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About Time

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

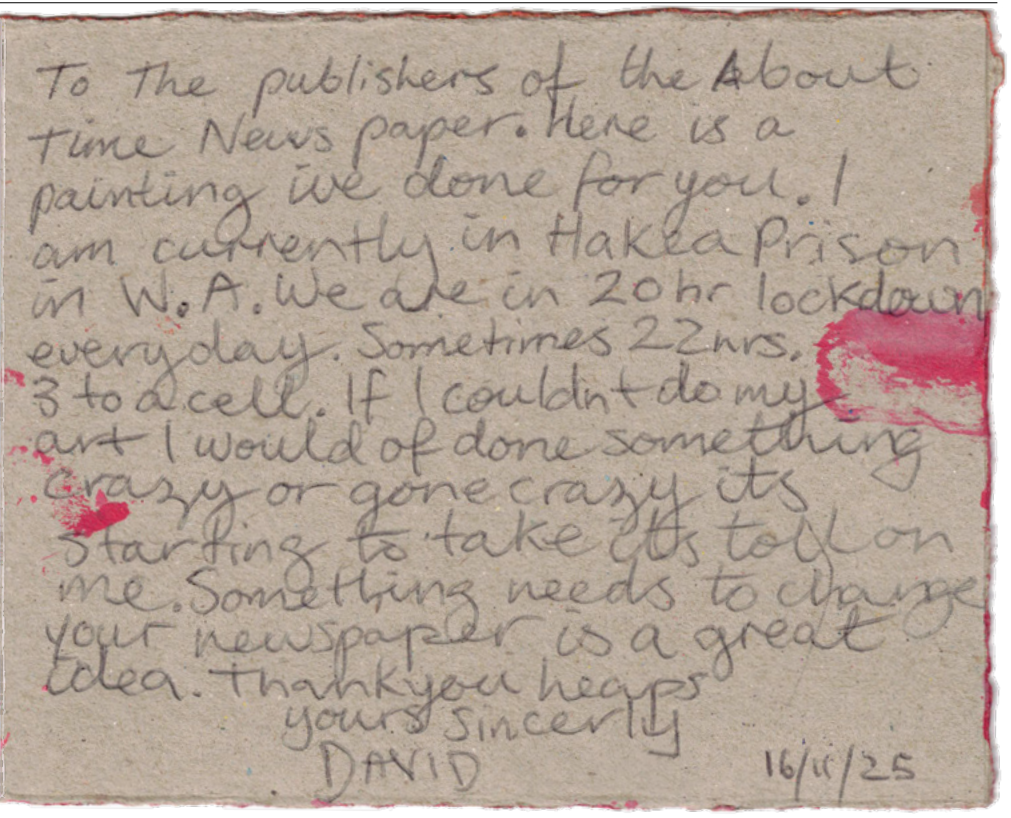
Happy New Year!

Best wishes for 2026. We hope you find connection and support in these pages in the year to come.



LETTERS · NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS · EXPERIENCES · LEARN · HEALTH · MOB · LEGAL CORNER · REINTEGRATION · CULTURE · CREATIVE · PLAY




To The publishers of the About time News paper. here is a painting ive done for you. I am currently in Hakea Prison in W.A. We are in 20 hr lockdown everyday. Sometimes 22 hrs. 3 to a cell. If I couldn't do my art I would of done something crazy or gone crazy its starting to take its toll on me. Something needs to change your newspaper is a great idea. thankyou heaps
yours sincerly
DAVID
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Send Us a Letter For Free!

For at least the next two months, the first letter you send us after each edition of the paper will be free. Simply use the address details on the right and send your letter off – no stamp required. More details on page 2.



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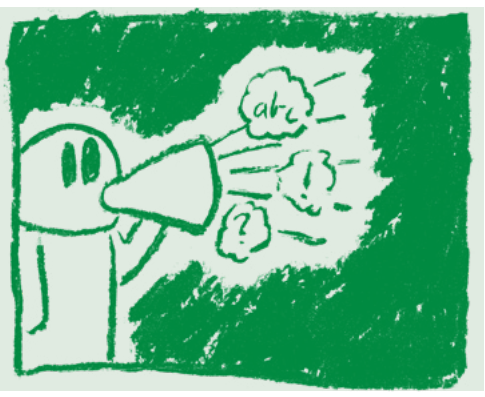
Your Words on the Front Page!

Send us a short story and you could be published on the front page. All pieces will be judged by a special guest. More information on page 4.



NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Police Installed Prison Listening Devices Without Proper Warrants

Watchdog finds 115 listening devices were installed in Victorian prisons without proper legal approval, raising concerns about prosecutions and privileged conversations.

By Denham Sadler

Denham Sadler is the Chief Reporter at *About Time*.

More than 100 listening devices were installed in Victorian prisons in the last 20 years without proper legal approval, according to a new report.

Integrity Oversight Victoria found that at least 115 of these surveillance devices were installed around the state, often at times when construction or renovation was taking place at a prison, between 2000 and 2018.

The watchdog found that these permanent listening devices were not installed under the authorisation of a warrant, and when police were applying to turn one of these devices on as part of investigations, the courts were not told that they were already installed.

"It is our assessment that Victoria Police did not comply with the Surveillance Devices Act when installing and maintaining integrated listening devices," the report said.

Integrity Oversight Victoria said that while there was no evidence that the listening devices had been turned on illegally in the prisons, there were also no records from the time to confirm they had only been activated under warrants.

"We were unable to definitively verify whether activations of the integrated listening devices were consistent with warrants due to the unavailability of primary records that indicated when these devices were activated," the report said.

Since becoming aware that the installation of these listening devices may have been illegal, Victoria Police said it immediately terminated use of them, and is working to determine if recordings from the devices were used as part of prosecutions.

Criminal defence lawyer Felix Ralph, a partner at MJR Criminal Lawyers, has regularly visited prisons in Victoria to meet with clients, and said he was concerned to read the report.

"I think it's outrageous," Ralph told About Time. "I think that people in prison should be rightly concerned about this as a human rights abuse. I just think it's extraordinary.

Continued on page 6.

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Letters

The Cost of Contact – New Prison Phone Fees Punish the Poor

By Anonymous

The author writes from a prison in QLD.

Earlier this year, new digital phones were installed (to replace the Arunta phones), with the promise of clearer and cheaper calls. As a result, STD and mobile call charges were reduced, and local landline calls were reduced from 40 cents to 30 cents. Time limits for "enhanced" prisoners were reduced from 12 minutes per call to 8 minutes. We were told the new system didn't allow for different times to be set depending on the user, though the CADL numbers have different time limits.

Early this month, a notice appeared stating that as of 1st November, all calls will be charged at 20 cents per minute plus a 15 cent connection fee. This means that all calls (whether STD, Mobile or Local) will cost $1.75 (8 minutes x 20 cents/minute + 15 cents connection) – for an 8 minute call. This is a further reduction of STD & mobile call costs, but local calls suffer a 583% increase.

Consider local calls. If we make one call per day, this will now cost $12.25 per week (compared to the existing cost of $2.10 (7 × 30 cents)).

