a risk and/or logistically difficult, but given patience, perseverance, time, trust, along with a collaborative effort between Corrective Services NSW and inmates, it is highly probable that a Higher Educational infrastructure, like the one we are proposing may not only be established, but successful (as data suggests).

According to Prison Education Regional Manager Fiona McGregor, who has over 30 years experience in education (20+ in prison education), originally as a secondary school English teacher and then prison educator, manager, government advisor, consultant inspector and researcher, specialising in prisoner education in UK and Australian prisons: “Our research is telling us that the longer you continue in education and the higher the level of education you engage in, the risk of re-offending is dramatically reduced."

The 2021 Bureau of Crime statistics and research study found prisoners in traineeship programs and education were significantly less likely to reoffend after they had left jail and 16% less likely to be convicted of another crime.

Professor Penny Bourke from the University of Newcastle who has recently been appointed Chair of UNESCO stated: "I could see how life-changing higher education can be for people when they have access to it and they can participate in a really active way. We need to make it easier for people, especially from diverse backgrounds and circumstances, to access higher education."

Education in prison is about giving people the tools not to reoffend. Studies have shown recidivism in NSW is at an all-time high. We at H.E.A.L believe that by establishing a structural pathway to higher education such as 'External Tertiary study' via correspondence, either by a student portal which can be readily made available on inmate tablets as an approved browser site, or alternatively, mail exchange with educational providers, will greatly benefit the community, and inmates collectively. We hope that we can work together to make this proposal an opportunistic possibility to collectively reduce the high risk of recidivism into the future.

It’s even in the CSNSW Inmate Hand Booklet at page 44: If the courses available at the Correctional Centre do not meet your needs, inmates can participate in tertiary distance education.



‘Courses’ by Tony, acrylic on canvas, available for purchase at Boom Gate Gallery

If you support this proposal, we suggest you respectfully talk to the education staff at the Centre where you are currently housed to see what options you have for higher education.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this proposal. We look forward to your support and, hopefully hearing your thoughts on this subject matter.

Kind regards
H.E.A.L



Kicking the Can Down the Road: Let Us Help Ourselves

By Stacey Stokes

Stacey Stokes is a transgender woman 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's advisory panel. Stacey runs the T4T support group and writes a Substack, Stacey Stokes. Stacey is also a member of FIGJAM.



'Hybrid Tea Rose' by Tom, 1996, acrylic on canvas, Boom Gate Gallery

I went to jail because I was a rubbish person. Having been released from jail and now rejoining society, I have realised I will never again be allowed to walk in the light with the rest of the angels.

I haven’t hurt anyone in a long time. But once, I did. And that's what matters. Those who understand me now are other criminals. Others who walk in the darkness with me. They get that I messed up and I’m so sorry. We all are. But society will view us with suspicion forever. It leaves a mark on our psyche. We don’t feel comfortable around you, because you expect us to rob you. Or disappoint you. Or let you down. You can’t trust us... we see it in your eyes.

Remanding a child in custody is not going to fix their behaviour. It's going to cement it. They will walk into the darkness with the rest of us who are cast aside. The only ones they can now relate to and feel comfortable with will be other criminals.

We aren't evil. We are just broken people. But when we are fixed, it counts for nothing. You hate the things we did. So, we are given no place in society.

Rehabilitation is pointless without forgiveness and another chance at doing right. Have you ever stopped to think, maybe some people are now committing crimes because we’re kicked out of society? When you’re not welcome in the light, well, you only have the darkness to make you feel like you belong somewhere. A place you’re not alone.

People need to belong. But people don't want us in the community. So, killers, rapists and drug dealers are forced to hang out together. Then, the naughty children, who go to jail, will be hanging out with them too. They don’t relate to society anymore. They are a part of our world now. Our culture.

The kids are troubled. So, society uses control to force them to act in a manner that is socially acceptable. This does not address why they are troubled. But they are taught that ‘might makes right’. They will remember that lesson.

In prison I saw so many people who acted like angry children. Something horrible happened in their lives and they just never emotionally developed past that point. They are still angry little kids.

Society had a chance to help them when they were 12. But it didn’t. Now they are older and have killed a person. And everyone says how horrible they are. Well, society put off helping these kids and invested instead in their criminal future.

Society left these kids behind. It put a gun to their heads and told them to be good ‘or else’.

Have you been to jail? I doubt it. You can’t conceptualise it. You don’t understand what the ‘or else’ is.

Jail is another world. A world that the longer you’re in, the more you belong. To a lot of people, it’s now home. It’s their world. Their friends are there. Their only friends. Because they have no other friends left.

So, when a kid is sent to jail, you teach them that the prison world is not so bad. And now the only friends they have are other naughty kids that will grow up to be meth dealers and enforcers.

Kids can’t vote, smoke or drink. But they can be taken from all their loved ones and locked up in a strange place with strange people and held prisoner. Because that’s not traumatic at all. I really just think it’s a massive example of where our society is.

We failed them. It’s our fault.

My suggestion is to try as hard as possible to help these kids. Then try harder. The future rides on it.

When I was a kid, a court ordered me to go into counselling because of my behaviour. How do you say, “I’m being abused and bullied, and I think I’m supposed to be a girl,” to a person who looks like a teacher at school, or one of your parent’s friends. My deepest darkest secrets I can’t share with any other human, but I will tell a random white lady... are you serious?

And that’s it. They tried. And gave up. Then I went to jail for 10 years.

I think though, that I would have opened up to a person who had been through it. When I was in jail, one of the biggest things we hated was when a nice-looking lady in her twenties fresh from uni tried to ‘help’ us. No thanks. We walk in the darkness now. We wanted someone who was once a user to tell us how he crawled out of the darkness back into the light.

When you are in the darkness, you want a person who has tasted their own blood. The pain of addiction. They know. We respect them.

This person is not going to judge me. Even as a little kid, I felt like that. But unfortunately, a person like this still has no place in polite society. He probably went to jail when he was 12 too. I bet I know him.

(*Please understand, I blame me for going to jail. I failed me. I failed my family*)



FORMERLY INCARCERATED JUSTICE ADVOCATES

We are a group of women, trans and gender diverse folk who have been incarcerated. We engage in paid research, consultancy, and policy reform. If you have something to say or just want to listen and feel part of FIGJAM, reach out!

Write to us at:
FIGJAM, Flat Out Level 2, 210 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3001

Bodies in Cages: Trans Experiences of Prison



Bojan Bozic for Enqueer festival

An extract from this year's EnQueer Sydney Queer Writers Festival panel

By Sam Elkin, Necho Brocchi and Stacey Stokes

Sam Elkin is an author and community lawyer, Stacey Stokes is a formerly incarcerated trans woman and Necho Brocchi is the manager of Open Doors Youth Service (QLD).

Sex segregation in prison has long posed a problem for people whose bodies and identities do not fit easily within the gender binary.

At this year's EnQueer Sydney Queer Writers Festival, author and community lawyer Sam Elkin joined formerly incarcerated trans woman Stacey Stokes and proud trans woman and manager of Open Doors Youth Service (Qld) Necho Brocchi on stage at Qtopia Sydney for an intimate discussion about trans incarceration. This is an edited extract from their discussion on Saturday 5th October 2024.

Sam: Stacey, you wrote a personal essay called 'How I Got Here', for the book Nothing to Hide: Voices of Trans and Gender Diverse Australia. Tell us about that.

Stacey: Yes, it's about my experiences of being repressed and messed up and not dealing with my gender issues, and how that in some ways led me into the prison system. I wrote about going to court and the judge in my case didn't really believe I was trans and just told me I should just cut off all my hair to avoid being bullied. It also goes into the violence and sexual harassment I experienced in prison from both staff and other inmates and my epic battle to receive gender-affirming health care.

Sam: Necho, tell us about your essay 'With Love and Abolition' in When Cops are Criminals?

Necho: I wrote the essay a couple years ago now alongside three people I support who are in prison and their experiences of transphobia and racism. Those three people are strong, and they really wanted their stories out there. When we speak about trans people in prison, we're forced to discuss the question of whether trans women should go to a men's prison or a women's prison, and where non-binary people are meant to go. But the framing of that question always pits people against each other, and it fails to see that prisons and policing itself are the real problems.

Sam: Necho, I was moved by the fact that even though you've had your own difficult experiences with police and the courts, you've moved into a role where you regularly interact with the criminal justice system. How does it feel still working in that space?

