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About Time

ISSUE NO. 17 DECEMBER 2025 ABOUTTIME.ORG.AU

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

Write to Us:

Share your story, your thoughts, your hopes or your dreams. Tell us what's going on inside. Ask us any question.

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000



This special edition features nearly 100 messages from family and friends on the outside to their loved ones in prison over the Christmas and holiday season. You can see them all on pages 6-9.



Ike Curtis

From: Phoebe Rose
To: To our mob in jail, my brothers and sisters, in NSW

"Hope is the thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it and to work for it and to fight for it." Too all mob, stay strong, your community and family need you. Merry Christmas and stay deadly.

From: Laylah, Avah and Ruby
To: Andrew, in Victoria

Merry Christmas Daddy! We love and miss you so much! We know our Christmas looks a little different this year but we know it'll still be magical and that mum's trying her hardest. We love and miss you so much daddy, loving you always – Laylah, Avah and Ruby xxxxx

From: FIGJAM Collective
To: Everyone

As this year draws to a close, we want to send love and strength to every woman, man and young person still inside.

Know this. You are not forgotten. There's a whole community of us out here, walking free but never leaving you behind.

From: Sally
To: Everyone, in QLD

Wishing everyone still locked up a very Merry Christmas. To my amazing friends still in there, thank you for getting me through my toughest days in there. I met and made a few really amazing lifelong friends.

From: Em
To: All the women inside in WA this Christmas

You are seen, you are loved and you are not forgotten. And this Christmas, hold onto hope. Your story is not done yet, and the best chapters are still ahead.

From: Kiki Gill
To: The women at DPFC, in VIC

To the women at DPFC, this season can feel loud and lonely at once. Please hear this: you matter, you are remembered, and you belong.

Christmas in Prison: Good Friends and Grape Juice

By Stacey Stokes

I remember Christmas in prison fondly. I was with all my closest friends – my only friends. When they send you to jail, everyone and everything you have goes away. Five years, 10 years – hardly anyone can maintain a healthy long-distance relationship in that time. Those relationships slowly fade away until all you have left in your life is other people in prison.

And then you throw in that some of us, like me, don't really get along with our families. Shocking I know! But Christmas for me meant awkwardly sitting there while, at best, no one spoke to me. At worst, they did talk to me and that meant an impromptu intervention, consisting of put-downs and criticism. Each Christmas was anxiety and shame. I'd leave knowing no one respected me and I was a disappointment. I'd get a gift card though, so small win?

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Time Stands Still for No Man

By Andrew

Andrew writes from a prison in TAS.

Hey guys, I love getting the chance to read about other prisoners all around the country each month and thought I would share my story.

I'm 40 years old and I'm serving a 9-year sentence. I got out back in 2021 for 6 months and I got out with the wrong intentions. I was a complete goose and I let the ice take over my life. I committed some violent crimes, and for that short time out I'm now doing a big one.

I'm a father of four. I have two beautiful granddaughters, who I have only been able to meet once in person. I have Zoom visits each week, but it's just not the same as giving them a big cuddle.

My eldest daughter got married last week, and, as a father to girls, it's my duty to be able to walk them down the aisle when that special day in their life comes, so I had to do the right thing and give her my blessing. I didn't let her know that I was going to write a speech. I had her little sister read it out for me, and I could have gone on and on about why she could have waited for me to get out and made it all about me, but as a father you have to be exactly that. So I wrote the speech.

I started off with this: "Sorry sweetheart that I'm not able to be there to support you on this special day. But time stands still for no man, not even myself, so forgive me for this but time must go on. No matter who you are." Now that sunk in the very moment I wrote that.

Life goes on without us fellas who are stuck in this dark hole. But there's always light at the end of the tunnel. At least I've got a release date. I will make up for my time lost.

This place has taken over 15 years of my life, and seeing all I'm missing out on has changed me this time around. Time to step up and stay out for the ones who actually do love us.

Cheers for reading guys. Just thought I'd share my side of life.



About Time's First Letter From WA!

By Russell

Russell writes from a prison in WA.

Hi, I just want to send congratulations on your first issue reaching my prison. I may be a rare beast, a prisoner who is enjoying his time in prison. This is due to my work as editor of our prison quarterly newsletter and running computer-aided design (CAD) workshops for prisoners.

As editor, I try to educate and highlight the positive to prisoners. With my CAD workshops I am trying to give an alternative to traditional skills programs provided.

I would be very interested if any other state provides similar workshops as the curriculum has been developed to be self-paced, with tutorials and course notes.

The attached short story is an extension of a match report I wrote for the newsletter covering our inter-prison footy match against Wooroloo Prison. *(Readers, please see the story in the Creative section of this paper!)*

Regards,

Russell

I Am Not My Crime

By Brendan

Brendan writes from a prison in NSW.

To About Time,

I am serving a 33-month sentence. I have been imprisoned first at Silverwater/MRRC before being transferred to another prison and am to be paroled in December this year.

My experience of being imprisoned has been like my world is crumbling down all around me. One day, I was a successful working professional. The next, I was refused bail following an incident.

Something that has kept me grounded throughout this traumatic, stressful and often lonely experience, to me, has been to remember who I am.

I am not my crime.

That was a bad moment. It happened. But it is but one grain of sand on a whole beach of life experiences.

As I sit in my cell tonight, I know my identity is more than this 4×2 room.

As a Christian, I have faith, hope and love in something much greater than myself and this place.

I encourage everyone who is incarcerated not to identify with your crime. Rather, identify with something higher, wider and greater than that.

I want to implore you to seek your purpose and to aim for that better future.

Thank you.

'You Got This, Aye!'

By Belly

Belly writes from a prison in QLD.

To the editors of *About Time*,

I just received a copy of Issue 15 and once again I have a near overwhelming feeling of enthusiasm. Thank you.

I have a short poem as well as a mindfulness technique called "Distress Tolerance".

S top, don't react or let your emotions take over
T ake a step back, breath in, breath out
O bserve your body's sensations
P roceed with your thoughts or actions

Do this with small events to begin with. Eventually this will become instinct. You got this, aye. Onya.

Poem
Empathy vs Sympathy
There are four stages to empathy
Sympathy is cut and dry
Recognising others' feelings
When you see others cry

The capacity to take perspective
The desire is to act
Just recognising distress
Is recognising fact

Thanks guys.

Regards,
Belly

Let Them Go Home

By Ed

Ed writes from a prison in QLD.

To About Time,

How's it going down there in the south?

Well, I'm writing this letter in relation to the housing crisis, which is a problem for many inmates trying to find a place to live. I have witnessed a lot of parole being granted, but then the problem is that accommodation is the one thing holding inmates in prison. In most cases we have a place to go with family and friends, but then corrective services deem it unsuitable for reasons they will not disclose to us.

How can we rectify this if we don't know how to rectify the problem? It's a dead-end road.

Most of the time we can go to our family for support, but in some cases they say no because there has been police contact at that address. I can't understand why we can't go to a place to live if the people are willing to have you live with them.

On some occasions they let us go to a parole house in public housing which is full of paroled inmates. So my question is: why can we live in a house full of criminals but cannot return to our family?

This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Thanks for listening. I guess I will have to do my full time because my partner has a criminal record. We have been together for 32 years.

To Corrective Services, why is your family home, which is full of support and security to stay on the right path, not an acceptable place for accommodation?

Stay real,
Ed





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Rest in Paradise, Alithea

By Adrielle

Adrielle writes from a prison in QLD.

Hello, About Time,

My name is Adrielle, but everyone calls me Bubbles, which I am – the original Aboriginal, the one and only.

I am writing to you about my one and only older sister, Alithea. RIP. It's been 2 months since I lost you.

I can't believe it. It's nasty out there. I don't know why someone would take you away from your one and only son. You had the biggest smile with all your beautiful teeth, and, when you were going through your ups and downs, you still had that beautiful smile on your loving face.

I've got to say, no one has had it harder than you, my sista.

For someone who had no one to be by her side, and for a strong Black woman who lived on the streets, you would always help anyone and everyone out. You would even give them your T-shirt off your back.

RIP Alithea. It's not going to be the same, my sista.

Love from your baby sista,

Adrielle

Rest in Paradise, Alithea
A dearest friend and sister, rest in peace.
I think about you every day and every evening, and, when we all go to sleep in the dreamtime, your spirit travels in the summer breeze or will be right there in the autumn leaves.
You're in the stars up above, watching over – forever our dove.
You chose to go and spread your wings and spread your love; you always were enough.
We will miss you beyond words. See you in the dreamtime, our rainbow serp.
We will hear you when all the birds chirp.
You're our eagle in the skies, dancing forever.
We will miss those beautiful brown eyes, and your perfect smile will never be forgotten – a smile so soft like cotton.
Now rest easy as your soul and spirit travel country roads, red dirt and gravel, sunsets and ocean waves, and all those paths you've paved.
You helped others; their broken souls you saved.
Now we'll let you sleep. Your memories are what we all will forever keep.
A moment of silence as we all weep, forever in God's hands.
Rest in peace.

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 seventeenth edition, distributed to all prisons in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. We hope that the Northern Territory will join us soon.

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

Write to Us

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

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

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

contribute@abouttime.org.au

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‘Protection’ at the Cost of Human Rights

By Timmy

Timmy writes from a prison in NSW.

To About Time,

I have done a number of laggings since 2005, and now find myself at the MRRC again, awaiting trial.

In New South Wales, there were previously three levels of protective custody for vulnerable inmates, such as myself, who have autism spectrum disorder and other mental health issues. As of 2020, Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) removed Protection Limited Association Area (PRLA) protection and forced all inmates on this protection onto Special Management Area Placement (SMAP), which is known by inmates as “the white man’s mainstream population”, causing a sharp increase in inmate violence.

Now SMAP is no longer considered protective custody, and the only protection for inmates like me is Protection Non Association Area (PRNA) – complete and utter segregation.

Locked in our cells 24 hours a day, up to 7 days a week, with no access to library, chapel or education and with our mental health declining every day. And there are wings full of such inmates, about 40 each wing, making it impossible for us to get the required 1 hour outside our cell every day.

Surely this is a breach of human rights, and there must be a better solution than complete segregation? Why were other levels of protection removed completely? I don’t even understand and think this should be properly explained.

Also, on Dan Nathan’s article re 90s Japanese sedans that ripped, surely you would go the next generation up, post-1995 – to the VG Magna / Camry / Maximia, even the H6 Liberty – for even more power, without much more weight.

Thanks.

Yours sincerely,
Timmy.

A Letter From the USA: Treasure the Moments With the Ones You Love

By Tricia

Tricia writes from State Correctional Institution in Muncy, Pennsylvania.

Hello to everyone in Australia.
My name is Tricia. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I am serving a life sentence, and, for those of you who don’t know, a life sentence in Pennsylvania means your entire life. Sad to say the only way they want you to leave the prison is in a body bag, but I believe that will change for all of us one day and we will be set free.

I’ve been incarcerated for 26 years now, which means I’ve been in prison longer than I was free. I am 51 years of age and became incarcerated at age 25. I have one child, a son, who was a little over a year old when I came to prison. He is a young man now who has his own son, my first grandchild.

I lost so much time with the people I love the most due to my incarceration and also gained the insight to cherish the moments I have with them, i.e.: visits, phone calls, emails – all the things we take for granted with freedom.

A day for me begins at 6:15 am. I do my usual morning routine, then I go to exercise – about three to four times a week – and then I have the usual shower and phone call, depending on the day. We get counted again at about 11:15 am, and then I go to work. My job is at the property department. This is the place where the ladies at Muncy pick up the items they ordered from the commissary, i.e: TV, radio, sneakers etc.

Then we usually get counted a third time, at 4:30 pm. “Wow,” I know you’re probably saying, “that’s a lot of counts.” Tell me about it. We still have one more to come. At night I usually wash clothes and chill in my room and watch some TV. I’m a BIG sports fan, usually watching basketball or tennis. Yes, I love the Australian Open. I also watch American Football every Sunday after church service.

One of the best things I do about twice a week is what we call sacred dance practice. Myself and two other ladies dance at our church service, so we practice at night at our chapel. Sharing time in fellowship with my sisters in Christ is one of my most precious times. This fellowship helps to get through the hard times.

Having long-term friends here means a lot. Sad to say I’ve spent more of my life with these women than my family at home.

The holiday seasons are pretty bad for most of us, being away from our families. In the ward I live in, we decorate our rooms, our doors and the common area. We have a secret santa, pollyanna and a little Christmas party.

I’ve met a lot of wonderful women during my incarceration. Some leave and forget, but the special ones that stay in touch mean a lot. I’ve been blessed to have people I’ve met in groups and classes, and even retired employees keep in touch. They not only help me but tell me how I have helped them and changed their outlook on life, and that means a lot to me.

For me, the hardest part of incarceration and having a life sentence is losing family members and not getting that time with them or that chance to say goodbye. My dad passed away – it will be 2 years in January, and sometimes it still doesn’t feel real.

There’s no closure. Thank God I still have my mother in my life. She is 81 years young. I try to call her every day. Just to hear her voice makes my day. We take things like that for granted – I always thought I’d have tomorrow to talk to my dad.

My one message to everyone reading is do not take a moment of life for granted, whether free or locked up.

Treasure the moments, whether big or small, with the ones you love because tomorrow is not promised.

Sending my love and prayers to you. Spend quality time with the people closest to you and give some Christmas joy to someone who may not have anyone on the outside. This time of year we need to spread joy, peace, love and happiness to all. Happy New Year and to many, many more.

Love Tricia.





How I’ve GROWn

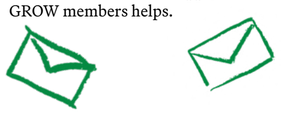
By Trevor

Trevor writes from a prison in VIC.

What is GROW?
GROW is a community-based national organisation that works on mental wellbeing using a 12-step program of personal growth, mutual help and support. It operates through weekly peer support groups.

The GROW program is based on lived experience, meaning GROW groups are a meeting of peers.

Members share how they are exploring self-improvement strategies on the road to recovery, as it’s not a straight road. This is where the support of other GROW members helps.



Everyone in the group also has the opportunity to share their experiences with mental wellbeing. You’ll be motivated by the stories from other members, and you’ll soon realise you’re not alone.

My Story
I have for years had overwhelming anxiety and depression without knowing it, only thinking that it was a norm. I just kept working until the day it was so bad in jail.

Doing video calls with lawyers had made it so bad that, by the time I went to court, my whole body started to shake. Even the tools and strategies that I had learnt did not help at the time; I was just starting to learn the ways to cope with things.

I was going through all the emotions – happy, sad, angry, even grief – within five seconds of each other.

One day someone noticed what was going on and sat me down and quietly told me that I needed help! I was told about the GROW program, and they placed my name on the waiting list.

An invite came to me two weeks from the time it was placed. The timing was perfect as my dad had just had a stroke and my mum was stressed to the point that she also needed help.