We are encouraged to maintain contact with our support people, our wives, our families, and our friends. This upcoming price increase will reduce the amount of contact we will be able to have with our supports.

Consider the most disadvantaged in our prisons – the elderly, the retired, the disabled, those who have been declared as medically unfit, the unemployed, etc. These people are paid $1.50 per day for five days a week ($7.50 per week). Even including the Hygiene Allowance of $9.85 per week, these people only receive $17.35 per week. If they make only one call per day ($ 12:25 per week), this leaves them only $5.10 per week to spend on toiletries and canteen items. They are being forced to choose between family support, basic hygiene products and the occasional treat on canteen buyup.

The Need for Compassion in End-of-Life Prison Care

By Laurence

Laurence writes from a prison in QLD.

Hello, my name is Laurence and I am writing to you about your recent article in the August 2025 About Time newspaper in regards to end-of-life care in prisons.

I am currently housed at the Maryborough Correctional Centre. I am 79 years of age and I was recently diagnosed with terminal inoperable cancer.

Day and night I experience unbearable pain, rapid bursts of tiredness, sickness and feeling weak – all signs of the end.

Last week, the prison nurse told me that she had never seen cancer progress so quickly and that I would be lucky to survive another six months. A month ago the hospital via video link said I had no more than 11 months to live.

I'm seven years into a 10 year sentence and have applied for the exceptional circumstances parole which has only been stonewalled by the parole board, for reasons ranging from that they had no proof of my terminal cancer all the way to that I rejected an MRI and blood test. That was after I was deemed inoperable and put on the "do not resuscitate" list.

It seems that throughout that process, the Queensland Parole Board has cherry-picked reasons to reject my parole and not allow any positives of me being released into the community.

I am a model prisoner and my approved home assessment address ensures I would receive gold class standard care, something I'm unable to receive in prison due to security and good order.

I have reached out to Prisoners Legal Service in Brisbane but due to their limited funding for these matters they can only act at a limited speed, but they are advocating for me to be released on exceptional circumstances parole.

I know that I only have limited time left – Queensland Parole Board as far as I am concerned are saying that I do not meet the requirements for that type of parole and want me to apply in a little under 18 months time to apply for normal parole, which I know exceeds my life expectancy.

In regards to my care, on the daily I'm expected to put my shoes on which I struggle with and it takes up to 30 minutes with agonising pain and dizzy spells, and march my way up to medical to receive my opioid medication.

I am always dizzy and I know that I am about to faint and collapse each time I stride up to medical. At night I am too weak to even buzz up for assistance – this is why I require outside palliative care.

The approved address I am able to go to is able to manage all my needs for care, transportation, grooming, dressing and that I am able to fulfill parole obligations.

These are all things I would greatly benefit from and give me a better chance of surviving longer.

I also reached out to the Salvation Army in Brisbane via mail about a month ago with assistance after my death in locating my family members in Melbourne that are still alive, my eulogy requests and assistance with the costs of my funeral and I have heard nothing back.

What I'm hoping to achieve by writing this is awareness of the care I receive and the stubbornness of the exceptional circumstances parole in Queensland.

I don't mind if you publish this in your newspaper, I look forward to hearing about any way you can help.



Free Postage to About Time

We understand that many people struggle to afford the cost of postage. We don't want that to prevent anyone from sending us a letter, and so we are trialling a special new system. For at least the next 2 months, you can send us a letter for free – with no stamp required. All you need is an envelope.

This is only for the first letter you send us each month, so, if you send us more letters, make sure you add a stamp to those other ones.

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My Advice to Others Inside

By Aaron

Aaron writes from a prison in NSW.

Dear About Time,

Hi, my name is Aaron and I'm currently incarcerated in NSW. I'm on remand ATM, and waiting for a Supreme Court bail date, which I'm praying will be before Christmas this year (if not January). I've made the most of my time in jail this time and have made myself a promise to not just waste my time here, but to learn as much as I can, study, get fit, do as many programs as possible, and come out a better person than I came in as. I've achieved that, and more.

I have even taken up art of late and am almost finished with my first painting on canvas. But what I'm most proud of is the study I've done and the assignments that I've completed all in my own spare time, in cell and of my own free will. I've completed and re-written two full courses that I was lucky enough to find after searching long and hard in the education section (app of the inmate tablet that is issued to all inmates here.)

I'm actually so proud of my work that I mentioned my work to a facilitator who facilitates the addictions program and she asked to take a look. Well, she was so impressed, she not only took it home to read, she also scanned it, copied it, binding a copy into a book (actually, two books) and told me it was amazing and then asked if she could use some of the contents of my work in her class, and also asked if i was interested in teaching/facilitating the contents of my work as a course/program. The two courses are versions re-written my way of two courses that I studied from the tablet. One is called positive psychology which I added "The Science of Optimal Human Functioning" to the title, and the other is called Atomic Habits which I also added "The Ultimate Guide to Behavioural Change and Success" to its title and re-wrote them both adding my contributions.

I was taken back by the praise and interest I received and it made me so proud of myself. I was told by her and a couple of other people I have shown that once they started reading it, they couldn't put it down, and that not only would it help a lot of people, but even they now have a different outlook on the subjects I've written about and it's already helped them and they have already started using some of my techniques and strategies themselves. One being my cell mate, who now trains with me everyday, for the first time in his life. I'm not going to keep raving on about it, because it's not really what I'm writing to you for anyways.

I just want to say that I've reached my first goal of becoming a better person this time that I've spent inside than the person I was when I came in less than six months ago.

So that's my advice to anyone that is coming to jail – and it's the first time that I've actually used my time in jail specifically to better myself, both physically and academically. Every other time, I've just wasted it, getting fat, putting on weight and writing to or calling girls saying how much I can't wait to get out and see them, talking myself up and just being a dickhead. This is how I know this is where I finally hang up my greens, and never return here and finally live up to my true potential. It's only taken me 44 yrs and about six years in jail over almost 25 yrs since my first time in. But anyways, enough rambling on from me now, and the real reason I'm writing to you is I want to say I'm a huge fan of your newspaper. Thank you guys for your inspiring work. I hope to hear back soon.

Yours sincerely,

Aaron

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Education Not Incarceration

By Jack

Jack writes from a prison in QLD.

I was sitting with a young bloke the old day as he told me his war story of cars and crime and bad behaviour starting in juvie and progressing over 30 years and 10 laggings.

We talked of his kids, his woman, his Holden and the myriad of minutiae that creates a life. The bits that go together to make one of us.

We talked about filling out a form, which was why the conversation started, when he asked me to fill it out for him.

We talked about how he left school at 13, unable to read & write. He had learned to write his birthdate and name, but needed help with a simple form which needed an address as well as his personal details. He was stumped at WA and the postcode.

We discussed whether education might be a way for him to develop a few more basic skills like simple arithmetic which are important on the outside.

He wanted to work because he had nobody outside to send him money. We looked at possibilities for both work and education. He could work mornings and do education four afternoons per week.

We filled out an education referral form and submitted it that day.