Necho: I'm not a criminalised person, but I did have to go to court when I was using ice for possession and carrying utensils. So now I realise these were relatively minor charges, but as a 20-year-old who had to wait six months to go to court, I was both scared and scarred by the process. On the first day of going into a women's maximum-security prison in Queensland, I saw someone that I'd grown up with who had been one of my close friends. So yeah, it was hard and was triggering but it was also a great, meaningful job too.

Sam: Stacey, you've been a reader and writer for various prison newspapers and newsletters, tell us about them and what they meant to you when you were inside.

Stacey: There's Inside Out magazine, which is a LGBTIQA+ plus magazine which is in prisons, and Paper Chained which is a creative outlet for incarcerated people. I wrote for 'The Incarceration Issue' of Archer Magazine as well.

It's so important to have a place for people to write about how they feel, but also so people who aren't in prison can read it. When you are in prison it can feel like you've fallen into a black hole where the truth of the situation can never escape, so it's important to have the ability to speak out.

Sam: Stacey, since you've sort of come out of prison in the last 12 months, you've done some amazing advocacy work. Tell us about that.

Stacey: When I was released, I just started writing on Substack because I wanted the truth of my experiences to be there, so it's like, even if I died tomorrow, it'll still be there. And I got feedback from people who said that they felt better after reading about someone like them, so that meant heaps. I just want to look back on my deathbed and think, I've made some kind of positive difference in the world. That my life had a point.



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

Reintegration

Correction from 'Identification' in last edition:
In the last edition, we explained that the prison can give you a letter to confirm your identity before you get out. The article incorrectly stated that the prison won't be able to help you once you leave. In some cases, especially in Queensland, you can call the prison and ask for this letter once you've left.

Studying After Prison

Considering what you want to do next? Maybe studying is a way to go.

By Community Restorative Centre

Studying after you leave prison may be a good option to help you learn new skills and give you more options and opportunities for employment. Studying can also help keep you motivated after leaving prison.

There are plenty of study options to help you with what you want to do next.

Are you interested in studying at TAFE?

TAFE (Technical and Further Education) is an Australia-wide vocational education system that focuses on providing practical skills and hands-on training and experience in many technical and trade related industries.

If you've finished modules of study with providers like TAFE or a state/territory vocational education provider, like AEVTI, EETS or VTEC-SAwhile in prison, you're already on the way. You can get recognition for the courses you've done, and keep working towards a qualification with TAFE or another training provider. If you didn't get the chance to study in prison, you may have opportunities to get started after you leave.

If you've left prison and want help to decide whether you could study at TAFE, and what you would study, ask to speak to a TAFE counsellor at your local TAFE college. Almost all TAFE colleges have a counsellor, and they're trained to provide counselling to help people make work and study plans. TAFE counsellors also help with personal or learning issues that could be barriers to studying successfully. They can help you get recognition for any of your prison studies,help you choose a course, and find out how to enrol. It's a good idea to take the results of any courses you've done whilst incarcerated when you go to discuss study options at TAFE or other education providers.

Finding a TAFE course

There are many courses available at TAFE, spanning from construction, cybersecurity to counselling and more! No matter what you want to do, it's likely there is a course for you at TAFE. TAFE courses are usually more hands-on than university courses, with less theory and a focus on practical training and experience, and can often be finished quicker than a university degree.

TAFE campuses are usually organised into groups, called institutes. Not all courses or services are available at each campus, so you will need to check what's available at your local TAFE.

Many courses will enrol students only once or twice a year. This means that you may have to wait before you can enrol, depending on your release date. Outreach courses and basic education courses start throughout the year.

If you want to find out more about TAFE courses, or already know the area or course you'd like to study after you're released, you can ask for information from the education centre in your prison. You can also speak to the education centre in your prison if you want to start studying before you're released.

Fees for TAFE courses

Since 2023, the Australian government has funded places in certain areas of training to provide fee-free placements to encourage people to go into these areas. Areas include agriculture, construction, defence, hospitality and tourism, manufacturing and technology and digital. Placements are prioritised for a number of people groups, including First Nations Australians, those 17-24yrs, and those who are out of work or receiving income support payments. You should speak to your prison's education centre about the fee-free TAFE placements available in your state or territory.

Outside the specific free courses, there are a number of ways that TAFE course fees can be reduced or waived. First Nations Australians, those living with disability, apprentices and trainees, and those receiving Centrelink pensions or benefits may be eligible to undertake courses at a reduced or fee-free rate, depending on the course and the state or territory TAFE.

Each state and territory is different and may have free options. For example, in Victoria, there are over 80 free qualifications and short courses in high demand areas. Any Australian citizen, Australian permanent resident or New Zealand citizen living in Victoria can access these. Free TAFE trains for in demand jobs in a variety of areas including construction and labourers, health support workers, community and disability services, agriculture, hospitality and other professional services like bookkeeping and accounting. You can find out more on 131 823 or www.vic.gov.au/free-tafe or ask someone in the prison to help you.

You should keep in mind that many TAFE or other vocational courses need textbooks and equipment, which you may have to buy in addition to paying any course fees. Your local TAFE can help you understand if you need to buy anything for the course you want to do, and if there are options to help you with this. For instance, if you're an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, you should be able to get help through ABSTUDY with buying textbooks and equipment for courses.

Income while you study at TAFE
There are a number of income support options to help you if you study full-time at a TAFE or other vocational provider. Programs through Centrelink include Youth Allowance, which is designed to help those up to 24 years old, Austudy which is for those 25 years or older, and ABSTUDY which is for First Nations Australians. All of these supports have requirements and you should speak with someone to help you understand what will work best for you. If you're already receiving assistance from Centrelink, you should also speak with someone to find out if there is extra help available to you to study.

Help to succeed at TAFE

TAFE offers introductory learning courses that can help you improve your reading, writing and number skills and learn work skills. These can be stepping stones to other TAFE courses, or to the workforce.

To find other local reading and writing courses contact the Reading and Writing Hotline on 1300 655 506.

Outreach courses also provide introductory courses that cover a range of entry level vocational areas. They're usually shorter courses running for about 6 to 10 weeks. For more information, contact the Outreach coordinator at the TAFE institute nearest to you.

Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

TAFE offers services to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to feel comfortable about accessing TAFE courses. You can contact an Aboriginal Coordinator at the TAFE institute nearest to you to ask about support for First Nations students.

Most campuses will have a First Nationsstudent support officer. They can help you with enrollment and support while you do your course. They'll also have information about any other support services that could help you.

Should I tell TAFE staff about being in prison?

You don't have to tell anyone about being in prison unless you choose to. Sometimes TAFE staff will be able to support you better if they do know that you've been in prison, but the decision to tell staff is up to you.

TAFE counsellors provide a confidential service, so if you tell them that you've been in prison they can't share this information with other TAFE staff. Certificates that you've gained in prison may show that you've studied at the specific prison-based program, such as AEVTI, EETS or VTEC-SA. Most people in TAFE or other vocational organisations who see your certificates will not be aware that you got them in prison.

Are you interested in studying at university?

University courses often focus far more on theoretical learning for traditionally academic fields. Many universities have alternative entry options these days, especially for mature aged students (often considered anyone over 21 years). These can include special or bridging study programs and special schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or other specific cohorts of people.

Local libraries will generally have publications such as the UAC (Universities Admission Centre) Guide, Good Universities Guide or Job Guide with information about university courses which you can look through to decide if university study is right for you. Fees for university are generally much higher than for TAFE, and students often use government loan schemes to pay for them. University courses also often take years to complete, though some may offer the ability to graduate with different levels of qualifications, such as a certificate or diploma, if you're unable or don't want to complete the full degree.

TAFE qualifications at Certificate 4 level or higher can sometimes count towards the first stage of a university degree. You can contact the Universities Admission Centre on (02) 9752 0200 or www.uac.edu.au for more information about university and about counting TAFE study towards a university degree.

● Learn

How to Write: Lifestyle Stories



Prison Journalism Project

From Prison Journalism Project (USA)

A non-profit, non-partisan national organisation that aims to empower incarcerated journalists to be a vital voice in criminal justice reform.

What is a lifestyle story?

Lifestyle stories might cover fashion, fitness fads, relationship tips, science and technology, entertainment, cooking and food, home design and gardening.

Stories in this category are newsworthy for at least two reasons: first, they inform readers of a novelty or oddity. What are the weird and wonderful things people are doing right now?

Second, lifestyle stories have the potential to impact readers' daily lives. How might readers adopt these trends, tips or advice to enhance their day-to-day experiences?

Writing a lifestyle story for incarcerated people can help share ideas for better living inside.

About Time is also available for readers in the community, so lifestyle stories are interesting to those who may be unfamiliar with or curious about the daily lives of incarcerated people.