I helped in a way by getting my partner to go and ask my mum to call my brother to help out, which he did. With all this going on on the other side of the wall, it was driving me down.

I have now been going to GROW for over 1 year and have learnt a lot of programs and methods which have eased and lowered both my anxiety and depression.

I now understand why I had the problem with both anxiety and depression, as I did not understand the disorder and torment within me. Also, I understand not to get caught up in other’s disorders as it gets me in a bad place.

I have helped my mum with things that I have learnt from GROW, while speaking with her by phone. Mum is now back to normal and finding things easier.

GROW is working for me and others in the group. I am grateful I had the chance to join the group as it is changing the way I think and I’m seeing things clearer now with empathy and hope.

I hope that GROW will grow larger over time, both inside jails and outside, to help more people in the way it is helping me. GROW can help people improve their mental health before they do something that may send them into jail or even suicide.

Mental health and wellbeing is an important part of life for us all.



Letters From the Outside



Some highlights from the About Time online comment section.

In response to the letter *Pen Pals, An Idea to Support Good Mental Health* by King, incarcerated in Queensland:

Dear King, what a beautiful idea! Corrections departments, please facilitate this wonderful opportunity to connect those who are incarcerated with the rest of society. ❤️🎄
Liberty

In response to the letter *Demonised Fringes* by Anonymous in Victoria:

I would love to know the correct and honest information about the prison system – what is it actually like? You are right, the whole experience is shrouded in mystery for the general public, which means that things can go unchecked and increases stigma.
Adi

In response to *Autism in Prison* by Ashleigh Chapman and Dan Vansetten:

Awesome read, loved it!
Cullen

In response to *Letters from Home Lost to the Photocopier:*

In Victoria, the rules are that mail can be photocopied based on “sound rationale”, including if the recipient has a history of trafficking or there is intelligence suggesting they might. The rules state that it is “critical that there is justification” for the photocopying to be done.

Who determines “sound rationale” and “critical justification” for an abject intrusion of privacy into prisoner mail? Is prison not punishment enough?

Having the freedom of seeking connection with their loved ones through the written word, pictures sketched from their children’s hands or the scent of their lover’s perfume on paper is surely a concession that can be granted on humane grounds alone? The greater the empathy that can be given to prisoners and their families the greater the chance of rehabilitation and reintegration into our community upon release.

A better society for all.
Liberty

In response to *The Importance of Radio In Prison:*

Having access to radio and music should be considered an essential aspect of the rehabilitation process – not only does this connect prisoners to their community on the outside but being able to listen to music that resonates with them is an indelible healing mechanism. Music is a wonderful antidote to “feeling free” within the confines of prison. It’s also an incredible tool to promote emotional regulation – a way to calm and soothe the mind when they’re having a tough and difficult day emotionally. It’s time that we as a society take a collective interest in the welfare and humanity of people in prison. Giving equitable access to radio is a step towards this.
Liberty

In response to Aidan’s letter *How Metal and Punk Music Saved My Life:*

Amen, Aidan. Your mum sounds like she has a similar taste in music to me. I don’t listen to it much these days, but I used to often when trying to process emotions.
Samantha



Thank You for Your Letters

As of a few weeks prior to publication, we received letters from Carolyn, Veronica, Peter, Liam, Kamara, Adam, Jack, R, David, David, Peter, Geoffrey, Robert, M, T, Brian, Christopher, Derrick, Jared, Dave, Rob, all those that wish to remain anonymous 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



From: Gillian Ophel
To: Alex, in ACT

Pillowcases on Christmas morning,
Stuffed with socks and things
to read. Barely daylight, parents
yawning, While we rummaged
through with glee. Poured on
the floor, toys and more things,
To keep us playing happily. Best
of memories, sun now dawning,
Christmas morning, you and me.
From your sister- we are always
together at Christmas, even if
we can't be in the same place.
Love you x

From: Melodee Ryan
To: Matthew, in NSW

Merry Christmas Matt , we hope
and pray one day we will all spend
Christmas Day together. We all love
and miss you ! Love Mum , Dad , Kev,
Paris and your beautiful daughter
Destiny xxxxxxxxxxxxx

From: Lara

Merry Christmas! Look forward
to Christmas roast and opening
pressies with you when your back
home, we love you, big hugs from
me and the doggies ❤️❤️

From: Rachel Ridley
To: Adam, in NSW

Merry Christmas dad. We hope you
can enjoy Christmas Day and wish
you were here with us. We can't
wait for you to come home and we
miss you so much. We hope you get
to have Christmas lunch . Nan says
merry Christmas too and loves and
misses you. Merry Christmas dad
Love Josh, Tyshira and Zeppelin
and nan and everyone else Xoxo ❤️

From: Sally
To: Red and crew, QLD

Red (and everyone I met during my
time on the inside),

I wish you a very merry Christmas.
I miss you all. Thank you for making
my time in there a bit more bearable.
I wish I could send in all the good
food this Christmas but I'll enjoy it
while thinking of yas.

From me!

From: Haley Clarke
To: Jeremiah, in NSW

Jerry I'm sending you the biggest
Christmas hugs ever merry
Christmas baby I love and miss you
worlds 💕❤️❤️❤️❤️Son I love you with
all my heart merry Christmas love
mum ❤️❤️❤️❤️Merry Christmas daddy
love Aisha ❤️❤️❤️❤️Merry Christmas
daddy Jerry love Rina and Rhyan

From: Charlotte L
To: Charlie, in QLD

Hi boo boo! It's your pumpkin.

This Christmas will look drastically
different for both of us respectively,
spent either in solitude or with
newly made friends, that for once
aren't mutual.

Our memories of setting up the
tree, making Christmas cards,
sneaking pressies, and waking up
early to open them before heading
to church are never forgotten. It is
also Nemo's first Chrissy, he must
be so big now.

I am grateful that despite the waves
and hurricanes that 2025 presented
us, the unchanging reason for this
season remains in us.

Like the frost on a rose, winter
comes for us all
Oh how nature acquaints us
With the nature of patience
Like a seed in the snow I've been
buried to grow
For your promise is loyal
From seed to sequoia
Though the winter is long even
richer the harvest it brings
Though my waiting prolongs
even greater
Your promise for me like a seed I
believe that my season will come.

Merry Christmas b,
Love,
Your Kya.

From: April Ross
To: Hayden, in VIC

Merry Christmas son, we all hope
your day is somewhat good and can
have a laugh with your mates there.
Miss your face and love you always,
Mum, John, Grace, Beth, Neve,
Ella, your new nephews Anakin and
Gavin annnd Aunty Kel xxxx

From: Belle
To: Mark (Little Lamb), in Victoria

Hoping for a Christmas Miracle. If
not, have a very Merry Christmas.
You are loved more than you know
xx

From: Erin
To: Joseph, in Victoria

Dear Joseph, Merry Christmas!
We love and miss you and hope
you never miss a Christmas again
with your family! Love all of us back
home xx

From: Amanda Scoular
To: Jaxson, in NSW

Merry Christmas Son ... thinking of
you today and wish you were here
with us. Love from all the Fam ❤️❤️

From: Mandy Sharman
To: Billy, in VIC

Not an easy time for you or us when
most families are enjoying the
festive season. We have a major
part of our clan missing. Who's
gonna make the gravy? Last hoorah
my boy enjoy the day the best you
can, moving forward you have many
memorable Xmas days to look
forward to with your own little boy
and all your family. Love you more
than life. Mum xo

From: Kelly Kichakov
To: Steven, in VIC

Even you are not here with me for
Christmas it won't be the same! I
hope you can enjoy the day and we
get to see you soon! Enjoy what you
can and hope you boys can make a
nice feast. Love you always, Merry
Christmas, see you at Yellowstone
for a ride soon xxxx

From: Justine
To: David, in VIC

To my beautiful partner – Merry
Christmas David. I really wish I
could be with you today but not long
now till you can come home to me.
Let's make this year our best ever!
I love you so much and am thankful
everyday that I have you in my life.
Love you now, always and forever.
<3 Justine xxxxxxxxx

From: Rhiannon Tierney
To: Jason, in NSW

Merry Christmas my soldier – the
last one we will ever have to be
apart! Happy New Year Baby xx

From: Skie Oborne
To: Corey, in Victoria

To My King, I wish I could be
spending my Christmas with the
love you offer wrapped around me,
I wish it was you I was sharing this
joy with ... just know that not matter
the time, no matter the distance ... it
is you, it has always been you, it will
be forever you that holds the key to
my heart.

I love you with everything I have to
give. Merry Christmas My King, I'll
be seeing you soon. Love always
and forever, Your Queen <3

From: Mark Moore
To: Adam, in NSW

Hey mate uncle Mark here I love ya
heaps and wish you a merry Xmas
mate. Miss you more than you could
imagine and pray that this will be
your last Xmas away from us all.

From: Leah Richards
To: Justin, in QLD

My son, Merry Xmas to you and
hope you are doing ok. Xmas
without you around isn't the same!
But no day is ever ok we just get
by ... girls miss you a lot and always
asking about you. We love you more
than words can say.

From: Lillian Durrant
To: Joey, in QLD

Merry Christmas, my love Joey ❤️✨
Wishing we could be together this
holiday, but just know you're always
in my heart. I'm keeping the spirit
bright for both of us – and saving
all my hugs for when I see you next.
Until then, stay strong, stay hopeful,
and know how deeply you're loved.
Here's to better days ahead and a
fresh new year. All my love, always,
LJ ❤️

From: Elle White
To: Bhodhi, in QLD

HO HO HO MARRY CHRISTMAS
MY FAVOURITE NEPHEW!!! (SHHH
don't tell the other hehe). Your gifts
will be waiting for you & more when
you come home, even though you're
on holidays the big fat man will still
deliver hahah not long babe!! Rest
assured aunty will get jolly for the
both of us this silly season!! I love
& miss you sooo much every single
day! We love you always & forever.

Mia, aunty & uncle xx

From: Mia Drake
To: Jai, in NSW

HO HO HO MARRY CHRISTMAS
uncle Jai. I hope this makes your day
a little more special. We love & miss
you more than you know. Sending
big cuddles.

Love, Mia & Elle xx

From: Kiona Willis
To: Bodhi, in QLD

Our first Christmas without you
Bodhi. It doesn't feel real. One
can only pray that all then men in
Woodford Correctional Centre
can have a little smile and turn
Christmas day into a somewhat
happy day. Have a happy day you
will be home soon and we can re-do
all the holidays you have missed.

Love always GG

From: Stacey Young
To: Bodhi, in QLD

Merry Christmas mate! Wish you
were home with us. Will have a cold
one for you and hope to have you
home with us all soon x

From: Bee
To: Lleyton, in QLD

Hi honey we love you so much
thinking of you always, you're in our
hearts no matter what, never above
or below always beside you. Have a
lovely day love forever and always,
K&B.

From: Rachelle Jones-Ward
To: Chris, in NSW

To Chris, we love you forever and
miss you heaps and can't wait
til you're home with us spending
every day with us, we love you and
miss you heaps. Love, Rachelle,
Charlotte, Oscar and David ❤️

From: Larissa McGrath
To: Steven, in NSW

I hate that you're still in there, you'll
always have me as your ride or die.
Merry Christmas! Love your guts.

From: Kelly
To: Stuart, in NSW

Merry Christmas & a Happy New
Year, we all love & miss you so
much. Sending our love from Kelly,
Hannah, Haley, Sarah, Kade & Tarj.

From: Joanne
To: Dean, in NSW

Merry Christmas Deano. Even
though we aren't all together right
now you are ALWAYS in our hearts
and on our minds. We are proud of
you for staying strong and looking
forward to our next Christmas
together.

We love you Dean ...
Mum and our family x

From: Raelene
To: Connie and Annie, in QLD

To Connie and Annie at HJC, hang
in there girls. This time of year is
hard and my thoughts are with you.
Take care and soon enough you will
be back with your families xx

From: Taryn
To: Karl, in QLD

Merry Christmas Dad! We love you
so much and hope you have the
best day possible xx next year we
can spend Christmas together! Love
from Tazzy, Ella and Ryleigh ❤️

From: Kate Foley
To: Nick, in VIC

Merry Christmas Nick. I'll put a
present under the tree for you. Stay
safe and don't do anything silly.
Love your sister, Kate.

From: Shakayla
To: Mitchell, in QLD

Merry Christmas honey. Lots of love
forever & always, your girls S + A
xxx

From: Dion Stubbings
To: Bodhi, in QLD

Merry Xmas mate I'll see you before
then anyway. This year I'm working
thru Xmas me and mum aren't really
celebrating it as you're inside. Will
catch up later in the year cheers
lots of love.

From: Jodie Rowe
To: Deano, in NSW

Merry Christmas and a great New
Year, your last one there next one
home with us ... Missing you so
much, glad we talk every day, can't
wait to see you and give you a hug.
Forever in my heart ❤️Jodean
always and forever. Much love Dean
😍💙

From: Kylie Wiggins
To: Jamie, in NSW

Merry Xmas son. Know that I'll be
thinking of you and missing you on
the day. Keep your head up high and
know that you are loved.

From: Kayla Wilton
To: John and Chris, in VIC

Merry Christmas! The boys,
Diamond and I love and miss you
both so unbelievably much! This too
shall pass and next Christmas we
can be on the beach in Tasmania or
somewhere nice! I hope you both
know how much we truly appreciate
every sacrifice you've made for us
💛forever & always, Kaykay xx

From: Ella
To: Jacob, in NSW

Merry Christmas my love, I miss you
more than anything. I can't wait till
you come home and meet your boy
for the first time. Keep your head my
love I'll see you on the other side
so soon x

From: Sam Harrison
To: Alex, in VIC

Keep your head held high little bro
love ya and miss ya hope to see u
and Jasmin soon xoxoxo

From: Talia B
To: Bradley, in NSW

Merry Christmas dadda –
love Linden

From: Frankie Sullivan
To: All, in NSW

To those of you who I have met
or represented over the years, I
have not forgotten you. Take care
of yourselves and each other. I
hope 2026 brings strength and
connection for you and your
communities.

From: Sally
To: Everyone, in QLD

Wishing everyone still locked up
a very Merry Christmas. To my
amazing friends still in there, thank
you for getting me through my
toughest days in there. I met and
made a few really amazing lifelong
friends. I will be thinking about
you all when I'm having lunch this
Christmas, wishing I could have you
out here with me. Look forward to
one day sharing Christmas lunch
together. Take care and love to all.

From: Leearn Reay
To: Samuel, in NSW

Hello my son Samuel, this year we
are without you for xmas – doesn't
mean you are far from our thoughts.
Next year be a better year for us all.
Mum loves you always and I believe
in you. Merry Xmas in there, Love
you son! Mum xx

From: Kiki Gill
To: The women at DPFC, in VIC

To the women at DPFC, this season
can feel loud and lonely at once.
Please hear this: you matter, you
are remembered, and you belong.
One breath, one choice, one step at
a time – keep your hope close. I've
sat where you sit, and I know the
road forward is real: small routines,
kind friends, honest words. You are
not your past – you are your next
decision.