The next Tuesday evening he called me over. He had done his 'ACER' test that morning and was told by the inmate supervising the test that he would get a result within a week. The ACER test allows education staff to put the student into an appropriate level for English and maths. The test takes less than 2 hours and in our facility in Queensland, is run every Tuesday morning. Any inmates who can move around can apply to take the test.

Yesterday, I got a new cell-mate. 50 years old, in and out of jail a dozen times and can't do his own forms! Why?

Why are jails so populated by people who are uneducated? What is being missed by the courts and cops and the community that the process of jailing people is formed around the process of not educating people or not identifying the problems in school?

As a community, we really are stupid when it comes to managing this.

We deserve what politicians do to us as a nation in the law and order auction we call elections.

Jack

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 eighteenth 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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ISSN #2982-0758

Program Helping My Mental Health

By Anonymous

The author 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 of 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, you'll soon realize 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 5 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 needed help also. I helped in a way by getting my partner to go and help 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 one 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 disorder 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.

*GROW mental wellbeing programs are available in some prisons in Victoria

I Should've Gone To Specsavers

By Alexandra

Alexandra writes from a prison in VIC.

I moved units about a month ago and we feed some stray cats here. One even let me pat her last night! It's been over a year since I've patted an animal, so you can imagine how excited I was!

I see a black and white tomcat outside my cell window in the evenings sometimes. I tap on the window and say hello but he usually looks at me, horrified, and runs away. A few days ago, however, he didn't move, so I chatted to him for ages, telling him how handsome and brave he was. Then I put my glasses on and realised I had been baby-talking to a serviette that was stuck in a bush!

Thank You for Your Stories

By Robert

Robert writes from a prison in QLD.

Dear About Time,

I am a first timer in jail and I would like to thank some of the inmates for making my first time as comfortable as possible and I would like to thank About Time for the prison papers that got me through this tough time.

Reading other prisoner's stories inspired me to keep my head up and keep going now four months in, thank you all who share your stories and words of wisdom.

Now I know prison is not as bad as some people make it seem to be, and I'm so glad some of the inmates are positive and motivate you to be a better version of yourself. So thank you again and thank you About Time.

From Robert

Forgiveness

By Grant

Grant writes from a prison in QLD.

To err is human; all heals with time.
Wounded, be righteous, no matter
your crime.
Be strong, my brother. To forgive
is divine.
By Motley.

I have been incarcerated for 22 months of a four-year sentence in Queensland jails. The poem above is about my own situation.

Thank you for inspiring others to keep strong whilst in jail. Your consideration is appreciated.

"Pretty soon this will be a long time ago."



Front Page Splash!



This competition is not available for readers in South Australia.

About Time is excited to launch a new publishing opportunity for people in prison around the country. The competition is free to enter, and you don't need to pay for a stamp.

Four times this year, we will provide a writing prompt and a certain style, such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction or art, and we will accept submissions based on this prompt for the 2 months that follow.

The first prompt will be judged by a special guest – Australian author Bri Lee. Lee is the author of several books including the award-winning *Eggshell Skull*, and she is also the co-founder of the fREADom INSIDE Project, which helps donate books to women incarcerated in NSW.

She will select a piece of writing to be published on the front page of the next edition of About Time, with several other shortlisted pieces to appear in the later pages. She will also provide you feedback on your piece!

This month's prompt is:
My Happy Place

- No more than 500 words
- The story can be fiction or non-fiction
- Submissions are due by 1 March

To enter, send us a letter with your entry and Writing Competition up the top.

Please include this on the envelope – you do not need to include a stamp:

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Reply Paid 94762
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The Real Cost Of Staying Connected: Why Prison Phone Calls Must Be Fair

By Peter

Peter was incarcerated in QLD.

My name is Peter, and I spent 15 months in prison before being released in October 2025. While I was inside, phone calls weren't a luxury. They were survival. Staying connected to my partner, kids, and support network kept me grounded and focused on rehabilitation. Anyone who has been inside knows that hearing a familiar voice can be the difference between moving forward and giving up.

For years, most people inside relied on "engine numbers" because calling mobiles directly cost about $5 for 15 minutes. With an engine number, the same call was around 30 cents – for many of us, the only affordable way to maintain regular contact with family.

But on 1 July 2025, QCS banned all redirection services. The reaction inside was immediate: panic, stress, and fear of losing connection to the outside world. Then the CallMe App became available. It followed every QCS by-law and wasn't a redirection service. At Palen Creek, around 90% of men used it. For a moment, communication became possible again.

Then came the biggest hit.

On 1 November 2025, QCS introduced a new pricing model: 20 cents per minute for all calls, mobile or local. A call that once cost 30 cents for 15 minutes now costs $3 – a ten-times increase.

And here's the reality most people outside don't know: if you're lucky enough to have a job inside, you earn between $3.55 and $7.00 per day. That means a single 12-minute phone call can wipe out more than half a day's wages. People are now having to choose between calling their kids or buying basic items like soap, shampoo, or deodorant. Families on the outside are also being stretched, topping up accounts just so their loved ones can stay connected.

This raises two big questions:

- Why did QCS make two drastic changes in the same year – both of which made communication harder?
- And even more importantly: who is profiting from these overcharged phone calls?

Because it certainly isn't the people trying to rehabilitate and stay connected to their families.

We know that strong family contact reduces reoffending, improves mental health, and helps people succeed once released. In NSW, it's just 25 cents per call to any landline. Why is Queensland so far behind?

This issue affects every person inside and every family waiting for someone to come home. That's why I've started a petition calling for fair, humane, affordable phone call costs in Queensland.

Ask your loved ones to sign and share this online petition:

www.change.org/FixQLDPrisonCallCosts

Once the petition has enough signatures, we will be sending it directly to the Queensland Ombudsman, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, Queensland Corrective Services, and the Queensland Human Rights Commission. We want every relevant authority to see the real impact these pricing changes are having on people inside and the families supporting them. We will also share it with key MPs, community legal centres, prisoner advocacy organisations, and media outlets to make sure this issue can't be ignored.

Staying connected shouldn't be a privilege. It should be part of rehabilitation – and part of coming home stronger.



Letters From the Outside

Some highlights from the About Time online comment section.

In response to *How Metal and Punk Music Saved My Life* by Aidan

You're so right Aidan. Music is a lifeline! It can transport us to another time and place, and provides an outlet to how we are feeling. You like some great music!
Caroline

In response to *Mental Health Services in Prison Successfully Billed to Medicare* by Damien Linnane

I really appreciate the importance of this work. Your persistence and determination – especially in challenging assumptions about what the law allows – will make a real difference. Thank you for shining a light on this issue, and for fighting to ensure people in prison get the care they so urgently need.
Tamra



Thank You for Your Letters

As of a few weeks prior to publication, we received letters from Kamara, Lee, R, Alex, Daniel, Bella, JB, S, Anthony, Andy, D, David, Aaron, Jude, Aaron, Shay, T, Tony, Gabrielle, R.W., 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 write to us via the below postal details.

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News and Investigations

Police Installed Prison Listening Devices Without Proper Warrants

By Denham Sadler

Continued from page 1.

"This is an industrialised and normalised procedure, and I think it was an open secret in prisons."