How do you write a lifestyle story?

1. Start with an observation. Have you noticed people around you doing or talking about something interesting or new, for example is there a new program or food in the prison? Or have you or others started doing something new to get through the day, such as playing a new card game?
2. Take detailed notes. It's important to be specific. Include vivid details. Who is doing it? When did it start? How did it get bigger?
3. Do some digging. Interview people who are doing it. Do research to find out more about its origins and how it may or may not be good/useful.
4. Show, don't tell. Your audience may not be familiar with what you're describing. Be sure to include little stories and/or direct quotes to make the story come alive for your reader. Define any prison-specific language, concepts, places or objects for readers on the outside.

SOME PROMPTS:

Joy:

Prison is a dark place. But, in spite of the brutality, light sometimes finds its way inside. Tell us how people cultivate joy behind the walls. Write a list. Ask five people about what they do for fun in prison. What brings a smile to their faces? Record their answers, write up a short introduction, and submit your list to About Time.

Prison recipes:

Much of prison life revolves around ways to avoid eating prison food.

Send a recipe for meals, snacks and desserts that you make inside prison and tell us a story about them.

This might be about how you came to create this recipe or memories of the dish outside that you were trying to replicate. Or it could be about an occasion that you enjoyed this dish. If you are an artist, include an illustration of the dish or a scene showing an occasion where it was served.

Or:

Compile a top-10 list of your peers' favorite meals to eat inside.

Pros and cons:

Write about the pros and cons of an item, an educational/rehabilitative program, or another aspect of prison.

Start with an introduction that explains how your topic of choice is relevant to you and other incarcerated people. Follow that with three points that are good about it, and three points that are bad. Incorporate personal stories.

Sports:

Write a feature story about the sports culture at your institution. What sports are played? Are there organised competitions? What kind of attention do they attract? What are the athletes' different relationships to each other and to the various sports? What's something about sports on the inside that might surprise people on the outside? Interview athletes and spectators about the culture of sports in your prison, and write a story that includes scenes from games and quotations.

● 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.

Critical Thinking & The Art of Persuasion

Assessing reasoning to improve persuasion and decision-making in life (and prison)!

By Daniel Vansetten

Daniel Vansetten spent almost 12 years in prison and has since gone on to study for a law degree. During imprisonment, he developed a peer-led program to teach people in prison the art of critical thinking and why effective reasoning skills are important for the best outcomes in prison.

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is a kind of thinking in which you question what others tell you, what you read, hear or see. You can use critical thinking to analyse what someone is trying to get you to do, and whether you should do it or not based on what they're telling you. It's about being aware that you're being persuaded to think or act in certain ways based on the argument the other is making.

For example, if someone asks you to give them some money, you will instinctively ask or think 'why?' If they cannot give you a good reason, you are unlikely to give them money regardless of the amount of money you may have.

How to persuade: The importance of making a strong argument

Critical thinking skills can help you persuade others to think or act in a certain way. Attempting to persuade someone is called 'making an argument'. An argument consists of reasons leading to a conclusion. Reason 1 + Reason 2 –> Conclusion.

Arguments are everywhere!

Arguments can be formal or casual. Formal arguments in prison may include making an application to be transferred to a low security prison or an application to have a privilege reinstated that was taken from you. Informal and verbal arguments however, are indeed everywhere. Asking a person for help with a task and saying why they should help is an example of making an argument. Another example is Person A proposing that Person B should lend a packet of noodles. Person A should think carefully about the reasons they are going to put forward before asking!

So, how do I make a good argument?

Let's work on an example: an application for parole. A person applying for parole is arguing that they are suitable for parole. The conclusion of the argument will be: 'I deserve parole'. This conclusion must be supported by reasons. Some examples of reasons include: I have shown appropriate behavior during my imprisonment, or I have employment when released. Let's now look at steps involved using critical thinking.

Analyse the strength of an argument using critical thinking skills

Critical thinking includes breaking down the argument into logical steps. This may seem long-winded, but it will help you make your arguments stronger.

1. Understand what you need to convince the other person. This is developing an alternate perspective.
2. Break down the argument to list the conclusion and all the reasons supporting the conclusion (see table below, Argument #1).
3. Test the logic of the argument by asking, if all the reasons were true, would the conclusion be true also? This is also called the validity of an argument.
4. Check for soundness – i.e., is there evidence to support the reasons? Sound arguments are the most persuasive.

I'll now apply these steps to a hypothetical (and simplified) parole application. (Please note, a real parole application is much more complex than this demonstration.)

Step 1: Develop an alternate perspective

In this example, we're trying to convince the Parole Board to grant parole. Therefore, I must understand what the Parole Board wants to see and hear to be able to grant parole. This is crucial to understand how to frame and present your argument. This may require some investigating, such as speaking to other people who have been granted parole or had their parole application rejected, speaking to a case manager, or writing to the Parole Board.

For the sake of this simplified example, let's say you've found out the Parole Board requires just three things to gain parole:

1. appropriate behaviour in prison,
2. employment upon release, and
3. appropriate accommodation upon release.

I therefore must try to satisfy these three things in the argument for a successful application for parole.

Step 2: Break down the argument

List the conclusion and reasons. This helps to make all the propositions in the argument clear. This argument can be set out in a table as follows:

Argument #1: I deserve parole

Part of argument	Proposition
Reason (1)	I have shown appropriate behaviour.
Reason (2)	I have employment upon release.
Reason (3)	I have appropriate accommodation for release.
Conclusion	**I deserve parole.**

Step 3: Test the validity of the argument

Next step is checking for 'validity'. Validity is not about if the reasons are true or not, rather it is assessing whether the conclusion would be true if the reasons were true.

Let's work through another example. In Argument #2, I'll replace Reason (1) – I have been of appropriate behaviour, with the reason: I am good at sport. The argument now looks like this:

Argument #2: I deserve parole

Part of argument	Proposition
Reason (1)	I am good at sport.
Reason (2)	I have employment upon release.
Reason (3)	I have appropriate accommodation for release.
Conclusion	**I deserve parole.**

I already know that there are three specific requirements for parole. However, Argument #2 does not address the first of these requirements: appropriate behaviour. Furthermore, being good at sport does not add any value to the argument (because the parole board does not care if I'm good or bad at sport). So, I can see that the argument would fail, even if I could prove that I am indeed VERY good at sport! To make it valid, I would need to reconstruct the argument to make sure it includes reasoning relating to my behaviour. For example, I could re-frame 'I am good at sport' into 'I am a team player and have shown good sportsmanship' – this now shows appropriate behaviour. Better still, I could add a reason that specifically refers to appropriate behaviour (as in Argument #1). I can now talk about being good at sport AND appropriate behaviour and it would make the argument valid. Not every reason needs to be exactly what the other person needs to hear, however you need to make sure what they need to hear is included.

Step 4: Check for soundness – evidence showing the truth of the reasons

Sound arguments are the same as valid arguments but also include evidence to show that the reasons are true. For example, I could prove Reason 2 ('employment upon release') by providing a letter from my potential employer. I could prove Reason 3 ('I have appropriate accommodation'),by providing a letter from the prospective landlord.

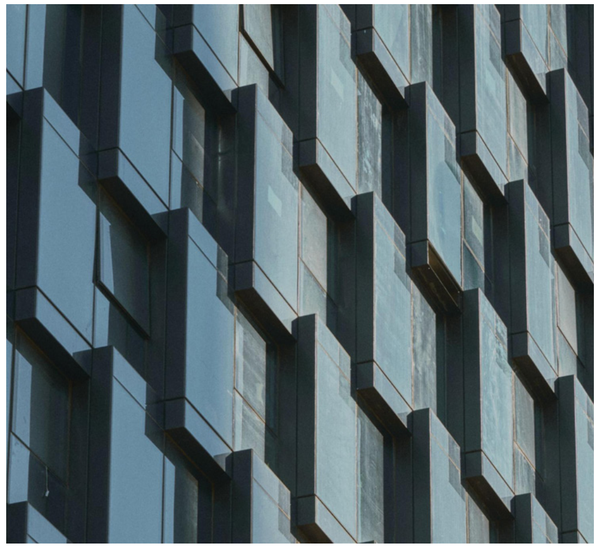
So, have a go!

Writing arguments out helps to clearly identify the conclusion and reasons and assists in analysing the argument's strength. Complex arguments can often be improved by taking time to assess and then improve the reasoning. Additionally, developing an alternate perspective can be crucial to making your arguments stronger.

Give it a go! Try analysing and improving some of your own arguments using the steps above.