I'm cheering for you today and
after Christmas, too. With love and
respect, Kiki.

From: Louise Hornby
To: Garrold, in NSW

Hey U I love you and I miss you more
than you can imagine x1000000
And wishing you a Happy Birthday
and a Merry Christmas for 2025. I
hope you enjoy your special days
and every other day of course. Every
day that passes is one closer to
home day remember n I can't wait
xxx 3 kisses for you mwah mwahhh
mwahhhh Louise xox

From: Felix Welsh
To: JB, in NSW

Merry Christmas JB

From: Montess Hughes
To: Matthew, in VIC

Kia Ora Matty (my love). Sending
you strength and aroha this
Christmas and New Year. Becoming
a dad for the fourth time is
something truly special (he tohu) –
a reminder of the legacy you carry
as a proud Cummeragunja Yorta
Yorta man, son, grandson, unc,
brother and bruz.

Anyone can be a father, but it takes
a special man to be a dad – and
your love for your sons shows that
every day, no matter the distance.
Keep your head up and heart strong.
Your mob, your new boorai, and your
community are proud of you.

With respect and strength, I love
you with all my heart and will never
give up on you. Monz ❤️❤️💞

From: Louise
To: Garrold, in NSW

It's a new year 2026 Home Day is
approaching New Home is awaiting.
The pocket Rocket has over-used in
2025 and losing it's mojo go go lol
you know the best of what's been
many of our conversations is ready
to go off like fireworks aha Them
words I say make a big statement
and are not said without confidence.
With them words to think about now
lol Happy New Years Baby miss you
much n love you more.

From: Em
To: All the women inside
in WA this Christmas

You may not know it, but we see
you. We see the woman beneath the
weight of it all, the first still burning
behind tired eyes. We see your
courage, your grit, your quiet fight
to hold on to who you are. You are
still human. Still worthy. Still whole.

Even on the days you don't feel it.
You are not defined by these walls
around you, they can hold your body,
but never your spirit. The past may
speak, but it does not get the final
word. You are seen, you are loved
and you are not forgotten. And this
Christmas, hold onto hope. Your
story is not done yet, and the best
chapters are still ahead.

From: Breanna Welsh
To: Webz, in NSW

Merry Christmas my bubba I
love you so much and miss you
even more I hate this time of the
year without you it's so hard But
next year we will have Christmas
together Love you forever xoxo

From: Robyn Ravenna
To: Edu students at Cadell Training Centre in South Australia

To all students that I worked with, whether you are still at CDC, or released or moved to another facility. I hope you are getting through and keeping busy. I'll never forget the time we worked together. Peace and love, Robyn.

From: FIGJAM Collective
To: Everyone

As this year draws to a close, we want to send love and strength to every woman, man and young person still inside. From all of us at FIGJAM – Formerly Incarcerated Girls Justice Advocates Melbourne, we see you, we remember you, and we stand beside you in spirit this Christmas.

The holiday season can be a hard time inside. The silence, the distance, the missing faces and voices of family can weigh heavy. But know this. You are not forgotten. There's a whole community of us out here, walking free but never leaving you behind.

FIGJAM was built by women who have walked those same yards, who have felt that same ache, and who now fight to make sure your voices are heard. We believe in the power of healing, of sisterhood and solidarity, and of turning pain into purpose. You are not your sentence. You are your strength, your future.

As you move into the new year, we hope you find small moments of peace, a yarn with a friend, a piece of art, a song, a sunrise. These moments remind us that even in the hardest places, light still finds a way in.

Stay strong, stay connected, and know that we're working every day for change, for healing and for freedom.

With love and respect,

The FIGJAM Collective – we rise together.

From: L Wyuna
To: Andrew, in QLD

Merry Xmas Mi Amor. Always in my heart and prayers. Sending all my love. Missing you dearly can't wait to hold you in my arms L&R forever xx Bena

From: Matalia Tiden
To: Decklen, in NSW

Merry Christmas Daddy We Love You & Missing You, Hopefully Not Long And You Will Be Home Mum And The Kids XOXO

From: Everley Rowe
To: Toryn, in WA

Merry Christmas Uncle Toryn. Love ya xx

From: Jo Morris
To: Josh, in NSW

Another Xmas without you here. Won't be long until we can celebrate together. Love you loads always & forever, Ma, Bren, Nan & Pop. Xxx

From: Charles Coombs
To: Benn, in QLD

Merry Christmas & Happy New Years, my boy! Hoping you have the best day imaginable in there with all the fellas. Fingers crossed this next year will bring everything you need and want in life. Lots of love, Char Char

From: Fran Partington
To: Zac, in WA

Dear Zac, Wishing you a Merry Christmas, keep up all the hard work you're doing with your studies. We love you and miss you not long now and we will all be around the same table for Christmas. With love, Mum, Dad and Riley xxxxx

From: Kristen Lynch
To: John, in VIC

Merry Christmas my little bro. You are loved and missed so much. I've very proud of the work you have been doing not only personally but art wise. You are amazing! Next year we can hopefully have a wonderful time celebrating all the special times we have missed out on. I can't wait for a hug!

Lots of love from your big sis ❤️❤️

From: Alana Nixon
To: Owen, in NSW

Merry Christmas Dad! We love and miss you heaps. see you soon xo

From: Emily Hensel-Saunders
To: Dane, in NSW

Merry Christmas my babe! Love & miss you more than ice-cream ❤️💋 Emily xox

From: Jannali Lee Austin
To: Jindara, in VIC

Merry Christmas daddy, I love you so much. Love from your little princess Jannali.

From: Jan McLeod
To: Brandon, in NSW

Miss you so much, especially this time of year. We may not be together but you're always in my heart 💗 Love you so much and miss you more, love mum xx

From: Jess Bloomfield
To: Tim, in WA

To our King, we hope you have a nice Christmas. Bring on Feb till we can fly over to see you! We miss you soooooooo much. Another day done darling. So proud of you. Love you forever, Jess, Chanel, Estelle & Brock xxxx

From: Sam Harris
To: David, in NSW

Happy Christmas, David. How wonderful that your blindness was fixed this year once your cataracts were removed and you can now see! May you continue to minister to the blind in your parish, helping them to find their way to personal freedom.

From: Sam Harris
To: Lance, in NSW

To the master of hilarious poetry about what goes on behind bars! May you continue to delight us with your larrikin rhymes. Hoping we can get your book of poetry published in the coming new year. Merry Christmas.

From: Sarah McGrath
To: Matt, in NSW

This Christmas I want you to know that you mean the world to me. Every morning when I wake up I think of you. And every night you are in my dreams.

You are everything I have ever wanted. I have loved you right from the start. You are out of sight, but never out of my mind. My gift to you this year is my Life, my Life, and my heart. Merry Christmas my baby, 16 months until you get out and counting.

From: Ta-leah Stracey

Merry Christmas Daddy, i love you with all of my heart love Amara, trigger and chappy Merry Christmas baby i love u always and forever 4.2.2.1 xoxo

From: Brandon Kelly
To: Rebecca, in VIC

Merry Xmas Bub, Love you to Infinity & Beyond!

From: Ben Racz
To: Anyone in prison feeling isolated

I've never set foot inside a prison, and while I don't know much of what you're going through, I know it must feel difficult, at times too difficult to get through. Prison severs your connection with the outside world, the community you belong to, the place or natural environment you may have known as home.

I wanted to reach out to you to say that as distant as you might feel from the outside world, people in the community still think about you, and wish you well for the end of year season. Whatever your dreams or goals might be to overcome this dark chapter and build a more positive future, know that there are people in the community rooting for you.

Take care and I hope the year that comes is brighter for you.

From: Transform Lives Program
To: All women

From all of us at the Transform Lives Program, we wish you a peaceful and gentle holiday season. We know this time of year can bring about many emotions, memories, and challenges and can be especially hard when you are separated from the people you love.

We want you to know that you are not forgotten. Your strength, courage and care for others continues to inspire us. We hope this season brings moments of comfort, connection and hope for brighter days ahead. Take time to rest, reflect and know that you are valued. Merry Christmas.

From: Channae Scott
To: Russell, in NSW

Russell @ Junee CC To Dad / Russ, Dad you are the best father in the world. Merry Christmas Russ, you may not be here with us but we'll be thinking of you. Love & miss you !!! Love Layla, Nae & Armani xo

From: Mathew Thomas
To: Pan, in NSW

Hey there General, Just wanted to wish you a very Merry Christmas. I know it's not the best place to be at this time but I'm sure you will have the best day possible. Say gidday to Dart, Picky, Singhy, Wayne, Rosey and all the boys. Look after yourself mate, All the best, The Admiral (Matty)

From: Chlorissa Anderson
To: Ty, in NSW

Merry Christmas, Babe ! Even though we're apart, you're always on my mind and in my heart. I'm thinking of you today and missing you so much. You're the reason for my smile, and I'm counting down the days until we're together again. I love you more than words can say. Wishing you a Christmas filled with love, hope, and peace. I know this year we are apart but next year we will all be together as a family. Love you always princess Love The kiddies and I 💗

From: Chlorissa Anderson
To: Ty, in NSW

To my Dad, To Dad your the best dad I could ask for. I really hope I can spend next Christmas with you and when you get out, I would really love to go fishing with you. Xoxoxo 💗😅

From: Kristy Maree
To: Philly, in VIC

Another Christmas is about to come & go without you home where you should be. I know this is more of a "me" thing than you, but this is why you love me & because im the crazy Christmas lady – so get on my level ❤️ Christmas isn't the same without you home, but we know you are here with us in spirit. We love you so much & miss you even more. Merry Xmas babe. Love always, me & ours ❤️

From: Jacinta Love
To: David, in VIC

Merry Christmas, my love. ❤️ Another year apart, but never once have you left my heart. While the world celebrates under lights and laughter, my greatest gift is knowing that what we have is real, unbreakable, loyal, and built to last through every storm. You're my peace and my chaos, my reason to keep pushing when life tries to knock me down. I don't just love you when it's easy, I love you through the distance, the silence, and the struggle. Because real love doesn't fold under pressure; it hardens, sharpens, and rises stronger every time. So even from behind those walls, know this, I'm forever yours. I'll ride for you today, tomorrow, and every damn day after that. The system might try to break spirits, but it can't touch what's written between you and me. You've got a queen who stands tall, loyal to the bone, proud to call you her man. Our story ain't over, it's just being rewritten with fire, faith, and forever in mind. Love always, Your RideOrDie, your peace, your storm! 224 forever your woman ❤️🔥

From: Aaliyah Welsh
To: Michael, in NSW

Dad Merry Christmas can't wait till your next Christmas and Halloween so we can dress up your going to be the big bad wolf Hope Santa leaves you lots of presents Love Aaliyah Kyzaiah and mum

From: Wubz Welsh
To: Michael, in NSW

Hey bubba I love and miss you so much This time of the year is so hard for all of us but it's our last so keep your head down so you can get home to us I miss you more and more everyday it's so hard when we are always together to be apart for this long I love you so so so so much I can't wait till you home and your never leaving us again Merry Christmas i love you till the day I die xxx Love you bubba for ever xoxoxo

From: Shirley Hilton

Thinking of you at Christmas With love always Better days ahead Mum ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

From: Ammie Jose
To: Jake, in VIC

Love you honey! I hope you have a lovely Christmas, Seth and I miss you so much! We can't wait to have you back with us to celebrate and make the gravy ;) X

From: Taleah Decaux
To: Lachlan, in QLD

Hey My baby, Even though we can't be together this Christmas, you're always in my heart. Sending you all my love and affection. Merry Christmas from the girls, Tracey and I. We are forever so greatful you walked into our lives, words can't express how happy you make all three of us. We love you to the moon and back and can't wait for the day your home with us

From: Maddison April
To: Joel, in NSW

Hi baby, I love and miss you so so much. Merry Christmas, I'll see you soon baby ❤️❤️

From: Jean Bill
To: Adam, in NSW

Hi Adam. Hope you're doing ok, and hope you will be able to enjoy Xmas day. I will give your mum some money close to Xmas to put into your account. Sorry I haven't wrote to you for awhile but I don't go anywhere anymore so got nothing to tell you. Love and miss you lots xxxx

From: Jessica Jones
To: Andrew, in VIC

To My posty, This Christmas feels a little still, The nights are quiet, the air feels chill. But even with the distance near, My heart still whispers, you're right here. The lights all glow, the world's in cheer, But what I want is you, my dear. No gift, no ribbon, no golden tree, Could mean as much as you mean to me. I think of you with every star, No matter where you are not far. Because love like ours can't fade away, It grows much stronger every day. I picture us near ocean waves, Where salt and breeze can cleanse old pains. A little house not grand, but real, A space that love alone can fill. You, barefoot on the sand one night, Your laughter soft beneath moonlight. Our hands entwined, our hearts at ease, Our future whispering through the breeze. That's what I see when I close my eyes, No walls, no bars, no sad goodbyes. Just peace your kids, my son, our days, All blending in the softest ways. You've been my calm, my steady flame, My love, my heart, my sweetest name. No distance breaks what we've begun, You are my moon, my stars, my sun. And though this Christmas, we're apart, You still live inside my heart. I feel you there with every beat, Your love makes my whole world complete. I know this chapter's not forever, And soon, we'll finally be together. The day you're free, the air will glow, The tide will hum, the wind will know. We'll drive until the city fades, And find that place the sea has made. A home with laughter, peace, and light, Where every wrong turns into right. We'll build our dreams, both yours and mine, And leave the past where it's confined. Your trauma, pain we'll heal them slow, With love that only we could know. Because, Andrew, love, you're all I need, You're every thought, my heart's own creed. You've changed my world, my every view, My soul feels whole because of you. So this Christmas, know this truth There's nothing stronger than my proof. I'll wait, I'll stand, I'll see it through, Because forever starts with you. When you are free, we'll find that shore, And you'll never walk alone anymore. I'll hold your hand beneath the blue My home, my heart, my love ... it's you. Your girl, Jess, I love you Always ❤️ PS, When did I ask Boo?