The report investigated 99 warrants issued from 2008 to 2024 seeking to install listening devices in prisons in Victoria. It found that Victoria Police did not tell the judge about the permanent listening devices when it applied for these warrants.

Most of the applications were for the "installation and use" of listening devices in prisons, when they were mostly just being turned on or off, and left sitting within the prison.

The report said that the use of listening devices in prisons is a "significant investigative tool and one that Victoria Police is eager to keep confidential to protect its efficacy".

Victoria Police is now removing some parts of the devices to make them unusable until new warrants are issued, and looking at retrospective reforms to make their use legal.

Police are also doing "considerable analysis" to identify whether recordings from these devices were used in prosecutions, and will then make "appropriate disclosures".

In response to the report, Victoria Police said that the listening devices were only ever activated with the permission of a valid warrant.

It acknowledged that "there were implications if information obtained from these devices was relied on in prosecutions".

Ralph said that more investigation needs to take place into the use of the listening devices.

"In an ideal world there'd be a Royal Commission into this," he said.

"If you keep pulling at the thread of the sweater it'll unravel. I want to know whether it was done during legally privileged conversations. There are also really sensitive and legitimate conversations happening in those areas, like sending psychologists or psychiatrists in to discuss with people in prison, really intimate details they would discuss with no-one."

It's not the first time that the potentially illegal use of surveillance devices in Australian prisons has been revealed.

It was revealed in 2023 that listening devices had been unlawfully recording conversations in meeting rooms at Risdon Prison, in Tasmania, for 2 months in 2017.

The devices were installed with a warrant to record a conversation between a target and their lawyer but were left on and continued to record more than 700 meetings in the rooms for another 2 months.

These recordings were then transmitted to a police headquarters. The judge for the trial in question ruled that the recordings could not be used in court as the warrant used to obtain them was too broad. A subsequent investigation determined that none of these conversations were monitored or downloaded by police.

The Victorian Ombudsman in 2012 released a report on the death of Carl Williams at Barwon Prison, revealing that 10 listening devices were found in multiple units at the prison, which had been installed without a warrant.

These listening devices were inoperable, the report said.

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United Nations Visit Australian Prisons

By Stacey Stokes



Mathias Reding via Unsplash

In early December, the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visited Australia. Their purpose was to provide guidance on how international human rights standards apply to prisons and places of detention.

Throughout the visit, the Working Group met with government and legal officials, as well as with representatives from NGOs and community groups. People with lived experience, such as myself, were also invited to attend and provide submissions.

The Working Group also inspected a range of places where individuals may be deprived of their liberty, such as prisons, police stations, psychiatric institutions, and immigration detention centres. During these inspections, the Group was to ensure private, confidential, and unsupervised contact with witnesses and other individuals, including detainees.

The delegation's plan was to conduct visits in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory went on to block access to all government-operated detention facilities, due to "operational capacity, safety and workforce resourcing priorities," according to local authorities.

This incident follows a similar event in October 2022, when a separate UN body, the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT), was forced to suspend its entire visit to Australia after being blocked entry to detention facilities in New South Wales and Queensland.

Despite being blocked, the SPT went on to deliver a scathing assessment of Australia's detention practices after its aborted 2022 visit, finding the use of restraints such as spithoods and the use of solitary confinement of people under 18 "may amount to torture".

The United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention visit concluded on 12 December 2025, at which time the Working Group presented its conclusions and recommendations to the Australian Government and at a press conference.

Before giving their findings, they noted that it was only the second time they have been denied access to a whole region (Northern Territory), the only other being Rwanda, having previously been allowed into prisons in regions like Mexico and Mongolia.

The findings urge Australia to do the following:

- To take urgent action to address the remand crisis.
- To work together with first nation peoples to end their over representation In detention.
- To raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years old
- To prohibit the solitary confinement children
- and to bring its mandatory migration detention regime into conformity with its human rights politicians.

More to come.

Impacts of Proposed New Freedom of Information Laws

New restrictions may impact the ability of prisoners to make FOI requests

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.

Obtaining information from federal agencies is about to become subject to stricter rules under the *Freedom of Information Amendment Bill 2025* (Cth).

The bill has passed the House of Representatives and has now been referred to the Senate for final approval.

The objectives of the current *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) include: providing the right to access documents; increasing public participation in government processes with a view to promoting better informed decision-making; and increasing scrutiny, discussion, comment and review of the government's activities.

The proposed changes purport to streamline and clarify processes and provide safeguards to "protect private interests" and ensure "the proper and effective operation of government". Many of the proposed changes have come under criticism from the Law Council of Australia, who suggest these measures will reduce transparency and increase barriers to public access of information.

The new measures under criticism include:

- **New powers to refuse to deal with requests that are considered vexatious or frivolous or an abuse of process.** The Law Council suggests that the reference to "vexatious" and "frivolous" may not be sufficiently detailed to guide assessment on whether an FOI request amounts to that description.
- **The prohibition of anonymous requests.** The Law Council noted the chilling effect of this prohibition on applications made by whistle-blowers, journalists and parties seeking sensitive information on sensitive matters of public interest.
- **Expanded exemptions to refuse requests, including placing a 40-hour cap on processing time for a request.** The Law Council considers that the 40-hour processing cap will likely stifle the operation of the act, especially for vulnerable applicants, with unintended consequences when vulnerable people seek access to complex, voluminous or historical records.
- **Introduction of application fees for requests for non-personal information and reviews of decisions.** The Law Council predicts that the application fee for certain requests will effectively create an economic barrier that may deter disadvantaged applicants from exercising their rights under the act.

The proposed requirement for application fees for certain information is particularly concerning for people in prison or detention centres, who are often under financial hardship, essentially preventing them from accessing certain information.

It is important to understand that these changes impact applications to federal agencies only. They will not affect applications for information from prison authorities, because prisons operate under state or territory law. However, the proposed changes to federal law will likely impact people in prison and detention centres who are applying for information from federal agencies, such as the Department of Home Affairs.

I am concerned by any legislation that purports to increase safeguards for the government or big business. The cost of such safeguards, unusually, involves infringing fundamental rights of the people. We should continue to be vigilant by critically assessing any changes for the sake of safety and challenge those that seek to reduce rights.



WA

Inspector highlights overcrowding ‘crisis’

In its annual report, the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services said that the prison population in the state had grown by 12 percent in the last year, and that most prisons are now operating at more than 90 percent capacity.

“Many facilities have operated above their general bed capacity which has meant hundreds of people have been sleeping on the floors of cells not designed to accommodate them,” the report said.

There are daily shortages of custodial and non-custodial staff, which means that time out of cells is regularly restricted and there is limited access to support and services, the inspector said.

This has also led to overwhelming demand for mental health services in prisons.

“There is an urgent need for system level reform and sustained resourcing commitment, otherwise the problems we are seeing today will only get worse over time,” the inspector said.

In a separate report, the inspector also found that there are still major barriers in place making it difficult for people in prison to maintain contact with their friends and family on the outside.

It found that the average number of social visits in prisons in the state has declined in the last seven years, and that restrictions on phone access hours and staffing issues were contributing to issues in staying in contact.