● Legal Corner

Freedom of Information (Part Two): Review Options



Willy Pleasance

By Daniel Vansetten

Daniel Vansetten spent around 12 years in prison and has since gone on to study a Bachelor of Laws at university. He is a lived experience advocate for the rights of people in prison.

This is the second part of a two-part series on Freedom of Information (or Right to Information) laws. This part discusses 'review processes' – that is, what can be done if you are unhappy with the FOI decision, particularly if you were refused information and you think this was incorrect.

The order of events for an FOI application and review(s) are:

1. Make an application.
2. Receive a decision.
3. If unhappy with the decision, or if no decision is provided within the required time, make an application for first review.
4. Receive outcome of first review.
5. If unhappy with the decision of the first review, or no decision was provided within the required time, make and application for External Review.

We will now go through each step.

1. Making an application:

This was covered in edition four of About Time. If you missed it, try and source it at your location!

2. Receiving a decision:

Once the first application is made, you should receive a decision by letter. The decision may be either (i) to release information, (ii) refuse to release information, or (iii) partially refuse to release information. Reasons for a refusal to release information will also be in the letter. The letter should also include information about your review rights.

The decision must be made around 25-45 days after your application is received, depending on your jurisdiction (see table below). FOI applications across the country face backlogs and are often delayed. Unless you are notified of an extension of time, the legal timeframe must be followed. A failure to deal with your application within the set time (and without them asking for an extension) is considered a refusal to provide the information. However, don't forget to allow for mailing time when working out time frames.

State/ Territory	Decision must be made by agency	Application for first review	Application for external review
ACT	Within 30 days after application received	Write within 20 working days of decision: ACT Ombudsman GPO Box 442 Canberra ACT 2601	Application made within 20 working days of Ombudsman decision on first review: ACAT (Civil and Administrative Tribunal) GPO Box 370 Canberra ACT 2601
VIC	Within 30 days after application received	Write within 28 days of decision: Office of Victorian Information Commissioner PO Box 24274 Melbourne VIC 3001 (Include a copy of the decision)	Application made within 60 days of notice of outcome of first review: Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal GPO Box 5408 Melbourne VIC 3001
NSW	No time under PPIP Act.	Write to: NSW Privacy Commissioner GPO Box 7011 Sydney NSW 2001	Contact NCAT for time restrictions. NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal PO Box K1026 Haymarket 1240
QLD	Within 25 business days after application received	Write within 20 business days of decision: Corrective Services GPO Box 1054 Brisbane QLD 4001	Write within 20 business days of outcome to first review (or, if no response to first application for review, within 40 days of that application): Office of the Information Commissioner PO Box 10143 Adelaide Street Brisbane Queensland 4000
SA	Within 30 days after application received	Write within 30 days of decision: Freedom of Information Correctional Services GPO Box 1747 Adelaide SA 5001	Write within 30 days of outcome of first review (or, if no response to first application for review, within 35 days of that application): Ombudsman SA PO Box 3651 Rundle Mall SA 5000
TAS	Within 20 working days after application received	Write within 20 working days of decision: Right to Information Officer Department of Justice GPO Box 825 Hobart TAS 7001	Write within 20 working days of outcome of first review (or, if no response to first application for review, within 35 days of that application): Ombudsman Tasmania GPO Box 960 Hobart TAS 7001

Important to note, all decisions will have some identifying reference, usually found in the top section of the letter. It is important to take note of this reference. It is also important to note the date of the decision. There are strict time limits for seeking reviews, usually 20-30 days, depending on jurisdiction and depending on what stage of review you are at (see table above for details).

My application for information was refused. What can I do?

There are a range of legitimate reasons for an agency to refuse to release information. For example, agencies may refuse to release information that identifies third parties or that may result in operational security risks.

However, agencies can make mistakes and refuse information that should have been released. Furthermore, a failure for the agency to respond to a request for information in the required time frame without an extension is considered a refusal. This is important to understand so that people don't sit in limbo waiting, and that review options are open to you. If you believe an agency has wrongly refused to release information, including by failing to provide you with the information in time, you may challenge the decision by the following steps.

REVIEW PROCESS

First attempt

You must send your request for a review via letter to the relevant Commissioner (see the table for relevant details). Be aware, applications for review must be made within specific time frames. Time limits for applications for reviews are also provided in the table.

Your application for review must state the reference identifying the decision which you want reviewed. You should also provide the name of the agency who provided the decision and do your best to describe the reasons why you disagree with the decision. The process is designed to be accessible to people without legal assistance. A typical letter, for example, may include the following:

> Dear Sir/Madam,
>
> **Re: Application for review**
> I seek a review of a decision on my application for information from Corrections Victoria dated [insert date of decision], reference: [insert decision reference].
>
> I am dissatisfied with that decision because [insert your reasons that you disagree with the decision].

Some jurisdictions charge fees for applications for reviewing a decision. Fee waivers can apply to if you are in financial hardship. If a fee is required and you seek a fee waiver, you should state this in your application. You will not be charged if your application for fee waiver is rejected, however your application may not be processed unless the fee is subsequently paid.

Strict time limits apply for agencies to respond to your application for review. These time limits may vary between jurisdictions, ranging from 14 to 30 days. If the agency does not respond to your request for review within the specific time frame, they are considered to have refused to make any changes to the original decision.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the first review OR you do not get a response from your application for review, you may seek an 'external review'.

Second attempt: external review

The second avenue for review is commonly known as an 'external review' and varies depending on jurisdiction. This is where an 'external' agency or tribunal (depending on the jurisdiction as in the table) looks at the application and makes a different decision.

There are time limits to initiate this process, usually 20 to 30 days, also depending on jurisdiction. If you do not initiate the process within the time limit, your application will likely be rejected. Specific information about time limits for reviews is usually included with the decision letter and is provided in the table.

In Queensland, South Australia, or Tasmania, an external review is initiated by writing a letter to an external reviewing agency, such as the Ombudsman (see table below). You should include the reference number of the decision and the date of outcome (if available) of the first review. You should also provide your reasons for requesting an external review (that is, the issues with the decision with reference to the outcome of the first review).

Victoria, A.C.T. or New South Wales are unique in that the avenue for external review is through the relevant Civil and Administrative Tribunal. This is not to be confused with other jurisdictions who offer tribunal reviews as a third review process, as stated below. Tribunal reviews are administered in a way that is somewhat similar in nature to court matters – that is, through hearings administered by a tribunal member. It is recommended that you contact the relevant tribunal for further information about this process before going down this path of review.

Further avenues for review

Some jurisdictions offer a further avenue for review after the 'external review' stage. For example, South Australia and Queensland offer further reviews through their Civil and Administrative Tribunals. While the table below assists to understand the process up to the external review stage, information on further avenues for review is usually provided with any determination on an external review.

In some cases, disputes over applications for information may be brought before the courts for legal challenges. These challenges are often based on very technical points of law or procedure and usually require legal representation or advice. These avenues are outside the scope of this article.

Like any legal process, maintaining good records of relevant dates and correspondence can assist you in getting the best outcome possible. Further information about making applications for information or the review processes can be obtained from community legal service centres, relevant authorities and by reading legislation relevant to your jurisdiction.

Legal Q&A: DSP After Prison

From Al

Al writes from a prison in NSW.

To About Time staff,

Congratulations on your newspaper. I am writing to the legal corner as I have a concern about the length of the sentence (imprisonment) and the Disability Support Pension eligibility criteria.

Q1. What is the legal sentence period after which an inmate must reapply for the DSP?

NSW prison rumours say under two years and one is automatically reinstated onto the DSP, over two years, and one has to reapply and resubmit all the new paperwork for a new claim for the DSP.

As this issue would affect about 15% of the population, I figure it would be an important question to seek your help with. Thanks.

Regards,
Al

Response from About Time:

Hi Al,

Thank you for the question. While imprisoned, your payments are suspended. You will need to lodge a whole new claim if the payments are suspended for more than two years for DSP or 13 weeks for the Age Pension. If under two years of imprisonment, you do not need to make a whole new claim, but you will need to fill out a 'request for restoration' of the Disability Support Pension form. It does not 'automatically' reinstate. You must fill out the form within seven days of release, if you are not able to lodge the form while in prison. Ask someone to provide it to you to fill it out while you're in prison, in anticipation of your release.

Once released, you can go to www.servicesaustralia.gov.au or visit a service centre. Call 132 717 for Disability Support Pension or 132 300 for Age Pension. If you need to speak with them in your language, call 131 202. Services Australia can also translate documents for free.