From: Hayley Parker
To: Connor, in NSW

To my fiancée Connor, merry Christmas baby I wish you were home we love you so very much and I can't wait till your spending it at home <3 always thinking of you xx love always your wife xo

From: Tekitha Tutaki-Irving
To: Brayden, in NSW

Hi my shmubs ! I'm not entirely sure if you're going to get this but it's worth a shot... Merry Christmas my love, I wish we were spending it together but nonetheless I know after this we will spend every Christmas, new years & birthday together !! Sonson and I miss and love you so so much every single day. I cannot wait for the day when we are all reunited and a family again ! I love you so much my shumbs and we will see you soon, I know it ❤️ Lots & lots of love from the girl of your dreams & the love of your life Tekitha 💋

From: Kyeisha Kelly
To: Jai, in NSW

Merry Christmas ❤️❤️ First Christmas without you Missing you so so much & just want you home Forever me & you ❤️❤️❤️

From: Natasha Soars
To: Zac, in NSW

'You don't know me Say I couldn't change, but that's the old me I've been plottin' on this since the nosebleeds Now I'm lookin' out and they know me I've been OT, gettin' no sleep I ain't call my momma in like four weeks I've been plottin' on this since the nosebleeds Imagine tellin' me when I was 14, they all know me now' Merry Xmas Tash

From: Amy Ludwig
To: Brandan, in QLD

Merry Christmas my dearest friend. I hope you find some comfort today, hang in there and know that people care so much about you. my thoughts are with you and your family xoxo Amy

From: Emma Patten
To: Jordan, in NSW

Merry Christmas miss you so much and love you always and forever keep your chin up nephew we got this

From: Amy Locke
To: Jordan, in NSW

Merry Christmas Jordan. We all love you and miss you heaps. Hopefully we can see you for Christmas. Merry Christmas also from Ebony and Pablo xoxo

From: Rachel Skippen
To: Jimbo, in NSW

This is to Jimbo the love of my love. Missing your nose baby. LoL XOXO

News and Investigations

Bar Lowered to Find Someone Guilty of Prison Offences in NSW

By Denham Sadler

Denham Sadler is the Chief Reporter at About Time.

The NSW Government has moved to make it easier to find incarcerated people guilty of a "prison offence", against the advice of independent experts.

A "prison offence" includes a range of offences, from serious charges to not keeping a cell "tidy and orderly" and failing to maintain "personal cleanliness". People in prison in NSW face losing privileges – such as accessing the buy-up, phone calls and visits – for up to 56 days if it is found that "on the balance of probabilities" they committed a prison offence.

The current requirement is for the decision-maker to be sure "beyond reasonable doubt" that an offence had taken place in order to find someone guilty and strip them of privileges. This bar will be lowered under reforms put forward by the NSW Government.

Independent legal advice given to the state government last year instead recommended for prison offences to be divided into "minor" and "major" ones, with different burdens of proof applied. It also called for more diversionary options and improved review avenues if someone is found guilty.

Last year, the NSW Ombudsman found that the current standard of proof was being applied incorrectly in many cases but did not recommend that it be lowered.

Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) CEO Karly Warner said the organisation is concerned that the government is "weakening protections for people who are incarcerated".

"These amendments infringe on the rights of imprisoned people and fly in the face of the NSW Ombudsman's recommendations to improve fairness in the prison disciplinary system," Warner told About Time.

"Instead of following the ombudsman's expert advice, the government is doing the opposite of what was recommended, with no regard for the safety and wellbeing of those locked in NSW prisons."

Most other states and territories require it to be proven that someone committed a prison offence on the "balance of probabilities", but several apply this standard only to minor offences and the higher standard to major ones.

Punishments for prison offences also vary across Australia.

In NSW, privileges such as visitation and access to buy-up and phone calls can be withdrawn for up to 56 days or up to 6 months if the offence involves a mobile phone.

In Victoria, privileges can be removed for 14 days or a maximum of 30 days for multiple offences, while in Queensland the penalty can be up to 24 hours for minor offences and up to 7 days for a major offence.

Punishment sentences are by far the longest in the ACT, where privileges can be removed for up to 180 days.

The independent advice provided to the NSW Government and written by Simeon Beckett SC and Dev Bhutani, from Maurice Byers Chambers, recommended changes to the prison discipline process to "promote fairness and just outcomes for prisoners" and the "just, efficient and quick operation of the disciplinary process".

It recommended that the higher bar of "beyond reasonable doubt" remain for prison offences deemed to be "major".

"Our view is that, because correctional centre offending is considered as part of the parole purpose and may have the effect of prolonging a period of imprisonment, the higher standard of proof should apply for a major offence," the advice said.

The state government did not agree to this recommendation and has instead introduced legislation to NSW parliament lowering the bar to find someone guilty of any prison offence.

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Delivering Christmas Cheer Behind Bars

The organisation providing a Christmas hamper to women in Victorian prisons

By Denham Sadler



Volunteers packing hampers to deliver to Victoria's women's prisons before Christmas (Source: Prison Network)

Every year in early December, a group of volunteers come together to pack a hamper for every woman in prison in Victoria.

The group, organised by the Prison Network, carefully arrange items such as shampoo, notepads, colouring-in books and herbal teas in boxes that will be hand-delivered to the women at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison before Christmas Day.

Thanks to the volunteers and donations from the community, the group makes sure that every woman inside in Victoria receives some Christmas cheer.

More importantly, Prison Network CEO Amelia Pickering said it is about showing the people in prison that people in the community care.

"It's such a small token, but the feedback we do get from women inside is that it really matters and they feel seen – that makes it absolutely worth it," Pickering told About Time.

The volunteers also make sure there's a handwritten note included in each hamper, saying something like: "I don't know you but I'm thinking of you and rooting for you."

The Prison Network has operated for nearly 80 years and first visited women held at the notorious Pentridge Prison. It has been delivering the hampers to women in prison for more than 20 years.

Before the COVID pandemic, this involved packing and delivering more than 700 hampers in Victoria.

This year, this number will be about 400.

The Prison Network attends the two women's prisons in Victoria before Christmas Day to distribute the hampers. They also leave about 20 extra hampers for women who come into the prisons in the days following Christmas.

The content of the hampers is guided by the Prison Network's Lived Experience Advisory Panel, which advises on what those on the inside may need or want.

"We try to get things that are not easily accessible for the women," Pickering said.

"Something for the body and something to keep them occupied so they can have a little escape and a moment of feeling like they're not in jail, with a nice cup of herbal tea."

This year's hampers will include shampoos, conditioners and hand creams.

"Everything inside is very bland and doesn't have much smell, so there's always something that smells good [in the hamper]," Pickering said.

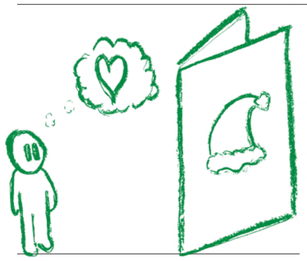
They also always include herbal teas and coffee sachets, Tim Tams, chocolates, notebooks, pens, colouring-in books and crossword books.

In recent years, the hampers have also included calendars featuring artwork by people in prison or those with lived experience of incarceration, along with popular recipes for on the inside.

The main idea behind the hampers is to make sure people in prison know that those in the community are thinking of them and trying to make life a little better for them.

"Even though it must feel incredibly lonely and difficult and it's just a small thing, even though you may not be able to always see it, there is a group of people out here on the outside doing absolutely everything we can to shift and change things and make things better for you, and you are seen," Pickering said.

"While we're celebrating Christmas on the outside, you're in our hearts and minds."



Christmas Cards in Solidarity

By Daniel Vansetten

Daniel Vansetten spent nearly 12 years in prison and has since gone on to study a Bachelor of Laws. He uses his lived experience and study to advocate for the rights of people subjected to the criminal legal system.

Nothing warms my heart more than the selflessness of good people doing good deeds for our sisters and brothers in prison. I was especially pleased to be invited by Tabitha Lean to join her community initiative with Tess Cunningham to make and send Christmas cards to people in South Australian prisons.

We are thinking about you. We stand by you in solidarity. That's the message that this initiative intends to send to recipients of these cards.

When I asked Tabitha how the project began, she explained that it started as a way to create connection, to give people on the outside a way to show solidarity with those on the inside and to offer an act of community care during a time that can feel especially isolating.

"We want people inside to know there's always someone waiting for them on the outside – a whole community who cares," she said.

Tabitha goes on to explain what inspires her to do this work: "Liberation. I'm focused on freedom for all of us, on ending incarceration and on building a world where people are held in care, safety and abundance instead." By this, she means a world where everyone's needs are met, where people are supported, not punished, and where communities have what they need to thrive rather than just survive.

Prior to my imprisonment, I had not heard about the Abolition Movement. In simple terms, the movement seeks to end the reliance on authority, punishment and prisons to address issues within our communities.

My conversations with Tabitha have taught me that abolition is a practice of community, by showing up for one another with care and accountability. It is not about charity or profit but about solidarity. Abolitionists do not exploit the vulnerability of incarcerated people or turn to the state to mediate conflicts. Instead, they work to resolve harm collectively, holding each other accountable with compassion.

The Christmas card initiative is one of many great projects undertaken by the South Australia Abolition Movement. The initiative has brought people from many areas of our community together to make cards, yarn with each other, strengthen bonds and, most importantly, show solidarity and love to those in prison over the Christmas period.



WA

Smoking to be banned in prisons
All prisons in Western Australia will be smoke free by the end of next year, with the state government to introduce a phased tobacco ban for inmates, staff, contractors and visitors.

Western Australia is currently the only state or territory in Australia to still allow smoking in its prisons.

The ban has already been introduced in women's prisons in the state and will be rolled out next year in men's and regional facilities.

Corrective Services Commissioner Brad Royce said the ban will be introduced in a "cautious, considered and collaborative way with a focus on safety and security" and that those in prison will be offered help from health staff to quit smoking, have access to cheaper nicotine products and be able to call Quitline for tips and advice.

Mass staff shortages in non-custodial roles
A new report by the state's prison inspector has found significant staffing shortages in non-custodial roles such as nurses, doctors and rehabilitation workers.

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) annual report found that there were long-running shortages in health, mental health, rehabilitation and reintegration and that these were leading to delays in people in prison getting help.

The report found that more than 220 extra nurses are needed in the Western Australian prison system, along with 15 more doctors, five more psychiatrists and 29 more prison support officers.

"Shortages in non-custodial staffing need to be addressed sooner rather than later," Inspector of Custodial Services Eamon Ryan said in the report.

"Without comprehensive reform and sustained investment, the department risks continued service shortfalls that compromise the wellbeing, rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes for people in custody."

"This means people will stay in prison for longer and come out no better than when they went in, driving up the size of the prison population and not making communities any safer."

The department has convened the Clinical Shortages Workforce Group to try to address these shortages, with an aim to make it an employer of choice.

The OICS acknowledged that some promising strategies have been introduced to tackle this problem but said that "more robust retention measures and competitive incentives are urgently needed".



TAS

Tasmanian prisons the most locked down in Australia
People in prison in Tasmania are getting the least time out of their cells out of any state or territory in the country, according to the Office of the Custodial Inspector's annual report.

The report said that the most common complaint to the inspector was with regard to inadequate time out of cells and that this issue was the worst it has been since the office started reporting on it.

In the 2023–24 financial year, people in prison in Tasmania received an average of 7.5 hours out of their cells per day, the lowest of any jurisdiction.

The issue is the worst in Risdon Prison's max units, where incarcerated people spend an average of just 2.8 hours out of cells – 5.5 hours less than what is planned. Those in Risdon's medium units have an average of 3.4 hours out of cells, while those incarcerated at the Southern Remand Centre get 3.9 hours. At Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison it is 7.2 hours, which is still over 2 hours less than what they are meant to get.

"Lockdowns are consistently, and understandably, the issue most often raised with us during monitoring visits," the inspector's report said.

"Lockdowns negatively impact people in custody's mental and physical health – issues which will affect health services in the community."

Death in custody at Mary Hutchinson
A First Nations woman has died in custody at Mary Hutchinson Women's Prison in Tasmania after experiencing a "serious medical episode".

The woman was transferred to Royal Hobart Hospital in late October but passed away the following day.

Tasmanian Aboriginal Legal Service (TALS) CEO Jake Smith said her death will "profoundly impact" her family and community.

"TALS stands ready to support the family and community during this difficult time," Smith said.

"It is with great sadness that we have seen an Aboriginal death in custody here in Tasmania."

The death has been referred to the coroner for investigation.



NSW

Aboriginal health services to be provided at Wellington prison
Culturally safe, Aboriginal-led healthcare services will be provided to women at the Wellington Correctional Centre and to incarcerated First Nations men for the first time, under a partnership between Justice Health NSW and Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service (WACHS).

WACHS will be delivering "trauma-informed, culturally safe healthcare to Aboriginal patients in custody in the state's Central West", as part of an in-reach model based on the Justice Our Way program.

This will see local Aboriginal community-based health services working with First Nations people in the Wellington prison and those transitioning to the community.

The Justice Our Way program launched in 2014 to address a "critical gap in support for Aboriginal people transitioning out of the justice system" and is currently delivered in Dillwynia and Silverwater prisons.

In July this year the program was expanded to First Nations women at the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre under a partnership with Durri Aboriginal Corporation Medical Service.

Review launched into inmate classifications
A review has been launched into inmate classifications in NSW prisons.

These security ratings – maximum, medium or minimum – determine where someone is placed in a prison and what conditions they are managed under.

It is determined by the seriousness of someone's offence, the length of their sentence, their attitude and conduct in prison and programs completed while incarcerated.

Currently, an inmate's classification should be reviewed at least once a year by Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) or if they are involved in a serious incident.

The NSW Minister for Corrections has ordered CSNSW to review the effectiveness of the inmate classification system and case management processes, with an aim to "ensure an inmate's record of behaviour in custody carries appropriate weight when decisions are being made about an inmate's classification".

As part of the review, CSNSW will consult with prison staff, the Public Service Association and other stakeholders.

The NSW Government said the review is part of efforts to improve safety within prisons and comes after a strike by prison officers around the state in protest of a court's decision to not extend the sentence of a man found guilty of assaulting four prison officers earlier this year.

The strikes plunged prisons around the state into lockdowns in late October and saw thousands of prison officers walk off the job.

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QLD

Painkiller trial hailed as a success
A study into a trial involving painkillers being available in prison buy-ups in Queensland has reported positive results, with this access "affirming agency, dignity and self-reliance".

A trial was conducted at a regional Queensland prison allowing inmates to purchase over-the-counter medications – paracetamol and ibuprofen – from the prison store, rather than having to obtain them from prison doctors or nurses.

Packs of 10 were available at the buy-up for $1 each, available weekly in the women's prison and fortnightly in the men's.

More than 9,300 packers were purchased during the trial, equalling 9.5 packets per person in both prisons, or less than one packet per person per month.

Women in the trial bought about 20 packets per year, while men purchased 7.5.

Nearly 80 per cent of the women involved said it was a good idea, and three-quarters of the men agreed.

Participants said that having access to these painkillers provided peace of mind, allowed them to proactively manage pain and gave back some "self-reliance, control and power".

"If you are old enough to go to jail, you are old enough to take Panadol," one person said.

The writers of the report said that the findings show that people in prison "view themselves as capable decision-makers, knowledgeable of the risks and deserving of trust to manage over-the-counter medications".