In 2018 the average number of visits per person in prison was 26. In 2024, this number fell to 17.

The report also found that while all prisons in the state have capability for an online booking system for visits, only four prisons have this option. These facilities are Bunbury, Boronia, Casuarina and Hakea.

Prison work camps offer benefits but aren’t being used enough

Minimum-security prison work camps in the state offer real benefits and improvements to rehabilitation and reintegration, but are not being used enough, a report by the WA Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services has found.

The report found that the work camps, located in Dowerin, Roebourne, Walpole, Warburton and Wyndham, have faced challenges such as staffing shortages and their remote locations.

Since 2020, the overall occupancy of many of these locations has never gone above 75 percent, and some have remained below 50 percent until recently.

The inspector also found that First Nations people were regularly underrepresented at the prison work camps due to barriers in achieving minimum security status and a limited awareness of the benefits.



VIC

Man sues for right to have Vegemite in prison

A man has launched legal action challenging a ban on Vegemite in prisons in Victoria.

The man has sued the Department of Justice and Community Safety and Corrections Victoria over the ban, saying it is his right to enjoy the spread as it is “his culture as an Australian”.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights states that no-one should be denied the opportunity to “enjoy their culture”.

Vegemite has been banned in Victorian prisons since 2006 due to concerns it can hamper the work of sniffer dogs.

First inmates at Western Plains launch legal action

A group of people who were temporarily held at the new Western Plains Correctional Centre earlier this year have launched legal action claiming the conditions at the new prison were in breach of their human rights.

In April a number of people from Barwon Prison were moved to Western Plans after a suspected gas leak, and held in the maximum-security 44-bed Karlton unit for a number of months.

The lawsuits are arguing that the conditions in the cell yards and exercise areas did not meet the definition of “open air”, and that a day in a cell in the unit “felt like a 24-hour lockdown day at Barwon Prison”.

They argue that there was no direct sunlight in the cells or exercise yards.

“This is an enclosed space in every sense of the word ‘enclosed’, it is not in the least bit open air,” one of the men told the court.

“I did not feel the sun on my skin as the roof of the yards are fully covered by iron sheeting, thick bars, and some tightly woven mesh covering which allows very little light to come through,” another said.

The men are seeking a range of declarations from the court, including that the exercise yards are in breach of Victoria’s Charter of Human Rights.

Earlier this month, emergency crews were called to Western Plains prison after a leak from a 20,000-litre liquid oxygen tank at Western Plains prison, with no injuries reported.

DPFC subacute medical unit under consideration

The Victorian government has signed a contract with an architecture firm to design a subacute medical unit at Dame Phyllis Frost Centre for future planning considerations.

If the state government decides to go ahead with the unit, it would act as a step-up or step-down from hospital care.

There are existing subacute units at the Metropolitan Remand Centre, Ravenhall, Hopkins and Western Plains.

The unit would also provide care for someone who needs assistance but is not so unwell that they need to be taken to hospital.



ACT

Lack of structured days at AMC

There is a lack of structured days in Canberra’s only prison, with limitations around education and work impacting rehabilitation and reintegration, the prison inspector has found.

The ACT Custodial Inspector released an inspection report of the Alexander Manonochie Centre late last year, finding that there was still a lack of meaningful, productive activity at the facility.

“Our review found that the absence of a structured day within the prison is a significant barrier to achieving its core objective of rehabilitation and reintegration,” ACT Custodial Inspector Rebecca Minty said in the report.

“Without sufficient purposeful activity, opportunities for skill development, education and positive engagement are limited.

“Purposeful activity in jail is not a luxury. It is fundamental to preparing individuals for successful reintegration into the community, which in turn improves community safety.”

There are now several education programs on offer at the prison, but a “piecemeal approach is not fully meeting needs”, the inspector found, with no TAFE or equivalent providing comprehensive education and training.

The ACT is also the only jurisdiction in the country that doesn’t operate a commercial prison industry of some sort.



NT

Corrections launch new framework for rehabilitation

The NT Department of Corrections has unveiled a new approach to rehabilitation, labelling previous efforts as “fragmented” and “lacking evidence-based decision-making”.

The new Rehabilitation and Reintegration Framework aims to shift from “crisis to reform”, and includes the launch of a centralised committee aiming to approve and review rehabilitation programs, restructure the system and make sure that programs remain effective.

The plan also involves moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach to rehabilitation, towards one that takes cultural needs and accessibility requirements into account.

The territory government has also confirmed that a new prison work camp will be located on the existing Katherine Charles Darwin University rural campus, which will be upgraded and turned into an open-security work camp.

To access the work camp, people in prison will have to have demonstrated good behaviour and have completed offence-related programs.



NSW

Harm reduction peer workers launched at Long Bay

A new program has launched at the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre at Long Bay Correctional Complex that sees inmates trained to use their lived experience to talk to other people in the prison about drug and alcohol use, and offer advice on harm reduction.

The Harm Reduction Peers will be able to deliver advice on reducing the risks that come with drug use and of blood-borne viruses, and to encourage safer choices in the prison.

The peer workers, who are paid for their work, have taken part in a seven-week training program covering health, harm reduction and peer support.

There are now five Harm Reduction Peer workers at the prison, with a new uniform helping to make them identifiable in the yard.

The NSW government has a goal to eliminate Hep C in prisons by 2028.

Corrective Services NSW has also renewed its partnership with Racing NSW, which sees inmates train retired racehorses for rehoming, for another five years.

There are currently 10 inmates caring for 50 retired racehorses in prisons in NSW.

Open letter warns against prison discipline changes

A number of organisations have written an open letter raising concerns with the NSW government’s plans to lower the burden of proof required to find someone guilty of a prison offence.

The letter is signed by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW / ACT, AbSec, ANTAR, legal experts and university law schools, and warns that the changes could lead to further deaths in custody.

“Incarcerated people subjected to discipline proceedings, who are locked in solitary confinement, fined and deprived of basic privileges like phone calls and visits with loved ones, are at increased risk of acute and ongoing mental and physical harm, and even dying in custody, if these laws pass,” the letter said.

The NSW government is planning to make it easier to find someone guilty of committing an offence in prison, against the advice of the state Ombudsman.

Inspector criticises ageing infrastructure at Long Bay

The NSW prison watchdog has criticised the ageing infrastructure in some areas of the Long Bay Correctional Complex, and recommended a fit-for-purpose unit be established for aged and frail inmates.

In its inspection report on Long Bay, the NSW Inspector of Custodial Services said the “continued reliance on such old and unfit infrastructure for the delivery of critical services” at Long Bay was a problem, and that planning should have begun decades ago to phase it out.

It found that the Metropolitan Specials Program Centre “simply cannot provide a safe environment for people in custody” due to its age and condition, with the site first opened in 1909.

“This physical environment frustrates good initiatives that aim to support inmate rehabilitation and wellbeing,” the report said.

“We have no choice but to recommend its closure.”

The report also found that there is a growing number of aged and frail people in custody at Long Bay, and that specific accommodation should be provided for this group.