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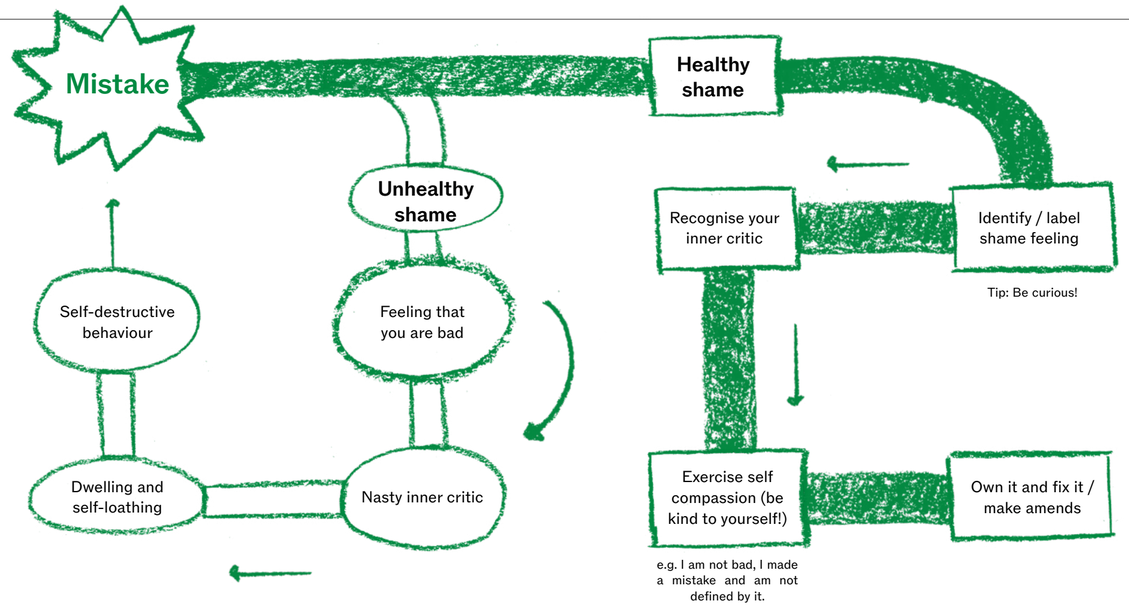
• Health



How To Deal With Shame

We shouldn't be judged solely for the worst thing we have ever done

By Annalise de Groot

The author is a psychologist at PsychOrium Forensic and Clinical Psychology Services.

It is human nature to screw up. It is how we learn, adapt and grow. This does not excuse causing harm to others, but it is an important thing to remember when we think about our mistakes.

Feeling shame for our mistakes can be a motivational force just as much as it can break us. What matters is what we do with it. Shame is there to tell us something, just like any other emotion. The danger is when we allow shame to define us, when we succumb to it and let it convince us that we are "bad". When we own up to whatever it is that created shame, and make amends however we can, we change the way it impacts us.

Before we go any further, I'm going to call out the elephant in the room – I can't comprehend what it feels like to be in custody. Even though I haven't walked in your shoes, I have made plenty of my own mistakes that have hurt people.

We have all experienced our own struggles and made our own poor choices. No one else's experiences can define our own. We are all on our own path, and even if the things that we experience are different, there is a common thread – our humanity.

I believe that there is no such thing as an evil person, just people who have messed up in some way or another and are desperately seeking a way out of their darkness (aka shame). The pathway out of shame involves looking directly at it, and taking charge of what it does to us.

One of the things that drives shame is our inner critical voice. This is the part of us that tells us that we are bad, or that there is something deeply flawed about us. We've all got one. Usually, the inner critic is formed because of the negative experiences we've had in our lives, especially when we are young.

Unfortunately, the inner critic thrives on shame and often will grab onto anything it can to confirm it. We need to learn how to tell the inner critic to back off, and exercise self-compassion instead. We can do this by recognising it and replacing it with kindness towards ourselves.

This is the story of Dave (see accompanying note), who was so horrified by the crime he committed that he stopped himself from interacting with anyone and lived a solitary life. Before Dave was incarcerated, he was taught that people who commit crimes should be harshly punished. As a result, he thought that his offence made him a terrible person. Dave was miserable, lonely and angry. He cut himself off from his family and friends and barely left his house.

Dave's (unhealthy) solution to this was to avoid anything that made him think about his offence, but that meant that whenever he had to talk about it, he would express himself in a way that invited people to judge him harshly. He would say things like "I did years for something horrible...I get it if you want nothing to do with me". Eventually, he began to change this narrative in his own mind. He recognised that what he had done was not ok, and that he had hurt people he cared about, but he learned to be compassionate towards himself for the mistakes he made. Because Dave was working on the things that contributed to his behaviour, and because he wasn't hiding from his shame any more, his shame started to subside.

He was able to stop expecting rejection and start being honest with people he cared about. I remember the day that he told me he had met someone, that she knew about his history and time inside, and accepted him despite his past mistakes.

Dave told me that he was able to explain why he had offended, and because he was able to show her how he had changed himself, she was able to see him for him, and not just his offence. I am sure that none of this would have been possible if Dave had continued to avoid his feelings of shame.

Even though shame can be an all-encompassing feeling of darkness, it is also a way for us to connect with our humanity. Emotions allow us to connect with each other and interact with the world. They drive our behaviour, but the path we drive on is our choice. This graphic illustrates the healthy and unhealthy paths that shame can take.

Dave's story is an amalgamation of client stories. This is to maintain anonymity. Any potentially identifying details have been modified.

• We Need Your Feedback!

Are you and your friends receiving the newspaper every month?
We are distributing the newspaper to every prison, and we have asked your staff to provide the copies to you directly. We want to hear from you:

- Are you being told that the paper is available?
- Are there enough papers going round?
- Have you experienced any issues or difficulties getting your hands on a copy?
- If you only have access to a digital copy, would you also like a physical paper?
- What do you like about the paper? What do you want to see differently?

Please send us a letter to let us know if there are any issues, and we can help fix them. Please ask your friends for their feedback as well, and put that into your letter.



Neck, Shoulder and Back Relax

By The Prison Phoenix Trust

If you're feeling tense or stressed, your neck and shoulders may start to hurt because they're tense too. Use these simple stretches any time you feel tight and uncomfortable or like you could do with an unwind. Breathe slowly and deeply as you practise these movements. Focus on your breathing and the sensations in your body rather than the things that have been bothering you. You may find your worries have quietened down afterwards.

Head tilts

Stay in each position for three slow, deep breaths, mindful of how your neck feels.







Eagle

Press your elbows together in front of you and work on lifting them to shoulder height. Do this for five slow breaths then change sides. Your arms might look like either of the pictures below – both are good if you can feel the stretch across the upper back.



Cow face

Five breaths each side. If your hands can reach each other, that's great. If not, use a sock to connect them.



Back stretch

Find a ledge to rest your hands on and fold over. Keep your neck in line with the rest of your spine. Take five deep breaths.



Shoulder stretch

Clasp your hands behind your back, let your head hang loose and pull your hands far away from your bum. Stay for five slow breaths.



Child

Relax like this for five slow breaths. Put your head on a pillow or rest it on your hands (one fist on top of another) if it doesn't reach the floor.



Floor twist

Open up slowly into this twist. You may not have room to stretch your arms out – just do your best. Stay like this for five slow breaths and then twist out again on the other side.



Rest

Lie like this and focus on your breathing, and the feeling the breath makes as it flows in and out of you. You can count your breaths if you want – up to ten and then start again – or just enjoy the quiet. If your attention wanders away from the breath, just guide it gently back. Stay like this for five minutes, or longer if you want. Let the work you've done help yourself sink in.



Exercises reprinted with permission from *Inside Time*.

LAUREN TYE LEGAL
CRIMINAL DEFENCE LAWYERS

Lauren Tye Legal exclusively practices in criminal law and intervention order matters. LTL is one of the leading criminal law firms in Melbourne.

If you have found yourself remanded or sentenced to a term of imprisonment get in contact with our office ASAP for advice and representation including urgent bail applications and appeals.



Mob

Forgotten Story

By KC

KC writes from Ravenhall C.C., in VIC.

My name is “KC”, and I’ve been a prisoner for 25 years. Every year I have been thinking this is where I belong, but I have started to realise that I don’t belong here. I am a proud Wiradjuri man from Latje Latje land Mildura.