"A growing body of evidence encourages a paradigm shift toward recognising prisoners as trustworthy and capable agents in managing their own healthcare and underscores the value of providing equivalent healthcare in prisons," they said.

Calls to end use of spit hoods in QLD
A coroner has recommended that the Queensland Government "consider" whether it needs to continue using spit hoods in prisons, following an inquest into the death of 44-year-old woman Selesa Tafaifa at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre in 2021.

The family of Tafaifa have called for spit hoods to be banned since her death, but the coroner stopped short of making this recommendation, saying there was limited evidence that the use of a spit hood contributed to her death.

However, the coroner did point to several other states having banned the use of spit hoods.

"The fact that other jurisdictions have ceased the use of safety hoods is a basis upon which, if it has not already occurred, Queensland Corrective Services should consider whether its operational needs require the devices to continue to be used," the coroner said.

Spit hoods can be used in prisons in Queensland and Western Australia but are banned in the ACT and South Australia and are also not used in New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.



VIC

Government promises 'Adult Crime, Adult Time' laws
Children as young as 14 years old found to have committed certain serious crimes will potentially receive a life sentence under new laws promised by the Victorian Government.

The Adult Crime, Adult Time reforms will mean that courts treat children accused of crimes such as home invasion, aggravated carjacking and armed robbery as adults, and their cases will be heard in the County Court rather than the Children's Court.

Currently, the maximum jail sentence the Children's Court can impose is 3 years, but the County Court can impose a prison sentence of up to 25 years for aggravated home invasion and carjacking and up to 20 years for intentionally causing serious injury through gross violence.

The Victorian Government has also said it plans to remove the rule that jail is the "last resort" for children and require judges to "clearly prioritise community safety" when making sentencing decisions.

A bill introducing the new regime will be introduced to state parliament this year, with plans for it to be in place from next year.

A number of legal and human rights organisations have criticised the announcement.

The Victorian Government also recently announced that the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre will reopen next year, just 2 years after it was shut down by the state government following a number of incidents.

The Malsbury centre will open with 30 beds at first under a "new model", which will see lower risk children aged 17 years and over incarcerated there and provided a "more intensive program of education, vocational training and job opportunities".

Under recent changes to the Youth Justice Act, rehabilitation programs can now be offered to children on remand, rather than just those who have been sentenced.

Work has already begun to upgrade the site, and it is expected to be reopened early next year, with more than 100 staff needing to be recruited.

Cafe opens at MRC visitor area
A new cafe has officially opened at the Metropolitan Remand Centre visitor area.

The One3Four cafe opened in early November and will operate from 9.30 am to 2.30 pm every day of the week apart from Tuesdays.

It will allow visitors to the prison to buy and share food and drinks with whomever they are visiting in the prison, with the menu including coffee, hot chocolate, milkshakes, meat pies, sausage rolls, ham and cheese toasties and apple turnovers.

Only visitors will be allowed to order food, and this must be done within the first 10 minutes of a visit starting.



SA

Multiple serious assaults in SA prison
There have been two serious alleged assaults in South Australian prisons in the space of a few weeks.

A corrections officer and an incarcerated person were taken to hospital after an incident at Adelaide Women's Prison in late October.

Just weeks later, an incarcerated person was taken to hospital following an alleged attack by nine other inmates at the Yatala Labour Prison.

A spokesperson for the state government said this inmate has since been discharged from hospital and is back in the prison.

The incidents are now under investigation by South Australia Police.

South Australian Attorney-General Kyam Maher said the incidents would be properly investigated.

"I do know that, when there are incidents that occur in our prison system, they are properly and thoroughly investigated and people are held to account for what they do, like they are outside the prison system," Maher said.



NT

Rehabilitation programs regularly cancelled
Programs for people in prison in the Northern Territory are being cancelled more often than they are actually running, new data has revealed.

According to Northern Territory corrections data, in the 6 months to March this year, 10 of 11 scheduled drug and alcohol sessions were cancelled, five out of every six Safe Sober Strong sessions were canned and 34 of 46 scheduled psych-educational programs did not run due to lockdowns.

The majority of rehabilitation programs in the Territory are being cancelled more than 60 per cent of the time, as the prison population reaches record highs.

Medical experts raise concerns about conditions
Medical experts have raised significant concerns about conditions in prisons in the Northern Territory due to overcrowding and a lack of medical staff.

The coronial inquest into the death of Wayne Hunt at Darwin Correctional Centre in August last year recently heard from a prison doctor, who highlighted a lack of medical staff in prisons in the Territory.

The doctor said that a recent increase in the number of people in prison and a shortage of prison officers had made prisons across the Territory less safe.

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Experiences

Christmas in Prison: Good Friends and Grape Juice



By Stacey Stokes

Stacey Stokes is a transgender girl who had a 10 and a half year sentence in a men's prison. She has an undergraduate in creative writing and has recently been published extensively, most notably in *Nothing to Hide: Voices of Trans and Gender Diverse Australia*, which was published and distributed internationally by Allen & Unwin. Stacey was a recipient of the 2025 Varuna Trans and Gender Diverse Fellowship to develop her manuscript, *My World*.

Continued from page 1.

But, in prison, I made friends. Good friends. Dear friends. People I can honestly say I loved and respected. We'd sit around on Christmas and eat roast ham and potatoes, sipping grape juice, like one of those families on TV that actually like each other.

Then came parole, and I sat at home, alone on my first Christmas out. Mum and Nan were sick at the time. I got a phone call from my friends back in prison saying, "We're having a big cook up. Merry Christmas. We love you!" Then the 15-minute, 9-dollar phone call ended, and I sat in my silent house again. It happens to so many of us. Your partner has left you, or the kids won't speak to you. What do you do now that you don't belong anymore?

All sorts of things run through your head. Toxic thoughts. Bad thoughts. I can't list them here as I don't think it'd be helpful. It may even be triggering. But one thought that nagged at me – why am I bothering with parole? I'm all alone ...

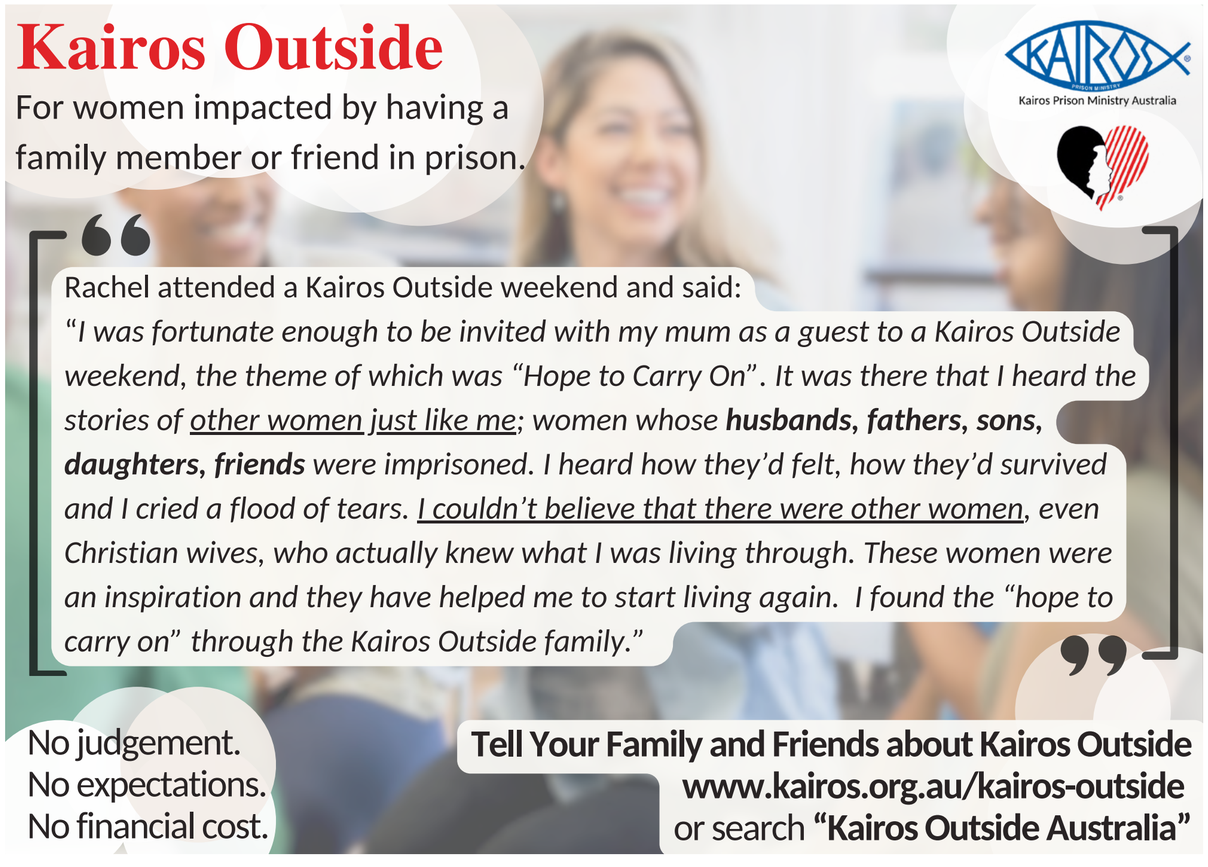
I cooked my sick Nan lunch and sat with her for a while. She passed away shortly after ... not from my cooking – the doctor was very clear on that! But her passing left me even more alone. The silence got so oppressive. It was so silent it was loud, if that makes sense.

But, because I had my beautiful Christmas in jail, I learnt something special: that no matter how bad things are I can still find something that makes me happy, that even behind stone walls and razor wire, piss tests and cell searches I was still happy with my little prison family gathered around on Christmas.

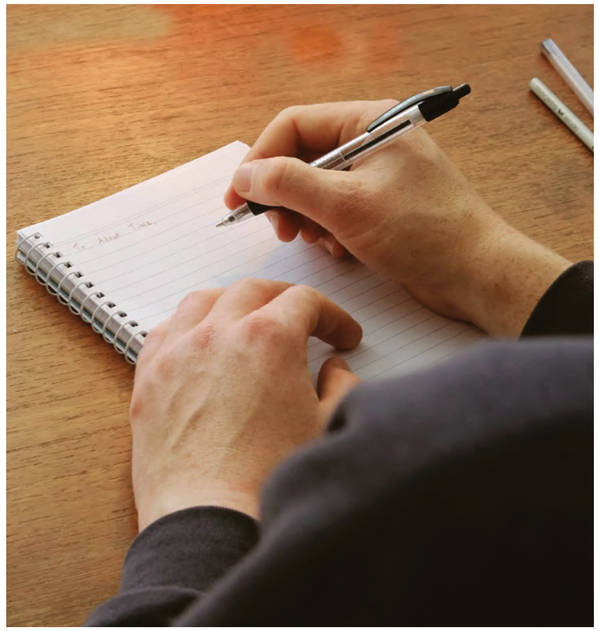
Now I take strength in thoughts like that.

No matter how lonely I get, how hard they make the rules for me to follow, I try to find happiness somewhere in it. It's a lesson I have taken to heart. A Christmas miracle!

I'm so grateful for memories like that, because things can be tough when you're all alone and rebuilding your life from a smoking ruin. But now, a few Christmases later, I'm not alone. I will spend Christmas with people who care about me and love me. I'm so glad I could make it to this point. And I'm sure you will too, guys. Merry Christmas.



Imagine That ... Miss Evans!



Willy Pleasance

In all the years I've been on this earth, I would have never imagined that I, a person who failed English in school, is now writing newspaper articles and publishing a book! Look at me now, Miss Evans!

By Ronin Cruise

Ronin Cruise, based in Queensland, has spent a significant portion of his life in prison. He wrote a book during his recent time called *Pri-Zen* and considers writing and sharing his story a key driver in staying clean and out of prison.

I had repeated this phrase to people so many times to emphasise how incredibly unbelievable it is that I failed English and am now going to be a published author.

This Miss Evans ... we had some beef. She was my high school English teacher, and the subject I hated the most at school was English. I didn't understand why it was so important to fluff up writing to reach a thousand words to be able to explain your stories or philosophy.

I skipped as many English classes as I possibly could. I never handed in an assignment once and, in my entire life, I had never read a book.

I was so stubborn and challenged everything Miss Evans said, getting kicked out of her class constantly.

Back to the present day, and I was cruising through a city of creative, open-minded peoples at Earth Frequency. It's a festival that goes for five days and is full of music, art, food, teaching, learning but, most importantly, healing. I had just spotted a bunch of kids sussing me out. So I jumped in the air, landed a funky dance move and watched them explode in smiles and laughter. As I landed, I locked eyes with a lady sitting down staring at me, her grey-tinged hair wearing a hat covered with a sunflower print.

She locked eyes with me and said, "Daniel?" in such a formal way that I remembered exactly who she was.

But there we were ... locking eyes in the middle of this bush doof, artists of different crafts reunited after 20 years ... Miss Evans!

I was in awe, in such amazement and disbelief, I had to sit down and tell her my story.

I told her how, a couple of months after my first stint in prison, I was placed in a cell by myself with no TV for a week. The librarian walked past with his rickety old cart with a bunch of novels. I'd never read more than a couple of pages of any book in my entire life, but out of boredom I picked up the book Breathless by Dean Koontz.

I was 21 at the time. My god, how beautiful and captivating a story could be written. I was hooked and finished the entire book in 2 days.

From that point forward, mostly while I was in prison, I trained in the art of reading and learning.

Not being attached to one genre or story or religion, I became more open and understanding of how people can write in a way that can impact the lives of so many for an eternity.

Imagine that, and there she was, in the middle of this hippie festival after all these years.

I told her that I've come to appreciate the importance of being able to study, of letting go of arrogance and being able to express yourself through the art of the written word.

We talked about the art of storytelling and just how much of an impact on anyone's life it can have, how it can change the hearts of the lost. To be someone who not only reads but absorbs knowledge, stories, ideas – melting all into a discipline in which you can create a way of life.

Miss Evans and I – we laughed, we cried and, despite the beef we had, we gave each other a long powerful hug of respect and understanding.

I know a lot of people would think, "It's just a rave." It's not just a rave! Matter of fact, I hate that word – it makes people think that it's just a place where people get wasted and just party and dance. But it's so much more than that. These events, these moments – they are sacred, powerful and life changing. They make us remember who we are and give us a safe space to be that person around a collection of people, a community who deserve freedom and truly appreciate a life worth living. And don't even get me started about the spark of creativity you get from being around thousands of other artists!

Before this doof, I was lost, a moment away from destruction. But all those moments I shared there showed the beauty of being outside of prison. It was medicine in its highest form. And being in a comfortable system of work, gym, home, repeat is so numbing. Expand a bit, you'd be surprised how much you could learn. I avoided reading and writing growing up, but imagine that – I'm writing literature that could possibly be captivating you at this moment. Not to mention that, if I never came to this place and practised breath work and meditations, I would have never survived an accident days later where my artery was severely severed. That's a story for another time though.