QLD

Watchdog calls separation rooms in youth prisons ‘inhumane’

The Queensland prison inspector has said the conditions in “separation rooms” in youth detention centres in the state are “inhumane”, with no toilets or running waters.

The Queensland Inspector of Detention Services released a report in late November based on its inspections of a number of youth prisons.

It raised allegations that children had been placed in separation rooms with urine left on the walls and that they were forced to urinate in a drain when a bathroom request was not responded to.

“It is inappropriate for separation rooms to be left dirty if children are to be separated in a clean and dignified environment,” the report said.

“Separation rooms become soiled with urine because the rooms lack minimum facilities such as running water and a toilet.

“This inhumane conduct may force children to urinate in a drain while being monitored via CCTV, and they may be left in an enclosed room with urine or faeces. These practices increase the exposure of children to serious biohazards.”

Man busted trying to bring drugs into prison

A man has been caught trying to smuggle in drugs worth nearly $1 million into the Woodford Correctional Centre.

A joint intelligence operation between Queensland Corrective Services and Queensland Police led to the arrest of the 34-year-old man, who is now facing eight charges related to drug smuggling.

Queensland Police allege the man turned himself into a police watchhouse in early November, before officers noticed suspicious behaviour. He was then searched, with a significant quantity of drugs allegedly found.

Death in custody at Maryborough

A man has died at Maryborough Correctional Centre after an alleged incident involving two other inmates in late November.

The incident occurred at the Maryborough prison on 26 November. The man was taken to Harvey Bay Hospital but died on 1 December.

Queensland Corrective Services said it is assisting with the police investigation.



SA

Concerns over use of prone restraint in youth detention

The continued use of prone restraint on children and young people in prison, where a person is held face down on a surface with their limbs restrained, is of “serious concern” and should be stopped, a new report by the SA Training Centre Visitor and Deputy Chief Psychiatrist has said.

The report said that the use of this form of restraint has known risks, and that it is banned in child mental health care environments.

It said that “behaviour management systems that rely too heavily on these restrictive and punitive responses can compound trauma”.

The report also found that the current structures and practices at the Adelaide Youth Training Centre are not meeting the complex developmental, emotional and psychological needs of children in custody, and that there is a lack of consistent and coordinated care.

Prison officers go on strike

Seven prisons in South Australia were plunged into a 24-hour lockdown after custodial officers around the state went on strike.

The industrial action impacted all public prisons in the state, with the privately run Mount Gambier Prison and Adelaide Remand Centre not impacted.

It came after another prison officer strike in late November over a pay dispute with the state government.

The industrial action was one of the largest by public servants in the state, and included staff from Corrections and Youth Justice.

The strike caused many of the prisons in the state to go into lockdown due to a lack of staff.

The public servants are calling for a 20 percent pay rise over an 18-month period.



TAS

Call to legislate ban on spit hoods

The Tasmanian Custodial Inspector has called on the state government to put a ban on the use of spit hoods and improvised spit hoods into law.

In a review into an incident at a youth justice centre where a makeshift spit hood was placed over a boy’s head, the inspector recommended the state government ban this practice entirely.

The review found that a young person in detention had displayed “challenging behaviours” when he was being transported from a hospital to the youth prison by security contractors.

His t-shirt was then pulled over his face so he “could not spit on anyone again”, with video footage showing him being removed from a vehicle with his hands handcuffed behind his back and the t-shirt still over his face.

The boy told investigators that he found it “hard to breathe” during this time.

The inspector said this action was “entirely incompatible” with human rights.

Palliative Care in Prison and the Push for Change

How will changes to end-of-life care in prison impact you?

By Sophie Lawson

Sophie Lawson is a writer based in Melbourne.



Dominik Lange via Unsplash

End-of-life care, also known as palliative care, is a healthcare process that aims to improve the quality of life and reduce the suffering of those who are terminally ill. Being incarcerated can make this stage of life even more complicated. Age can take on a different meaning in the prison system, with people being considered "old" at the age of 50. People in prison are experiencing age-related health conditions earlier than those in the community.

Australia's prison population is aging. . Between 2009 and 2019, the proportion of older Australians in prisons (aged over 45 years) grew by over 78 percent to more than 9500 people.

Currently, to access specialist healthcare, those in minimum-security prisons are required to be transferred to maximum-security facilities. This can influence people's decision to accept, decline or delay receiving treatment, as those in minimum-security prisons will potentially lose the comfort and familiarity of their cell and job.

Because of this, many people are not receiving timely medical care.

Once people in prison access the healthcare they need, there are still many systemic barriers that can negatively impact the delivery of care. For example, having security guards at all appointments and in hospitals can compromise the privacy of the patient and interrupt the healthcare being provided.

It's also difficult for incarcerated people to have visitors while in hospital. All visitors must be on the patient's Nominated Visitor List, and visits must be during hospital hours and are limited to 40 minutes.

Reform to palliative care in prison: what you need to know

The University of Technology Sydney, with the Department of Health and Aged Care, is working on reshaping palliative care in prison.

This five-year project is in its final stages, and has examined the current state of palliative care for people in prison, along with options to improve it.

Its suggestions include:

- Implementing education about palliative care
- Building connections with local palliative care teams
- Encouraging collaborations with correctional and justice health on local and national levels
- Continuing to conduct reviews to monitor the effectiveness of palliative care in prisons

There are some positive developments around keeping people comfortable and improving the standard of healthcare.

There are plans to expand the number of secure correctional wards in hospitals around the country, meaning that people receiving care will not have to be shackled to the bed.

One such ward has been running at St Vincent's Hospital in Victoria for several decades, and one is expected to open in Brisbane specifically to provide palliative care for incarcerated people.

There are also changes designed to remove the need to transfer someone away from their cell into a foreign environment, or a higher security centre, to receive care.

At Port Phillip Prison in Victoria, doctors and nurses are delivering end-of-life care outside of the hospital, and guards are trained in palliative care delivery. Since this program began in 2021, just three patients have been transferred from the prison for palliative care.

In the ACT, guidelines for the delivery of palliative care are in place at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. According to this policy, those who need palliative care or who have been given 12 months to live or less must be given healthcare to the same standard as someone in the community.

People in the ACT prison will also be able to access a Complex Care Meeting which will see a developed medical care plan specific to their needs.

Tips for navigating palliative care in prison from a former prison nurse in the UK

Accepting the end of life can be tough, and it is normal to feel a variety of emotions: sadness, fear, regret. It is normal to have concerns over not being with family, the fear of being alone, pain management, and what happens next.

Getting prepared early is your best chance to ensure your end-of-life care meets your needs.

1. Understand your rights
You have the same rights to healthcare as those in the community. The Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights is for everyone, and you are entitled to be seen by a nurse or doctor in the prison when you need.

2. Get your will sorted
It is your human right to have access to legal help – through Legal Aid or your own chosen service provider.

3. Create an advanced care plan
An advanced care plan enables you to make your wishes known about how you want to be treated. It allows you to plan your healthcare for the future, especially when you may no longer be able to communicate what you want. Think about your preferred medical treatments and care choices, your wishes in terms of organ donation, and your spiritual or religious preferences.