I have a few poems and stories for this paper. I hope you like what you get from me as it’s from my heart and the only way I have learnt to express my emotions. I hope it helps Mob and others by the words they read as this was my only way that I could say my truth, as a proud Aboriginal man. I am also an artist. I do traditional Aboriginal art and love being connected to Culture as it’s my self-worth and gives meaning to my life. When I didn’t know what I was here for or meant to do, an Elder once came in and told me that when you connect to Culture it’s unlike anything you’ve ever known...

KC

I will tell you a Story, a story hidden, left in the dark of most Australians and how our land was taken from us.

How Captain Cook took this land by saying it was (Terra-Nullius), which means a land for the taking as not a living human on it. They claimed out the land and they murdered, raped and massacred our people. Most of our people are still racially vilified and discriminated against to this day and the ancestral trauma that has been passed on through this remains.

They tried to breed us out like we were a disease, like we were not human beings. But we have been here for over 60,000 years – the oldest living culture in the world.

They stopped us from sharing dreaming’s talking, our dreams, or talking about our culture, so we would forget where we came from, or our way of life. ‘Gubber-ment’ made it law. Our people weren’t passed off as living humans until 1967. Yeah, not long ago hey.

We still suffer to this day with racism, treated differently because of our looks and colour of our skin.

We are among one of the only countries in the world to be said to be the First Nations people but not in the constitution.

From all this we have survived from their attempt to get rid of us. We are still ALIVE.

“ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE OUR LAND.”

You cannot hide history and pretend it didn’t happen because it did.

We are fewer than 3% of the Australian population and yet we are 25% of Australians locked up. I believe in 1901 that’s when we became a nation, we were not even in the constitution then and still not, and law was made to take our children and tell where or who we could live with. Before 1967, we were known as and counted as “flora and fauna” and not citizens, jailed for speaking language.

This is a story of truth, resilience and survival... share that story – the one they don’t want to share! Truth telling roar and in my own words as a proud Wiradjuri man: “LOUD AND PROUD.”

KC



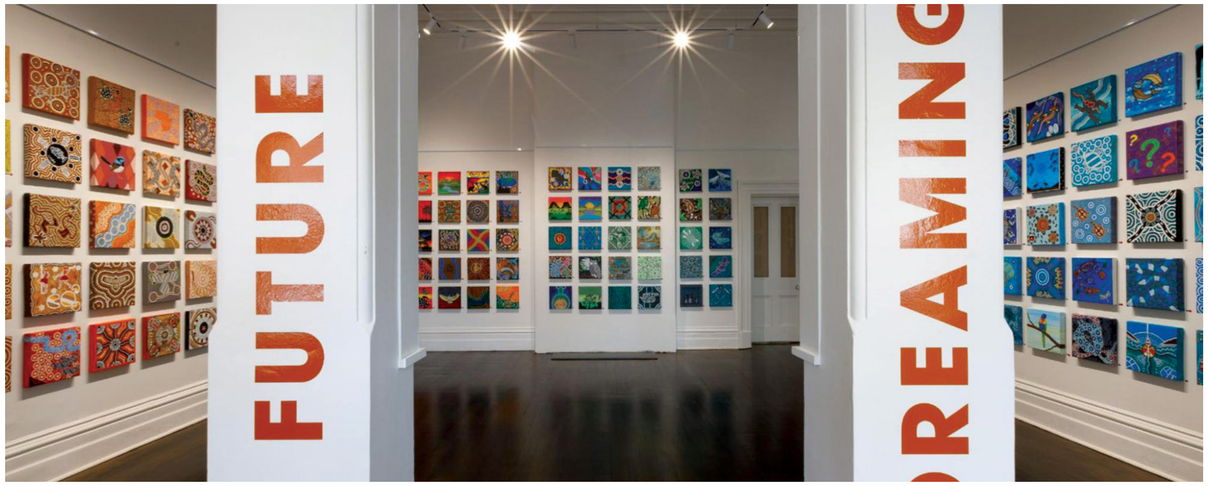
Send Us a Letter

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



Supplied: The Torch

Future Dreaming Exhibition

***Future Dreaming* showcases 250 artworks representing First Nations cultural groups from all across Australia.**

By The Torch

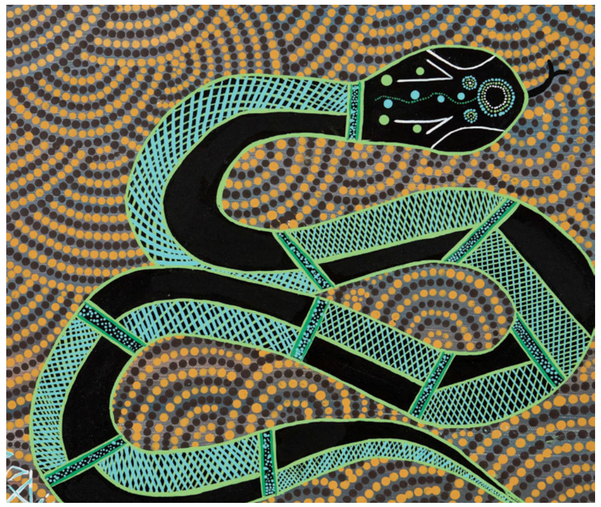
Future Dreaming is an exhibition of 250 artworks created by First Nations artists incarcerated in Victorian prisons in 2024. Each artist has created an artwork that explores their concept of “Future Dreaming.”

Re-entering society after incarceration is a challenging transition, with 50.2% of incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders returning to prison within two years of their release. The latest Closing the Gap report shows that adult incarceration of incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is increasing.

The Torch works with artists to strengthen the cultural, economic, and social connections that help break the cycle of reoffending. Using brushes, paint and canvas, artists participating in *Future Dreaming* explore dreamt and potential pathways ahead of their release. The resulting artworks express their visions and aspirations.

The Torch takes no commission on sales, meaning that 100% of the proceeds of each sale go directly to the artist.

Future Dreaming will be on display in the community from Friday 25th October – Saturday 23rd November at The Torch Gallery in Carlton, Wurundjeri Country (Victoria) and viewable online.



Family Ties
By Ben D
Barkindji
2024

The cross-hatching inside the snake represents me, my partner and our seven children. The dots symbolise our many memories and hardships, hard times throughout our struggles. Now we are one, just like this snake as it moves onto much better times, with no worries, free from imprisonment. Our lives can now move forward as the travelling snake does.



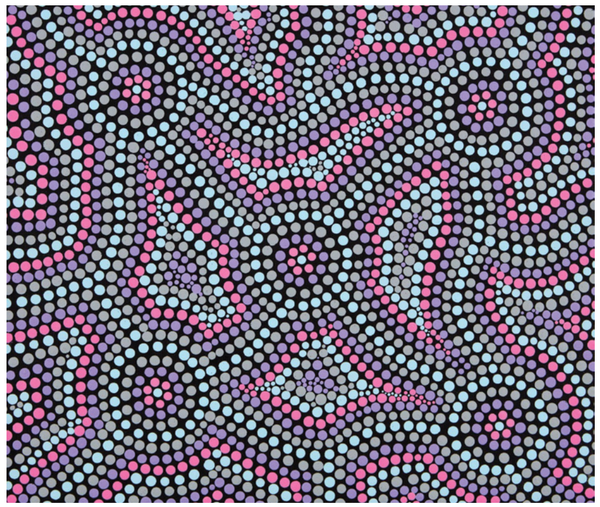
Life's Sun
By B.Charles
Palawa
2024

This painting represents the sun, the sun comes out everyday and makes living that much better. To me it, doesn't matter what you have done in the past. To me, as long as the sun comes up again, you will always have another day to begin bettering yourself, and fixing all the wrongs you have done in the past.



Bora Ground Corroboree
By Brendan H
Gunaikurnai/Kurnai/Gunditjmara
2024

This painting shows how two different people from two different tribes can unite in harmony without conflict. The outer circles represent a Bora Ground (dance circle) for each person. The centre Bora Ground is where they unite to form one corroboree together, to stop conflict. The footprints represent each person who is forming a resolution for Future Dreaming.



Reconnection
By BS
Gunditjmara
2024

This is about going home and reconnecting with my Mob. Walk my path, a free man with my loved ones. The bright colours represent a brighter future.