So this is my advice to you: find these spaces and figure it out. There is knowledge if you are willing to be open enough and let go of your attachments to the world for a minute. Go to connect, not disconnect. Pay your respects to ancestors, family and teachers that have passed through your lives ... even your version of Miss Evans!

I hope you find peace and freedom. Good luck on your journey.

Don't talk about it, be about it.



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They Killed Joe



Ike Curtis

Who's gonna make the gravy now? I bet it won't taste the same

By Tabitha Lean

Tabitha is a formerly incarcerated woman, having served time in Adelaide Women's Prison and Adelaide Pre Release Centre, as well as time on home detention. She is now a member of the National Network of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls, a collective that advocates for liberation, not punishment.

The day I got out of prison, I walked through those gates with a clear plastic bag full of scrappy paperwork, clothes hanging off me. I shuffled across the carpark to where my son was waiting, elbow resting on the car window, a gentle breeze cooling the warm day. My shackle clanged clumsily against my ankle bone with every step. I'd been approved for home detention – it was not quite freedom, but the air still smelt sweeter outside the razor wire. I threw my bag in the back, climbed in and exhaled for what felt like the first time in almost 2 years. This moment had been a long time coming. My son smiled and started the car.

I put the window down, and the wind rushed through my hair, and, as if by magical happenstance, *How to Make Gravy* came on the radio. His voice rolled out like it was coming from someone familiar, telling the story of Joe, writing home from prison before Christmas. Joe spoke of all the people he loved, naming them one by one, imagining the Christmas table without him there, the food, the music, the kids running around. It's so ordinary, but that's the cruelty: the ordinariness you're locked out of and kept away from. And, underneath every verse, you can hear the ache of someone marking time: counting the days already stolen, measuring the distance still to go, rehearsing every absence in their head while trying to pretend they're not.

I felt the heaviness of that ache and the buzz of excitement all at once. I was heading home, not for Christmas but for good. In that moment, that song became my soundtrack to freedom, my reminder of going home, of fighting to be with my kids again.

Every time I heard it since that date, I thought about the letter I never wrote, the family scenes I replayed while pacing the yard, the smell of food cooking in a kitchen I couldn't reach and the kids growing up and doing life, while I was not beside them.

But coming home wasn't all unicorns and rainbows. When you're inside, you think the answer to all your problems is just walking through that gate. But I came home to nothing. No job, no belongings, no money ... nothing but the oversized clothes on my back and a garbage bag full of useless papers.

On reflection, in some ways, those early days of my re-entry were the best of times and, in other ways, the hardest. Thin second-hand mattresses on the lounge-room floor. Watching old SpongeBob DVDs on repeat because that's all we had. Simple dinners from whatever we could get at Foodbank – pasta with nothing but sauce, rice stretched to fill every plate. Trying to catch up on the months and years I'd missed and working out where I fit into my kids' lives now.

And, all the while, living under another kind of captivity. My home detention conditions meant I couldn't take my daughter to the playground. Couldn't walk her to school. Couldn't even pop down to the shop for milk. I was "free" but not allowed to live like it. The walls had followed me home.

Inside, I used to think about freedom a lot – I mean, we all do, right? We dream about the outside, about all the good things that aren't allowed in. But I also thought a lot about captivity. Not just the big obvious things but the small daily rituals of being caged.

I'd watch the women circle the prison yard over and over and over again, the same loop every day, wearing out the dirt under their shoes like lions pacing in the zoo. Their faces blank, but their bodies restless, trapped in motion with nowhere to go. It wasn't exercise; it was survival, a way of pushing back the madness of stillness, of concrete and razor wire closing in.

Every part of the system feels inhumane. Being called by your prison number instead of your name. Lights that never go fully dark, so even sleep belongs to someone else. The sound of keys and boots in the corridor that remind you, every minute of every day, that you are always watched, never alone, never safe.

And then Paul Kelly killed Joe.

Nestled on page 33 of the newspaper *The Age*, the notice read like any other obituary: Paul Kelly had published a death notice for "Joe" – the guy in prison from his 1996 song *How to Make Gravy* – saying he'd died of "sudden misadventure".

When I read that, I sat for a long while thinking, "Did Joe ever make it home? Or was he like so many of our mob who never get to walk out of those gates?" Because, in this country, Aboriginal people don't just "do time"; too many of us don't make it home. Some lose their lives inside, others lose their hope, and, either way, it's a kind of ending.

Inside, when we were feeling low, the women would say, "Don't worry, love, they can't keep you here forever." They said it with good intentions, but it wasn't actually true. Some people (too many people) never make it home. Sometimes through circumstance, sometimes through despair, sometimes through the slow erasure that captivity brings.

Now when I hear *How to Make Gravy* I don't just hear my freedom moment. I think about Joe. I don't care what crime he committed. I just want to know – did he make it home to his wife, Rita? Did he get his moment, lying on a mattress with the kids, watching DVDs, yarning about old times? Or was Joe, like too many others, a story left unfinished, a reminder of how hard it can be to find your way home once the system has taken hold of you?

Because here's the truth: prisons take more than time.

They take families, futures and the chance of a moment like mine. And, in this country, it is still mostly Aboriginal people, my brothers, sisters, aunties, uncles, who are held the longest and who face the hardest road home.

So, when they killed Joe, even if he was only a song, it stayed with me, because every Joe I've known deserved to make it home.

Reintegration

Preparing for Employment While Inside

By John Kotsifas

John Kostifas is a member of the Australian Community Support Organisation's (ACSO) Lived Experience Advisory Panel, and this article was written with the support and input of ACSO.

Finding purpose after prison

When I left prison, one of the hardest challenges I faced was finding work.

At first, it felt like nobody wanted to give me a chance. But, eventually, one employer took a chance on me. That warehouse job may not have looked like much to others, but to me it was everything: it gave me purpose, structure and, most of all, hope.

I have often said that finding work didn't just give me a wage; it gave me self-esteem, self-worth and the feeling that I was accepted back into the community. For the first time in years, holding down a job made me feel like I belonged.

This is a story that's common to so many people transitioning back into the community after spending time inside. As one colleague put it: "Work gave me a reason not to go backwards. It gave me a reason to stay clean. It gave me a future."

Despite all this, it can be very difficult for people leaving prison to find work. That's why I believe preparing for work should begin inside prison.

Barriers to work after prison

As I'm sure some of you already know, there are many obstacles to getting work after prison. Inside prison, access to training and education is often limited or outdated. There are also many things that need to be worked out before release. These include:

- getting ID, tax file numbers and bank accounts
- stable housing (of course!)
- mental health
- debt
- transport to help get to interviews and work.

Some prisons have financial counsellors that visit the prison and help with these things, especially debt, ID, tax and bank accounts. Ask someone at your prison if financial counsellors are available for you to talk to. There's nowhere near enough counsellors to go round, but maybe your prison have them on offer. This will help a lot when trying to work on release.

Work should start while inside prisons

Finding work must begin inside prisons. Governments and organisations should:

- invest in real training that prepares people for jobs in industries that need workers
- create connections between people in prison and willing employers
- support social enterprises that hire and mentor people post-release
- provide wraparound support, housing, transport, mental health and mentoring.

Without these programs and supports, even the best intentions can fall apart.

Apprenticeships inside prisons?

In a recent proposal, I suggested introducing accredited apprenticeships inside selected Victorian prisons. Prisoners could train in trades like construction, logistics, horticulture or plumbing while still inside.

Time served would count toward qualifications, and structured support would continue post-release. This approach helps people leave prison not just as "former prisoners" but as apprentices, workers and professionals with a future identity.

Prisons across Australia offer different pathways for employment and education. What is available will depend on where you are located. The best way to find out what opportunities are available is to speak with your corrections officers. While your options might be limited, I encourage you to make the most of what is available. Programs like this are often voluntary, so it is up to you whether you get involved. The more you prepare while you're inside, the more ready you will be when the time comes to reintegrate into the community.

In addition to speaking to your corrections officer, speak to your employment pathways representative if one is available at your location.

Success stories: Fruit2Work and ACSO

In Victoria, Fruit2Work and ACSO prove that employment and support services can transform lives. I know this because I've seen the way they've transformed my own life and I've seen the positive impact they've had on the people I work with.

Fruit2Work employs people with lived experience of the justice system in warehousing, driving and operations. Their Transition 2 Change program combines real jobs with mentoring and peer support. Remarkably, none of their participants have reoffended.

ACSO, an organisation founded by a man who had been through the criminal justice system himself, provides wraparound support: mental health supports, alcohol and other drug services, forensic disability supports, specialised residential supports and reintegration programs. Their trauma-informed approach ensures people are supported across their whole journey from custody to community.

Together, these two organisations prove what's possible. When employment and support are both available to people leaving prison, reintegration has a far better chance of succeeding.

As one colleague told me: "Fruit2Work gave me more than a job. I finally feel like I belong and I'm proud of who I'm becoming."

A final message

To people inside: You are not your worst mistake. Every step you take now, every course, everything you do to prepare now, will help you build a future worth fighting for.

To people outside: Make policies and partnerships that encourage second chances for people. People leaving prison need employment opportunities – this is the foundation of reintegration.

It is time to start building systems that make second chances real. It's a chance to build a meaningful life.



Have a Question?

We want to help prepare you for the outside.

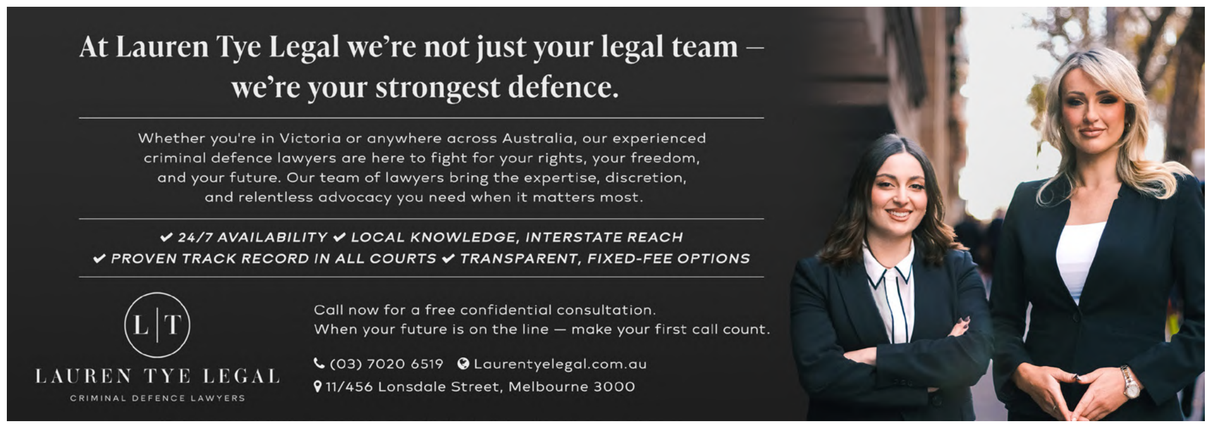
What questions do you have about leaving prison? Write to us and we'll try get them answered!

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



Legal Corner

Explainer of Prison Offence Laws

By About Time



This is legal information and not advice.

There are major differences between how offences in prisons are dealt with around Australia. These offences typically range from minor ones, such as keeping an untidy cell, to more serious ones and others that can become criminal charges.

For non-criminal prison offences, the rules for how these are investigated and dealt with are outlined in the various state and territory corrections acts.

These state what type of actions are considered prison offences, who is responsible for investigating whether one has been committed, what burden of proof that it happened must be reached, what punishments can be imposed and whether it is possible to review one of these decisions.

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	ACT	NT	TAS
Type of offences	No split between minor and major ones	Disciplinary and hearing officers able to treat an offence as trivial (minor) or major.	Divided into minor and major offences	Divided into minor and aggravated offences	Divided into minor breaches and major ones	Not split up	Not split up	Not split up
Who makes the decision?	The governor of the correctional centre	A prison officer nominated to be the disciplinary officer	For minor offences, a corrective services officer For major offences, a corrective services officer who holds a more senior position than the one who brought the charge	The superintendent can decide minor prison offences A visiting justice decides the aggravated offences charges	Person holding or acting in the position of chief executive of the department Can also be referred to a visiting tribunal for hearing and determination	A corrections officer to whom the director-general has given functions of an investigator	The general manager of the custodial correctional facility or a correctional officer nominated by the general manager	Disciplinary officer – can be a correctional officer
Burden of proof required	Currently – satisfied beyond reasonable doubt, but has proposed to change this to "on the balance of probabilities"	Reasonable satisfaction	Balance of probabilities for minor offences Beyond reasonable doubt for major offences	Must "find the charge proved"	"Satisfied beyond reasonable doubt"	"Balance of probabilities"	"Balance of probabilities"	"Satisfied that the prisoner or detainee has committed the offence"
What review options are available?	Inmate can apply to commissioner for a review of the decision	No appeal process	A review can be requested conducted by a more senior officer than the deciding officer, must say this immediately after being told of the decision		Can apply to a visiting tribunal against any penalty imposed by a corrections officer Can appeal against decision of visiting tribunal on grounds proceedings were not conducted in accordance with the provisions of the act	Can apply to the director-general for a review of a decision by a presiding officer	Can apply to the commissioner for a review of the decision within 3 days of given written notice of the decision	Can appeal to the director against a decision by a disciplinary officer up to 3 days after a decision made
What punishments can be enforced?	Reprimand and caution, withdrawal of privileges for up to 56 days, confinement to cell for up to 7 days, cancellation of any right to receive payments for up to 14 days	Reprimand, withdrawal of privileges for less than 14 days A fine of up to one penalty unit (currently $203.51)	Reprimand, withdrawal of privileges For a minor offence – 24 hours For a major offence – 7 days Separate confinement	For minor offences: caution, reprimand, cancellation of gratuities for a period not exceeding 14 days, confinement to cell for not more than 72 hours For aggravated offences determined by court of summary jurisdiction: imprisonment for a term no longer than 6 months, a fine of $300, separate confinement in a "punishment cell" for no longer than 28 days	Forfeiture of a sum payable from money held by corrections or any allowance to be paid to the inmate, withdrawal of privileges for no longer than 35 days, exclusion from any work that is performed in association with other prisoners for no longer than 21 days If decided by a visiting tribunal: • A fine • Withdrawal of privileges for up to 2 months • Exclusion from work for 28 days	Warning, reprimand, administrative penalty, direction • Financial penalty up to $500 • Withdrawal of privileges for up to 180 days • Perform extra work • Separate confinement for 3 days, 7 days, 28 days	Reprimand, be separated from other people in prison for up to 7 days, withdrawal privileges for up to 28 days, reduced rate of pay for work for up to 28 days, order not allowed to take part in work for 28 days	Reprimand, withdraw privileges for up to 14 days, confinement to cell for up to 48 hours If charged and then found guilty of an offence: • Withdrawal of privileges for up to 90 days for contact visits and 30 days for others • Separation from other prisoners for up to 30 days • Deduction from any prison allowance paid to repair any damage caused • Loss of remission

Health

Brett's Story: It's Never Too Late to Get Treated



By Brett

Brett was previously incarcerated in QLD.