Try asking yourself these questions:

- What medical conditions do you already have?
- What feels different about your body? Stay aware of your body and speak up.
- Do you want a religious figure as part of your care plan?
- Also try to keep your loved ones in the community aware of your health and plans.

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Warning:
This article contains references to an Indigenous Australian who has died, and references to suicide.

Cleveland's Death Was Preventable, Predictable and Predicted: Coroner

By Denham Sadler

The death of a 16-year-old First Nations teenager in a notorious youth unit of an adult prison in Western Australia was preventable and predictable, and the result of "serious longstanding deficiencies in the system, a Coroner has found.

WA Coroner Phil Urquhart handed down his findings from the coronial inquest into the death of Cleveland Dodd in mid-October 2023, at the Unit 18 youth detention centre within the adult Casaurina Prison.

He found that the treatment of Cleveland before his death was "not only entirely inappropriate, but inhumane", and that Unit 18 should be closed "as a matter of urgency".

The Coroner also called for an inquiry to be held into how Unit 18 came to be established as the state's second youth justice facility.

The Coroner found that for 74 of Cleveland's last 87 days in custody he had been locked in his cell for longer than 22 hours each day, amounting to solitary confinement under international law.

"No child in detention deserves to be treated in the way Cleveland and the other young people in Unit 18 were treated at the time he decided to end his life," the Coroner said.

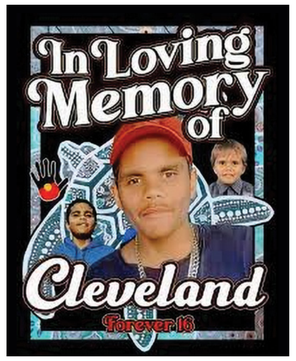
For Cleveland and other children held at Unit 18, prolonged periods of solitary confinement, isolation, intense boredom, meals eaten alone and a lack of access to mental health services, education and running water had become the norm, the Coroner found.

"The youth justice system failed Cleveland," Urquhart said.

"It should never be forgotten that detainees are not only children but are some of the most vulnerable children in our state; many of whom have intellectual disabilities that can be directly linked to not only their offending in the community, but also to their behaviour when they are placed in detention."

The Coroner made 15 adverse findings against the WA Department of Justice and a number of recommendations. He said that "tinkering at the edges" isn't going to solve the problems, and that "wholesale reform and a complete reset is necessary".

Cleveland's mother told the inquest the impact his death has had on their family.

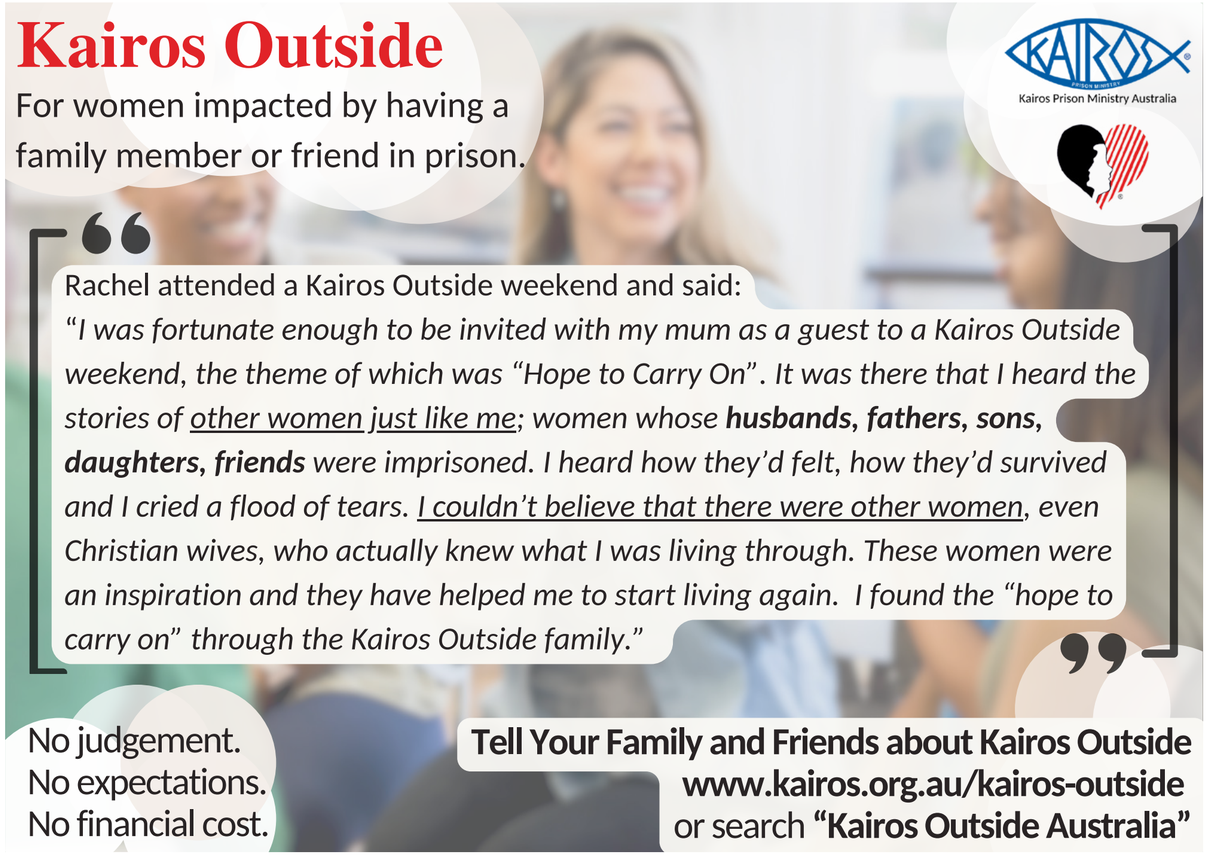


"My son's death will not be in vain," she said.

"In his memory, I must remain stalwart to change, to a kinder world and solid in the pursuit of justice even in the strongest winds.

"I hope that this process, which is unimaginably difficult for me and my family and indeed all those who loved Cleveland, will be the catalyst for real and lasting change. Enough is enough.

"My son didn't deserve to be treated that way. My son didn't deserve to die. I want justice for Cleveland."





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Experiences

"I'm a Good Person, Surrounded by a Bad Life": Youth in Prison



With Victoria introducing harsher penalties for youth offenders, this interview shows why prison is not the answer

By Mark Yin and James*

Mark Yin is a researcher and writer, currently pursuing a PhD in criminology.

When James* stepped out of his building in the residential rehab facility to meet me, cigarette in hand, decked out in Calvin Klein, my first impression was of a confident, talkative young man. When we spoke, he was forthcoming – but also vulnerable. He was 25 at the time, only a year younger than me, and told me about the past ten years of his life, spent in and out of the prison system.

Victoria has just announced a raft of changes to youth justice. It will uplift a number of children's offences to face adult prison terms, and will also introduce a new 'Violence Reduction Unit' to coordinate crime prevention policies across government.