• Culture

About Time Book Club: Archer's Voice

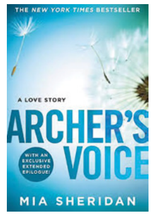
Have you ever thought about starting a book club in prison? It can be a great way to share your thoughts with others. Here are some points to guide you:

How to start a bookclub:

1. Pick a book for everyone to read – see what's available in the library or can be purchased cheaply. About Time can also provide book recommendations that you may like to read as a group. It might be nice to see if any group members have book recommendations too!
2. Plan ahead – make it easy for people. Maybe reading a whole book can be too much. You can choose a certain amount of pages for everyone to read each week. You can also provide people with questions ahead of time to reflect on when reading the book so you can discuss at your next meeting. Some examples of questions include:
   - How thought-provoking did you find the book? Did the book change your opinion about anything, or did you learn something new from it? If so, what?
   - How did the book make you feel? Did it evoke any emotions? Make you laugh, cry, or cringe?
   - How, if at all, did this book relate to your own life? Did it evoke any memories or create any connections for you?
3. Spread the word – let people know when and where the bookclub will be happening! Maybe you could meet once a week? It is a good idea to meet at the same place each week and at the same time.
4. Make it fun and relaxing – pick a calming environment, be inclusive, and have an open minded when reading and discussing the books.

By About Time

This month, we're reading Archer's Voice by Mia Sheridan. Archer's Voice is a New York Times bestselling romance novel. The novel centres on Archer Hale, a reclusive and mute young man with a troubled past, and Bree Prescott, a woman trying to escape her own traumatic history.

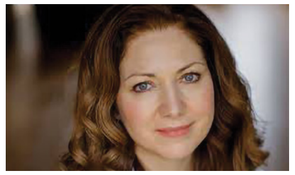


About the book

The book starts when Bree Prescott moves to a small town to escape from the nightmares that have plagued her ever since she and her father became the victims of a brutal crime. She rents a cottage by a picturesque lake and gets a job as a waitress in the local diner, all the while trying to fight off her nightmares. Bree just wants to restart her life – she has no plans to get romantically involved with anyone. But, like all good romances, love comes when you least expect it. That's when she meets Archer, a mute man who has lived a secluded life due to his family's tragic history and the town's prejudice against him.

As Bree gets to know Archer, she discovers that he is nothing like the man others in the town believe him to be. It takes her a while to get past his initial freakishness, but once she does, she finds a strength in him that helps her begin to heal. However, Archer's fear of abandonment is crippling, and Bree fears that he'll never be able to trust anyone or allow himself to feel love again...

The novel beautifully explores themes of healing, acceptance, and the profound connection that can exist between two souls who have suffered but find solace in each other.



ABOUT TIME'S VERY OWN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR, MIA SHERIDAN

1. The novel explores themes of trauma, healing, and love. How did you approach writing about these themes, and what message did you hope to convey through Archer and Bree's journey?

My message, when writing about trauma and healing, is that no matter who you are or what terrible circumstance life has handed you, there is always reason for hope. Hope that you will heal. And hope that regardless of where you are, there IS still life ahead, and joy, and peace.

A few years before I wrote Archer's Voice, I'd suffered a devastating loss and stories – especially love stories – ministered to me in a way nothing else could at the time. They also distracted me when I needed it most, and offered perspectives that helped mend my heart. And the mere idea that I might be able to offer even a small bit of any of that to others in a dark place is my driving force.

2. Do you have a favourite scene or quote from Archer's Voice?

One scene that is especially significant to me is the scene where Archer comes to see Bree at her work at the diner. He walks there with his heart on his sleeve, willing to risk the whispers—and perhaps even scorn—from the townsfolk who have only ever given him a reason to mistrust them. And Bree recognizes that as the great act of bravery it is. May we all have someone in our lives who sees our leaps of faith for what they are. As far as a quote, I think the one that stands out for me is,

"The loudest words are the ones we live,"

just because I've seen it quoted so often (and even a few tattoos!).

3. In what ways do you think creativity and artistic expression serve as a form of escape or coping mechanism for those in prison?

I think to connect to creativity and imagination is to connect to the childlike part of us that is unafraid to dream and wonder, and especially, to hope. Creative expression softens us and helps us reflect – worthwhile work during times when the future is unclear.

I think different creative outlets appeal to different people, but I do believe that stories are for everyone and nothing provides more escape than losing yourself in a good book.

4. Do you think that literature and creativity impacts personal change? If so, how?

Literature helps you walk in the shoes of a thousand people. And that fosters empathy, not only for others, but for yourself. It helps you see the world differently. It can clarify who you want to be in your own story, whether that's through reading the journeys of others, or crafting one yourself.

5. If you could offer advice or encouragement to individuals currently incarcerated who are trying to find solace or purpose through reading and writing, what would it be?

I would speak from personal experience and say that books heal. Stories can move mountains in ways you might not expect. I don't say it lightly, but stories saved my life and moved me through great times of despair. We all tend to think that no other human has felt pain like ours, or made as many mistakes as us, or whatever it might be, but stories quickly dispel those falsehoods. That alone is deeply soul healing.

And if you find strength from books and believe you have your own story to tell like I did, sit down and write it. It doesn't have to be good – first drafts never are. It just has to be yours because no one else on this planet has the exact same story to tell. No one else on earth has your voice. Not one other singular soul.

Please send us your favourite book suggestions and/or reviews! We'll create a vibrant community of literary enthusiasts. Join us on this reading journey!

• Creative

No Regrets

By Alex

Alex writes from MHWP, in Tasmania.

Dear About Time,

My partner and I are both currently locked up down here in Tasmania. Your newspaper has been a huge hit in both the women's and the men's prisons, so I thought I'd send you something from both of us.

Corey painted this sunflower painting for me, which prompted the inspiration for my poem that I've submitted for the upcoming "Artists with Conviction" exhibition. We are both no strangers to the system, having been in prisons across Queensland and NSW (and now Tassie). But we're hoping this will be the last time for us!

Hope you like the painting and the poem. Keep up the awesome prints! We all love and appreciate them down here.

Warm regards,
Alex, MHWP Tasmania

A six-digit number, takes place of your name
The person you were, no longer the same.
Little did you realise the life you once led
Has landed you here, be grateful you're not dead.

Stripped of your freedom, your dignity and pride
Though locked behind bars, you cannot hide.
Your mind pools with regret from all that you've done
The life you once enjoyed, no longer seems fun.

Every day is a struggle just to get out of bed
You plead for forgiveness inside of your head.
But the sooner you grapple with your new reality
The quicker you'll settle and see how good life can be.

For as bad as it is, there's a reason you came
The Universe is screaming – "it's time for you to change!"
See, jail has this way, it shows you what you are
Exposes your demons, your secrets, your scars.

Only in the light can we begin to mend
All the trauma and pain that made our hearts bend.
For we are not broken, nor damaged beyond repair
We just lost our way; all we needed was for someone to care.

It's easy to judge and to say nasty things
But little do we realise the destruction this brings.



By Corey, drawing from a Tasmanian prison

It's hard for us all in here, don't ever forget that
Time to break the cycle, and stop coming back.

Because jail isn't rock bottom, nor the end of the line
It's merely the Universe forcing you to take time.
Time to stop and rethink the choices you make
Show some humility, and get your head straight.

Now that you've read all I have to say
Try to go on and change someone's day.
This place doesn't have to be all doom and gloom
Be kind to each other and watch us all bloom.

Last Letter

Anonymous

The author writes from a Victorian prison. This is the last page of an actual letter they wrote to their spouse.

I'm going to need a shower,
when I get out-
wash this prison off me.
Help me with this, come inside the water with me.
Wash the stink of green off my chest, my back,
my mind.
Wash this filthy, miserable place off me for the last time.
Make me clean.
Wipe the slate,
turn the page,
come into my arms and promise me everything will be ok this time.
Promise me the world-
give me you.
That's all I want,
that's all I ask.
Clean me of this damaged life and make it right.

And I swear I will do whatever it takes to be a better man.

I swear it.

Behind These Eyes

By MULLO

MULLO writes from Ron Barwick Prison in Tasmania.

No one can see the shame and guilt,
Trapped behind these eyes.
As I sit here in a prison cell,
All due to a pack of lies.

Memories that are trapped within,
Deep behind these eyes.
Echoing ever so softly,
Compounding our goodbyes.

To see the love I have within.
Look deep behind these eyes.
For this love I have for you,
Is the kind that never dies.

You may see a broken man,
Hiding behind these eyes.
But from this time in prison,
A better man will arise.

You may see a man of confidence,
As you look behind these eyes.
But in this hell-like place,
Every bit of it's a guise.

Or you may see a man of strength,
As you peek behind these eyes.
As I sit and think of you,
This strong man, he still cries.

Take a look,
Behind these eyes.
It's the window to the soul.
Allowing you to see things that you can't apprise.

For now, I have my thoughts,
Concealed behind these eyes.
Soon I will be home,
I hope you're awaiting my reprise.