For a long time, I thought hepatitis C (hep C) was just something I'd have to live with. But it doesn't have to be that way.

After years of being in and out of prison, being re-infected multiple times and fighting through all sorts of barriers to access treatment, I'm now cured and stronger than ever.

I was probably in my early to mid 20s when I first found out I had hep C. Back then, there was nothing around to help. It was just something bad to have.

People would say, "You're going to lose 20 years of your life." It was scary. Then more and more people started talking about it. Treatment with interferon came out, and some of the long-termers in prison were put on it. Some of them were feeling sick. It was really hard on them. They said it was how they imagined having chemo.

Even though I tried to look after myself, trained, ate well and kept active, by my 30s I started feeling tired all the time. At first, I thought it was just the heat, but then I realised it was probably the hep C.

I wasn't given much information about the virus early on. It wasn't until I was encouraged to do a routine blood test when I came back into prison that I took the first real step towards treatment. When you come in, they ask if you want bloods done. I said, "Yeah, alright. Test for everything." My results came back positive for hep C. Everything else was fine. They just said, "It can be bad in the long run."

When the current DAA tablet treatments became available, everything started to change. In 2017, I found out about the tablets while I was inside. When I got out, I went to my regular doctor. I was rapt. He gave me heaps of insight about the DAA treatment and told me there were barely any side effects for most people, nothing like the old interferon.

But then I relapsed, started using again, went back to prison and got hep C again. I started getting sharp pains in my liver and kidney area, always tired. I was putting in a lot of request forms for help.

Then I found support from a familiar face, a nurse who had known me since I was a teenager. She had become one of the hep C nurses. She really cared about people and put me down on the list to get the bloods done and started me on medication. She looked out for me. That made all the difference.

When I got out again, I went to a clinic at a community corrections centre to get tested and treated for hep C. They told me my liver was inflamed and it would only get worse if I didn't do something. My liver is doing much better now and my levels have gone down. I used to get pains in my back and liver, and now that's all settled.

The people at the clinic were amazing. They explained everything – what can happen, what treatment does and what the end result looks like.

They had cultural awareness and mental health awareness. They didn't pressure me or talk down to me. That means a lot, especially for people who've been inside. We don't really trust anyone. Before community corrections, I didn't trust anyone.

It's all connected, my body, my mind, my energy. Since being treated, I can get up in the morning without feeling broken down.

It's amazing what they're doing, and everyone is so nice. They gave me the option to get rid of something that'd been weighing me down for years.

These days, I tell other people to go to medical, put in a request and get tested and treated for hep C if you and medical decide that's right for you. Just go in and get the test done.

After more than a decade living with hep C, I'm finally free of it and hopeful about what's next.

Hep C is curable. Treatment is simple and it works for almost everyone. If you think you might have it, or know you do, put in a request to get a blood test at medical.

Get tested. Get treated. It could change your life.

All the pieces of the puzzle finally came together for me. After treatment, I get up earlier in the morning and I feel like having breakfast – and it's only getting better from here.

It's never too late to get treated. It turned my whole life around.

Brett

Developed by Hepatitis Queensland, the Queensland peak community hepatitis organisation providing support and information for people impacted by hepatitis and liver disease. For more information or to contact Hepatitis Queensland please call 1800 437 753 or visit www.hepqld.asn.au

People in corrections centres can also request a Hepatitis Queensland info pack which includes a boredom busting activity book, colouring pencils and a deck of cards using the reply-paid postcards in Queensland corrections centres or via the OHO.

Call HepLink (1800 437 222) for hepatitis information and support. HepLink is a free and confidential service and does not require a Medicare card. Normal call rates apply.

You can also call AIVL, the peer-led peak organisation advancing the wellbeing, health and human rights of people who use drugs, on 1800-MYAIVL(692485) for information and peer support. It is free, confidential, and no Medicare is required.

The appropriate treatment for an individual patient is for the healthcare professional to decide, in consultation with the patient.

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Ask the Doctor: High Blood Pressure

By Harley Stiebel

Harley Stiebel is a Resident Medical Officer at The Royal Children's Hospital and Founder of Scrublets.

Hello! I'm Harley, a doctor working in Victoria. Welcome back to Ask the Doctor!

Today, we are talking about high blood pressure.

What exactly is "blood pressure"?
Blood pressure can be thought of as the speed of the blood whizzing around your blood vessels (arteries). This is affected by two things: your heart and your arteries.

1. Your heart: When your heart beats faster, the blood travels around faster, and, since this racing blood doesn't follow road rules, it pushes on the walls of your blood vessels, stretching them this way and that. The more the blood pushes on your arteries the higher your blood pressure is.

2. Your arteries: When we're young and invincible, so are our blood vessels; they're flexible, like one of the balloons the clown weaves into a poodle. These flexible vessels can expand when the blood speed increases to create more space. So there's less blood pushing against the wall and therefore a lower blood pressure.

But, as we get older, our vessels become stiff and rigid, like the magician left the balloon out in the sun for a few days. These stiff blood vessels can't expand when the speed of blood rushing through increases. Since they can't expand the blood has to squeeze through a smaller space, so there is more blood hitting the walls of the arteries. This means a higher blood pressure.

So why should I care if I have high blood pressure?
High blood pressure has a lot in common with a bad fart: it's silent but deadly. Blood pressure is particularly sneaky because we usually don't have any symptoms ... until something bad happens.

Prolonged high blood pressure means speeding blood crashing against your arteries. Over time, this damages the arteries, meaning they struggle to bring oxygen and other important things to your organs. This damage affects smaller arteries the most. It causes four main issues:

1. Heart attacks: damaged arteries can become clogged, and, when this happens to the arteries that supply the muscles of your heart, you get a heart attack.
2. Stroke (brain bleed): damaged arteries become frail and can burst. A burst artery, like a burst water pipe, means the blood can no longer get where it needs to go. When an artery in the brain bursts, this is a stroke.
3. Retinal (eye) damage: like what happens in a stroke, the small arteries that supply your eyes can burst. This means the eye cells stop getting oxygen and start to die. This can cause vision issues.
4. Kidney disease: the high speed of blood rushing through your kidneys overwhelms them, causing important cells to die. This means the ability of the kidney to filter out waste is reduced.

So how can I stop myself from getting high blood pressure?
I don't think it's helpful for me to write down a list of things you shouldn't do – it'll give nagging teacher vibes. So, instead, I'll write down a list of things that cause high blood pressure, and then, if you want, you can think about the opposite of these things and whether they interest you.

Causes of high blood pressure:
1. Smoking
2. High salt diet
3. Being overweight
4. Uncontrolled sleep apnoea
5. Not exercising
6. Poorly controlled diabetes

Medications can also be an important part of managing high blood pressure for some people.

If you think you might have high blood pressure, please speak to your doctor. They'll be able to give you personalised advice.

Thanks for reading this month's article!
Please write to About Time with any questions you have or suggestions for future topics. Trust me, nothing is off limits – most of my day is spent asking whether people have opened their bowels or farted.

If you've received a Section 24 Request for Information letter from the National Redress Scheme, you don't have to go through it alone.

www.nationalredress.gov.au/



SAMSN is a free government funded Redress Support Service, and we are here to help.

Our dedicated Section 24 Redress Support Workers provide free, confidential, trauma-informed support to help you:

- Understand what the Section 24 letter means
- Prepare a high-quality written response
- Connect with legal support service Knowmore for review
- Access other SAMSN services and warm referrals

We'll work with you to ensure your voice is heard and your response reflects your experience-safely and respectfully.

Contact us today at samsn.org.au, email on support@samsn.org.au or call us on 1800 472 676 for support.



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SURVIVORS & MATES SUPPORT NETWORK

Eligibility criteria: Adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse who currently reside in or were abused in NSW. Also incarcerated male survivors of childhood sexual abuse who are currently incarcerated in NSW, SA or TAS. SAMSN does not work with adults who have perpetrated sexual abuse against children.

Mob

WA Stolen Generations Redress Scheme Launches

By About Time

A Stolen Generations redress scheme has launched in Western Australia, with eligible people to receive $85,000.

The scheme recognises the enduring impacts of past child removal policies in Western Australia and the harm experienced by Stolen Generations survivors, who were separated from family, community, Country and culture.

The scheme will make available $85,000 per person and a personal acknowledgement from a WA government representative if they wish.

You can access the scheme if you:

- are an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
- were removed from your family when you were under 18 years old
- were removed in WA before 1 July 1972.

You can also apply on behalf of a family member who was part of the Stolen Generations in WA who passed away on or after 27 May 2025, which is the date the scheme was announced.

You do not need to provide any forms or documents but can if you wish, and, if you give permission, the department will work with Aboriginal History WA to do a check of records.

To apply, you can contact the WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet to request an application form be sent to you or a Supported Applicant Form to nominate someone to help you with this process.

You contact the department on:

08 6552 5050
wasg@dpc.wa.gov.au
(if you have access to email)

Or by post:

Reply Paid
Stolen Generations Redress Scheme
Dept of the Premier & Cabinet
Reply Paid 84912
West Perth WA 6872

The Western Australian Government has also partnered with organisations to provide practical and emotional support to those applying for the scheme.

Yokai – Healing Our Spirit
08 6288 8123
174 Treasure Rd
Queens Park, 6107

Kimberley Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation
1800 830 338
28 Barker Street
Broome 6725

Yorgum Healing Services
1800 469 371
176 Wittenoom Street
East Perth, 6004



Southern Songlines #6
By Luke Mc
Wulgurukaba people
2024

Songlines are ways that information is passed between tribes and generations. They can be dance, music, stories or artwork. Songlines teach us love and law. They enable us to navigate the land, teach us creation stories and give important information relating to seasonal hunting and gathering, custodians of the lands and the right time to burn the land. This series of paintings is my interpretation of songlines.



The Lands of the Namoi River People
By Hippai Francis
Kamilaroi people
2025

Looking down on the lands of the Namoi River people from the Guinbrai clan, the stylised river flows across the land. Along the river are the meeting places of the Guinbrai families, shown as fireplaces with people sitting around them. Since time immemorial, the families have gathered, living in their gunyahs and cooking in earth ovens. They are born, grow, live, hunt and gather around the river and wetlands and the surrounding mountains, hills, and plains. Here children played; here people died and are buried. Along the river, events over the generations are remembered in the clan's Songlines. It is a great tapestry of human life and of the world around them. The surrounding country, with its plains, woodlands, forests, hills, and mountains is represented. The pictorial inserts show common trees such as the cypress pine, red gum, wilga, and wattles. Important totem animals are also shown, such as the red kangaroo, emu and red cockatoo, and the sky with its own life. The seasons are seen top to bottom.



If you've been hurt, we're here to help.

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Our expert lawyers can provide legal support on a 'no win, no fee' basis for the following legal services:

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If you have an injury, disability or illness that prevents you from being able to work, you may be eligible for a lump sum payment.

These payments come from an insurance policy included with most superannuation accounts. You don't need to touch your super to access the compensation payment.

The injury doesn't need to be work-related, and while it comes with extra challenges, it is possible to claim from prison.

Workplace, road and medical injuries

Our dedicated lawyers specialise in different compensation schemes around Australia, including for:

- workplace injuries
- motor vehicle accident injuries
- medical negligence injuries, including medical error, like a missed diagnosis or a botched procedure
- occupational diseases where you have been exposed to toxins that led to the development of a disease, such as asbestos or silica.

We also help with institutional childhood abuse claims, Wills disputes and more.

No Win, No Fee.

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It doesn't cost anything to know where you stand.

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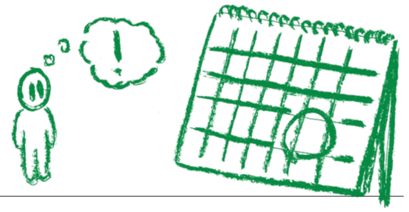
or Mail us at
21/380 La Trobe Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Learn

Christmas, Hanukkah and Other Celebrations in December



By About Time

Learn about the other numerous religious and cultural celebrations around the world in December.

While you may have heard of Christmas and Hanukkah, did you know that there's also an important Buddhist celebration and a Wiccan festival in the same month?

Here are some of the major religious, cultural and other festivities taking place in December around the world.



Erwan Hesry via Unsplash

Christmas

Commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas is a significant day for Christians worldwide.

It is observed as a religious day by the majority and also as a cultural occasion for many others, marked by presents and the coming together of friends and family.

Many Christians will attend church services on Christmas Day, participate in nativity scenes and decorate and light Christmas trees.

The way Christmas is celebrated varies around the world. In Japan, KFC chicken is the most popular food to have on Christmas Day, accompanied by a strawberry shortcake known as Christmas cake for dessert.



Robert Thiemann via Unsplash

Hanukkah

Hanukkah is an 8-day Jewish holiday taking place from 18–26 December each year.

It includes the lighting of a nine-branch menorah each night to symbolise how one day's worth of oil miraculously lasted for 8 days during a battle in 165 BC, according to Jewish tradition.

Foods usually eaten as part of Hanukkah include latkes (potato pancakes), sufganiyot (jam-filled donuts) and brisket.



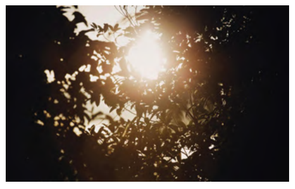
Abhijeet Gourav via Unsplash

Bodhi Day

Bodhi Day, also known as Rohatsu, is a significant tradition for Buddhists. It is celebrated on 8 December, honouring the day the Buddha is said to have achieved enlightenment.

The Buddhist story details Buddha's decision and vow to sit beneath the Bodhi tree until he reached spiritual enlightenment.

Bodhi Day is marked by Buddhists through meditation, studying the Dharma, chanting sutras and performing acts of kindness towards others.



Alexey Demidov via Unsplash

Yule

Running from 21 December to 1 January, Yule is when Wiccans and neopagans celebrate the winter solstice, which is the shortest day and longest night of the year.

To celebrate the re-emergence of the sun, the days involve a common tradition of burning the yule log.

Yule was first celebrated in Scandinavia.



Matt Hanns Schroeter via Unsplash

Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Taking place on 12 December each year, this is an important day for Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

It celebrates the patron saint of Mexico, who symbolises patriotism and devotion.

To mark the day, pilgrims often visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe.



Christopher Myers

Kwanzaa

Running from 26 December to 1 January, Kwanzaa is a week-long holiday honouring African American heritage.

It is a cultural rather than religious celebration and was first created in 1966.