So, when I come home to you,
I trust you won't chastise.
I hope you take the time to see,
The man behind these eyes.

My Son

By A.S.

A.S. writes from Goulburn Correctional Centre, in NSW.

One cold and windy night, I laid upon my gaol bed, and as I closed my eyes, I heard a voice that said: "Please don't be afraid, I wish to speak with you, maybe you will listen, to my words that are true."

"Yes, I am a spirit, but do not be alarmed – I come in peace, and I mean you no harm. I know just how you feel and, you're going through hell, and I guess I should know, I died in this cell." "It was so long ago, when I was not so young, leading a life of crime, not caring what I've done. My freedom I did lose and my son I never saw, he grew up without me, from the time he was small."

"But throughout all those years, I hoped he would be free, never would he see gaol, and follow on behind. So many years flew by, I grew older each day, time was drawing near, and death would not delay."

"Now I look down upon you, I remember when I was young, and my eyes – they fill with tears, because you are my son."

• Play

Quiz

1. How many consecutive NRL Grand Finals have Penrith Panthers won?
2. True or False: Cutting steak against the grain makes it tender.
3. How many times has Australia won the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup?
4. What are elephant tusks made of?
5. What two primary colors can be mixed to make purple?
6. What video game character has a brother named Luigi?
7. What is the largest reptile in the world?
8. What year was the moon landing?
9. Which direction does the sun rise?
10. Can you name a country that starts with the letter 'J'?

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. Find the nine letter word.

C	E	R	I	L
R	M	E	W	L
A	T	O	F	U
I	N	R	A	L
W	S	D	E	K

Bad Jokes

Q: What did the judge say when the skunk walked into the courtroom?
A: Odour in the court!

Q: What did the building say to the earthquake?
A: You crack me up!

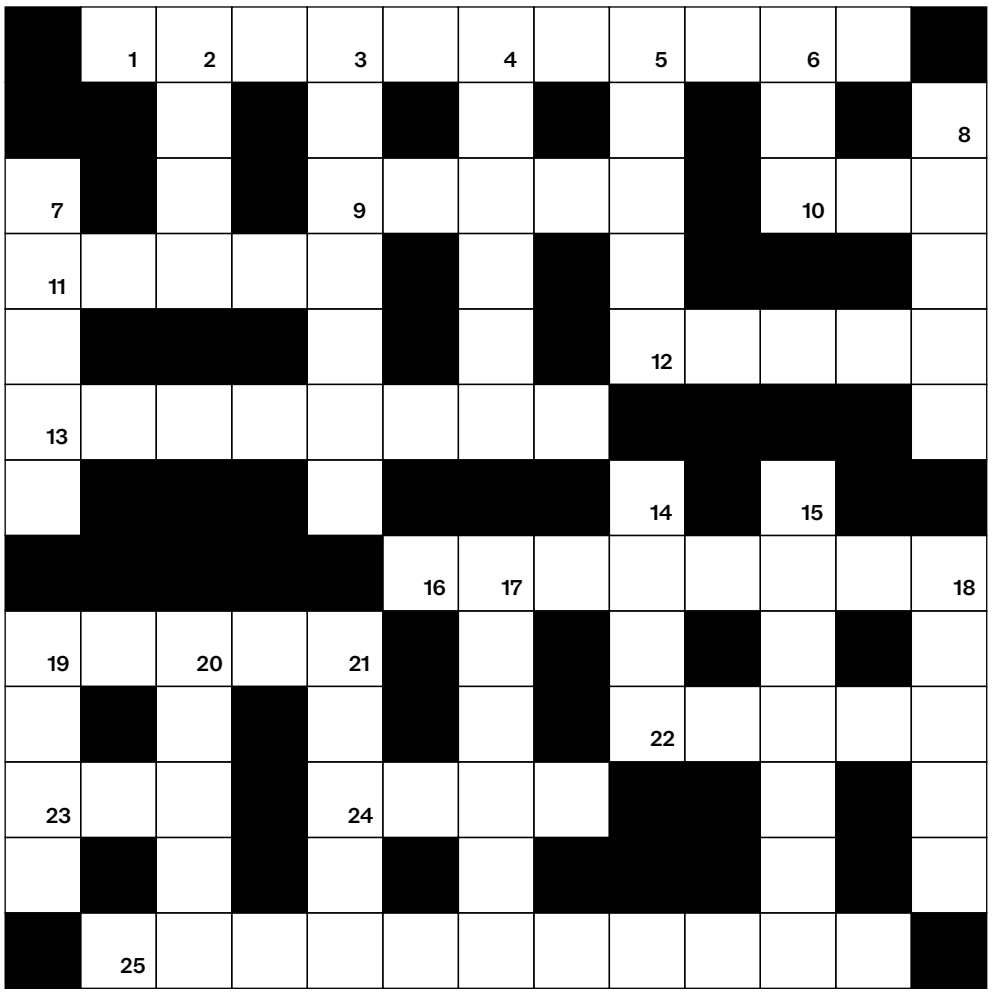
Q: Why couldn't the pirate play poker?
A: Because he was sitting on the deck!

Q: What has words but never speaks?
A: A book!

Q: Why did the banana see a doctor?
A: It wasn't peeling well

If you have a better joke please send them to us!

Crossword



ACROSS
1. Paris landmark (6, 5)
9. Academy award (5)
10. Two people in a musical group (3)
11. Artist's stand (5)
12. Stitched a hem (5)
13. Tent location (8)
16. Illegal tenant (8)
19. Recommend for a job (5)
22. Boat safety equipment (5)
23. Motel or pub (3)
24. A place to buy goods or services (4)
25. A pun (4, 2, 5)

DOWN
2. Tattoo supplies (4)
3. Not sensible (7)
4. Crop-eating grasshopper (6)
5. Shrek and Fiona (5)
6. The finish (3)
7. Educate (5)
8. Nouns and verbs (5)
14. ____ and polish a car (4)
15. Enlarged pupils (7)
17. A butterfly emerges from this (6)
18. Stinks (5)
19. Destroy (4)
20. NRL Grand _____ (5)
21. Out of practice (5)

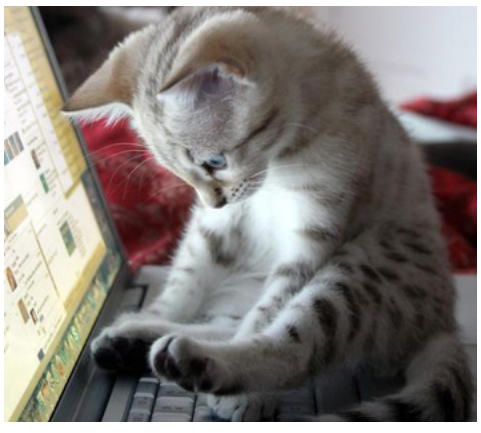
Card Game

Old Maid

Old Maid is a classic and easy card game. No one likes to be called an old maid, thus the goal of the game is to try to avoid becoming one!

The gameplay is simple. The game uses a standard 52-card deck, minus one Queen. The players must form and discard pairs of cards until they have none left. The player that ends up with the odd Queen becomes the Old Maid and loses the game.

The dealer hands out all the cards, one by one, to the players. It does not matter if a player receives more cards. They first must remove any pairs they may have. Then, they spread their cards face down and offer them to the player on their left to pick one. If the player forms a pair, they can discard it. If not, they spread their own cards and offer them to the next player. The game keeps going until all the possible pairs are formed and only the odd queen is left.



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!
Accordingly, he wasn't much of a pianist, but he was first past the post.
Geoff, HRP Tasmania

Runners Up:
Singing? But I feel a bit 'horse' today!
Belly, WCC Queensland

Mustang Stallion? More like Busktang Stall-ion!
Brodie, Tasmania

We have almost made enough to get on. Sing louder Ed!
Shona, Tasmania

Boggle Nine Letter Word
Wonderful

Quiz Answers

1. Four
2. True
3. Five titles
4. Ivory
5. Red and blue
6. Mario
7. Saltwater crocodile
8. 1969
9. East
10. Japan, Jamaica and/or Jordan

Crossword Answers (DOWN)

2. Inks
3. Foolish
4. Locust
5. Ogres
6. End
7. Teach
8. Words
14. Buff
15. Dilated
17. Cocoon
18. Reeks
19. Ruin
20. Final
21. Rusty

Crossword Answers (ACROSS)

1. Eiffel Tower
9. Oscar
10. Duo
11. Easel
12. Sewed
13. Campsite
16. Occupier
19. Refer
22. Flare
23. Inn
24. Shop
25. Play on Words