Kwanzaa celebrations include the lighting of the Kinara (a seven-branched candleholder), storytelling, music and dancing.



Curious for More?

Want to learn more about a certain topic? Write to us via the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

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

contribute@abouttime.org.au



Culture

Visions Through the Eyes of a Palestinian Prisoner

By Damien Linnane

Damien Linnane is the editor of Paper Chained, a quarterly journal for art and writing which is made available to all people in NSW prisons.

The catalyst for one of the biggest art exhibitions I've been involved with was a letter to Paper Chained. One of my regular contributors, Khalil, asked me if I could write about the ongoing situation in Palestine for an upcoming issue.

However, as Paper Chained is a magazine aimed at prisoners, we only write about issues relating to prison and the criminal legal system. The letter, however, got me thinking about what it must be like being a Palestinian in an Israeli prison.



Damien Linnane with painting from artist Mohannad Al Azzeh

I put out a lot of feelers, and eventually I found a former prisoner willing to speak about it; you can read that interview in issue 16 of Paper Chained. That person, Mohannad Al Azzeh, told an inspiring story about how he turned to art during his period of incarceration, even though Palestinians are not allowed to make art in Israeli prisons. Most of his art was found and destroyed by guards, however, some of it was smuggled out, and Mohannad also turned to art again following his release, as a form of art therapy to help address his PTSD from imprisonment.

Knowing what an incredibly powerful story he had – not to mention unique artworks – after the interview I asked Mohannad if he would be interested in having art exhibited in Australia.

That exhibition was launched on November 22nd by Senator David Shoebridge to a packed crowd. ARIA-Award winning rapper Dobby performed at the opening while people were able to see Mohannad's original art made while at Ofer Prison in the West Bank, the drawings he made as art therapy, and the paintings he created about his imprisonment specifically for the show.

Visions Through the Eyes of a Palestinian Prisoner ran from November 20-30 at The Creator Incubator in Newcastle. The exhibition will tour to its second and final location at Sydney Street Gallery in Marrickville from January 12-19, 2026.

Your Armchair Guide to Summer Sport

By Goal Mouth

Horse racing: Lone Aussie proves a point

Legendary trainer Bart Cummings would have been delighted with the win of Australia's only representative in the Melbourne Cup this year, Half Yours.

The 5-year-old chestnut gelding, ridden by Jamie Melham, powered to the finish line, leaving a field of international raiders in his wake. In doing so, the horse and rider completed the Caulfield Cup-Melbourne Cup double.

Cummings, who died 10 years ago, was known as the "Cups King", winning 12 Melbourne Cups in an illustrious career. As Scott Heinrich of *The Guardian* wrote, Cummings "was dead against the internationalisation of the Melbourne Cup, which these days is commonplace but 20 years ago was seen by some as an invasion".

"It is much easier for the foreigners to qualify," Cummings once said. "It is becoming very one-sided, and they are pandering to the internationals. If they keep going like this, we will have to 'spot the Aussie' in the Cup."

Melham, who recently married fellow jockey Ben Melham, is the first female jockey since Michelle Payne (Prince of Penzance in 2015) to win the Melbourne Cup and the first to win the Caulfield Cup-Melbourne Cup double.

Motor racing: Piastri's F1 title hopes nosedive

The Formula 1 world title that Australia's Oscar Piastri had in his grasp mid-year has been "headlocked" by his McLaren teammate, Englishman Lando Norris.

Piastri led the championship by 34 points mid-season but has fallen 24 points behind Norris with three grands prix remaining – Las Vegas on 23 November, Qatar a week later and A bu Dhabi on 7 December.

Norris has won the past two GPs, in Mexico and Brazil, while Piastri has gone six rounds without a win and has not finished ahead of Norris since the end of August.

Cricket: Shock loss ends World Cup run

The Australian women's cricket team has set the standard for so long that its defeat in the semi-final of the World Cup to India was a major upset. The Australians had enjoyed an unbeaten run of 16 World Cup matches stretching back to 2022.

They were expected to win again, especially after reaching 1-180 in the 28th over, thanks to brilliant young opener Phoebe Litchfield (119) and Ellyse Perry (77). But the Australian batters lost focus and were all out for 338 in the final over.

Then some poor Australian fielding and bowling allowed a determined Indian side to chase down a record target in women's one-day internationals. The hero was player of the match Jemimah Rodrigues, who was 127 not out as the home side celebrated a famous five-wicket win.

India went on to win its first women's world cup with a 52-run victory over South Africa in the final.

AFLW: Roos make it 25 on the hop

North Melbourne's men's AFL team has finished last or second last in the past five seasons. But its women's team has not lost a game since its grand final defeat to Brisbane in 2023.

When the Kangaroos' AFLW team steamrolled a goalless Hawthorn in the qualifying final on 7 November, the Roos took their run of victories to 25. On the way, they broke a 72-year VFL/AFL record (23 consecutive wins by Geelong in 1952-53).

No one would be willing to bet against the Roos making or winning the AFLW Grand Final on 29 November. I'm certainly not.

Soccer: Ange sacked again – after 39 days

Australian manager Ange Postecoglou was sacked by Nottingham Forest in October after just 39 days and eight winless matches (five in the Premier League).

This gives Postecoglou the "distinction" of the second shortest managerial stint in the Premier League, behind only Sam Allardyce, who lasted 30 days at Leeds in 2023.

It was the second time he had been sacked by a Premier League club in four months, following his removal by Tottenham Hotspur in June.

What to look out for this summer

Cricket and tennis dominate summer sport in Australia. This summer will be no different.

The Ashes begin on 21 November in Perth and continues with the day-night test in Brisbane, starting on 4 December. The other tests are in Adelaide (17–21 December), Melbourne (26–30 December) and Sydney (4–8 January).

The Australian Open at Melbourne Park begins on 12 January and ends on 1 February. The women's singles final is scheduled for 31 January, and the men's singles final on 1 February.

Creative

Poking the Bear

By Russell

Russell writes from a prison in WA.

The spectators erupted as the footy sailed through the big sticks. Fake-Hips dropped to his haunches and watched the throng of green-clad prisoners mouthing off, high fives spearing his eardrums. They were now three goals down with 10 minutes to go. After all his team had been through to get here, physically and mentally, the farm boys were disrespecting them big time.

"Only one way to shut their gobs," he thought with venom.

The footy was nearly back to the umpire, and Fake-Hips was searching for Brooksy. He found him and made the signal with his fingers. Brooksy nodded. Stork was looking at him too and acknowledged the signal with a smile. He shook his legs to loosen up, stamped his bruised ankle and then tensed. The umpire whistled, and the footy arced into the clear blue sky.

The two ruckmen crashed in a dance of biceps, arms and knees, but Stork had those crucial inches, and the ball sailed to the left – a herd of arms and legs chasing, tapping, tackling and collapsing towards the beckoning boundary. Fake-Hips held back, his tag ball watching and being drawn like a magnet to where the ball was, not where it would be.

Brooksy crashed the pack and soccered the ball to the empty wing, tumbling randomly, each bounce leaching momentum in the soft grass. Fake-Hips was suddenly a blue, his light frame and honed legs making him the fastest and fittest on the ground. He was also a natural at the game – he had been playing since he could walk to the vacant block down the street.

Tracking his target like a leopard, he felt the panic of his tagger struggling to correct his mistake. On his left he spied the lumbering centre half back that had read the danger and was pushing his strapped thigh to breaking point. The ball was teasingly trickling to the boundary, and Fake-Hips knew the music was about to pump, his signature tune. Gliding to the left and just behind the ball he eluded the grasping ankle tap and massaged the ball with his left palm along the white line, past the desperate back's outstretched fingers, Elastoplast clips pinging.

The ball was now stuck to his fingers like a tree-frog, and he was over 70 metres out. All he could see was a chessboard of green and white jumpers flooding towards him, tightening the trap. A left stutter-step fake left the first jumper flat on his backside. Then the goose-step fake sent the next defender to the interchange box.

Fake-Hips took a bounce and scanned his options. Where were his forwards? None of them were leading, and he wasn't close enough for a shot. One more left, and he headed along the boundary line. The last defender was now getting the hint, and he was content to herd him, side-stepping him to forward pocket purgatory.

Fake-Hips slowed and tempted the sheep dog with a dangling ball temptingly within reach. He bit. A pirouette and Fake-Hips was clear and smiling, heading across goals towards trouble, on his wrong foot. Time for a patented banana kick with extra hip action. The goal umpire displayed his tonsils watching the ball sail over his head, arms flailing and desperately trying to keep vertical.

Silence. Fake-Hips was on his knees gulping down air, his ankle screaming. Scattered clapping rang out, the spectators acting as if they were at a fashion show and they could only gawk. His teammates were no better, heads down, hands on hips; they had been chasing him too.

The farmer boys were all swarming to the centre square as if they had a wasp nest to protect, sting arms pointing everywhere, planning revenge. Five quick goals later, Fake-Hips realised he had "poked the bear".

As Fake-Hips sat uncomfortably wedged on the armrest in the Coaster, he looked out at all the greenery and open space. The bus turned the corner, and there was a queue snaking out of the canteen.

With the Coaster crawling past, he saw all eyes turning and then spotted him. He froze. Then all the thumbs raised in unison. Fake-Hips smiled. His next and most important game would be outside.

A Poet's Thought of Soulmates

By Elijah

Elijah writes from a prison in NSW.

I am your best friend, and you are mine,
I'm your man and you're my woman,
We are each other's person,
Husband to wife, bonded by marriage,
The words, the promises,
Feelings to actions,
Attraction, love's sweet reaction,
Souls become one,
Two bodies, two minds now one,
Two people, two futures paved only
in thought,
So different yet their destinies
so aligned,
We are each other's person,
complete immersion,
Eyes like stars, lips like silk,
hands so soft,
Bodies they dance, among stars they are,
Creation they make, life's path they take,
Every feeling they felt, the other
feels too,
Trust is a must and communication too,
Together as one, soulmates we
are destined,
Forever to each other we are.

Christmas Day in Prison

By Joshua

Joshua was formerly incarcerated in a prison in VIC.

Christmas day without my family
Was such a terrible burden to bare
No Christmas tree, decorations,
no presents
No laughter, no joy, no Christmas fare

No sounds of excited children
Running from their room
To see what's under that special tree
Was a feeling of shattering gloom

My first Christmas without my family
A torrent of tears, roll down my face
A broken, soul-destroying feeling
That has taken me to a different place

I think of the joyful moments
We all shared on Christmas morn
Looks of delight on the children's faces
As the ribbons and paper are torn

My heart lies empty and shattered
And my body trembles in pain
Emotions of complete desolation
Next year it will haunt me again



My Barbed Wire Syndrome

By Anon-conformous

The author writes from a prison in VIC.

They expect us to play ball
But always move the goalposts

They expect us to hold boundaries
The same they overstep

They want us to abide
But break their own rules

They want us to be responsible
Three hots and a cot, how can we be?

They expect us to be kind
In a place it can be exploited

They don't want us to be violent
In a place violence can be a commodity

They want us to show love
But there's no love here

They want us to soften our ways
In a place hardened men thrive

They expect us to be truthful
But fill us to the brim with lies

They take so much
But give so little

They wanted me to conform
All they formed was a con.

When the Light Returns: A Christmas Poem for Those Inside

By Sam Harris

Sam Harris is a retired inmate.

When the light returns and the long
night fades,
and dawn slips soft through
shadowed shades,
you feel the hush before the day—
a whisper of grace that finds its way.

The year turns slow beyond the wall,
yet Christ still comes to hearts that call;
not crowned in gold, nor robed in flame,
but born in dark, and born the same.

He comes to places harsh and bare,
to hidden hearts in need of care;
to those who sit with heavy eyes,
and wonder if their hope still lies.

The world outside may sing and shine,
with trees and bells and
Christmas wine;
but here, where silence seems to stay,
the Saviour still is born today.

He knows the weight that walls contain,
the grief, the guilt, the inner chain;
for He too wore the robe of pain,
and walked through death to live again.

No gate, no guard, no lock, no key
can close the door of Calvary;
His love still reaches, fierce and far,
through every wound, through
every scar.

And though this night may
feel confined,
His light still lingers, clear and kind;
it flickers softly, pure, and true—
the Christ-child's gaze that rests on you.

So lift your heart and dare believe,
that mercy waits for all who grieve;
that when your freedom finds its day,
His grace will go with you—always.

The fields will open, the sky unfold,
and sunlight wash the bars with gold;
you'll step into that brighter air,
and find that He was always there.

For love that came in manger small
still moves through stone and steel
and wall;
and when at last your gates are turned,
you'll walk out whole—redeemed,
re-learned.

So rest tonight in quiet trust,
though time be slow and walls are dust;
the child once born in straw and pain
will rise in you and live again.

And when that morning calls
your name,
step forward free, yet not the same;
for Christ, who waited in your night,
will walk beside you in the light.



Send a Christmas message to your loved ones!
Below is a card you can send to your loved ones. Cut it out along the dotted line, write your message inside and send it off in an envelope. Merry Christmas.

Play

Quiz

Test your general knowledge on our monthly quiz!

1. What is the smallest country in the world by land area?
2. Which scientist developed the theory of general relativity?
3. What is the longest river in Africa?
4. What is the largest organ in the human body?
5. In what city would you find the famous landmark known as the Colosseum?
6. What is the main language spoken in Brazil?
7. Which metal is liquid at room temperature?
8. What is the name of the ship that Charles Darwin sailed on during his famous voyage?
9. What is the currency of Japan?
10. Which continent is known as “the birthplace of civilization”?

Quiz Answers

1. Vatican City
2. Albert Einstein
3. The Nile River
4. The skin
5. Rome
6. Portuguese
7. Mercury
8. HMS Beagle
9. Yen
10. Africa

How to Play Hangman



Hangman is a simple word-guessing game for two or more players.

1. **Choose a secret word**
   One player (the “host”) picks a word or phrase and writes down blank spaces for each letter.

2. **Guess letters**
   The other player(s) guess one letter at a time.

3. **Correct guesses**
   If the guessed letter is in the word, the host fills in the matching blank space.

4. **Incorrect guesses**
   If the letter isn’t in the word, the host draws one part of a stick-figure “hangman” (or uses another method of tracking mistakes). Typically, players get 6–8 wrong guesses before losing.

5. **Win or lose**
   - **Win:** The guesser completes the word before the drawing is finished.
   - **Lose:** The drawing is completed before the word is guessed.

That’s it—simple rules, quick rounds and easy to play anywhere.

Sudoku

Fill in the boxes with numbers from 1-9 with no repeated numbers in each line, horizontally or vertically.

			6		8	9	1	
	9		4	3	2	6	8	7
	6	3	9			2		4
9			3		4			2
3	1						7	9
	7				9	5		
		1		9	6	3		
					1		2	
		6	7	4		8		1



Caption This...

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

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