It's hard to ignore the impact of the harsher sentences on criminalised children – it feels as though the government is playing political football with their lives. I cast my mind back to James, whose story captures what some of these impacts might be.

"Well once I was in," he said, "that was that. Like, it just involved me, you know? It's been ten years in and out.

"I've spent, like, a lot of my life in jail since [...] I've been three times in youth jail. And I've been four times adult jail."

The reasons why James returned to prison are complicated. From the outside, James appeared to be a "chronic repeat offender". Looking a little closer, however, James was a young man experiencing homelessness who struggled to understand and comply with supervision conditions. I sense this is hard for him to talk about – he stops and starts a lot here – but he says:

"I've never been able to – I've never been good with pa– paper, reading off paper, and stuff like that. I actually can't, you know – it's been like, you know – I've always had – [pause] Didn't do well at school, you know?"

On top of this, he adds, "I never had nowhere to live. I'd always get out to just being on a CCO and nowhere to live, not be able to make my appointments because it's not – I just couldn't even get, couldn't even work out where to lay my head at night. You know?"

How could the wider community know, without being in his shoes?

James was never a "chronic repeat offender" – very few people are, despite what the media says – he was trapped in a cycle that prison did nothing to break.

"I just wanted [pause] a normal life. Couldn't have it. No matter how hard I was trying. Like, I've tried it, put myself in TAFEs, carpentry courses, shit like that. Didn't go far with it, 'cause, you know, when you got nowhere to stay and shit like that, worrying about where you're going next, it's hard to make it to stuff like that. I tried but it would always upend. You know?

With nowhere to live and shit like that, eventually I was stealing cars and sleeping in cars." And so on.

This is the part that really got me. James goes on to say, "when you're involved in that life, it's like all you know. And it's not, it's like...

"I'm a good person, just, was surrounded by – I don't know how to explain it, just surrounded by a bad life."

In the end, AOD services and housing were what he needed: "Drug court, like, gives you a chance. Here's a house, here's some programs to do, they'll help you if you need it. And I needed it.

"That helped me bring myself back to reality, who I am – who I really am – and not have to be all that stuck in that other life. 'Cause this is the life I'd rather live."

AOD programs, housing – these are the things that young people in the justice system need the most. These are the kinds of investments we should most be making. Only time will tell whether the Victorian changes will be effective, but for now they may well contribute to more stories like James'.

*James is not his real name and is the pseudonym he chose for himself.



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My Perilous Life as a Professional Fire Breather



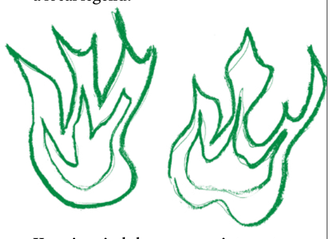
Mohamed Nohassi via Unsplash

By Simon

Simon writes from a prison in NSW.

I spat my first fireball on the shore of Warwick's Leslie Dam over half a century ago. That freaky moment was the flashpoint for a short but spectacular career as a professional fire breather. It gave me money and notoriety, but it very nearly killed me.

God only knows why I put that first match to my mouth. I probably wanted to impress someone, and I was definitely drunk on Bundaberg rum. The kerosene filled my gullet then there was a hot orange blast. For a long second the night sky glowed. Scary bikers and town gangsters gasped and jumped backward. In an instant this shy 17 year old became a local legend.



Keep in mind there was no internet. People didn't get to see this stuff. When I ignited that fluid in my mouth I had no clue what may happen. The risks were utterly unknown.

Sure, we all knew someone who knew someone who had actually witnessed fire breathing, but none of us had first-hand experience. None of us had felt the heat of the blast and smelled the singed hair. This was all new and exciting.

By the time I settled in Sydney a couple of years later my technique had spectacularly improved. I learned how to spit fire like a machine gun. I created meteor trails and grenade explosions. I played with the fire-holding in the air for ages without it burning my lungs. I made it dance and I made it roar. Gods and demons dwell in fire, and so did I.

My brilliant career began when my lovely neighbour in Cremorne offered me a case of VB to perform at his daughter's party. Within a month the word had spread. The case of beer became a hundred bucks. Then, five hundred. In the Theatre Royal I played to the public gallery, dressing in black and silver and putting on a spectacular show like David Copperfield or Penn and Teller. People who only the previous year would never have talked to me suddenly glorified me as the ultra-cool showman.

I remember one very posh North Shore party where a quite famous TV celebrity got me on to the big money events circuit. So at the age of 20 I ended up earning the modern day equivalent of $5000 a week.

I had become a sort of demigod, and I knew it. Women, for the first time in my life, wanted me. Men wanted to be me.

Like Harry Houdini I took greater and greater risks. My mouth muscles were as well developed as a pro trumpet player. I took the fluid deep down into my throat and I ignited it right inside my mouth – not two feet away like some coward amateur.

The shows were spectacular and dangerous, but the impact of kerosene was limited – hot as hell but boring. I wanted an explosion, so I stupidly started playing with petrol.



The result was mind-blowing. The blast fanned out and roared like a grenade. I must have toasted more insects than the entire population of Thailand. Then one day it all went horribly wrong.

All fire breathers end up dead or injured, and so it was with me. An unexpected wind gust blew the fire back into my face and I gasped, gulping the fire into my throat.

The ambulance delivered me to the A&E with my face and lips blistered and bubbling from the heat. Fortunately the injuries were (sort of) minor, but for me the experience took the magic out of fire breathing. I did a few more gigs using kerosene, but my career was soon extinguished.

Do I have any advice? Well, I can tell you that the days of the high-paid fire breathing superhero are over. Health and safety rules have seen to that. And to be honest, it's not worth the risk. Yes, those were truly the glory days, but I almost suffered the most horrible death imaginable.

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Our Minds Are Far Away



Willy Pleasance

How prison takes away your presence – sending your mind backwards and forwards

By Sam Harris

Sam Harris is a retired inmate.

The other old men and I never thought our lives would come to this. But here we gather again, like withered autumn leaves, awaiting the 7 am call for muster. Occasionally we stare at the large blank television screen which has been positioned high up in a corner of our small common room. What are we looking for? Maybe, we are awaiting yet another rerun of our broken lives to appear, as they so often do in our mind's eye. But, mostly, we just sit in silent regret, staring ahead.

Our minds are far away.

By 6.30 am, eight of us share the dim light in the common room: three sit on hard, flesh-coloured plastic dining chairs around an empty circular table, and five of us squeeze together seated on bright-blue and yellow sofas whose torn vinyl covers have seen better days.

But our minds are far away.

The only sound belongs to the tiny, sharp claws grappling with the meshed security screen affixed to our open kitchenette window. Beyond lies the grassy exercise yard criss-crossed by narrow concrete paths. The rosellas have returned with the dawn, in all their blue and red-feathered freedom, for their early morning fix of fresh white bread smeared with strawberry jam. Richard, an elderly inmate we fondly call 'the birdman', pokes a few sweet fragments of bread through small diamond-shaped apertures in the metallic meshwork. The rosellas quickly move into position to gorge themselves. Richard offers a fleeting moment of connection, a crumb of kindness tossed through the barrier that separates us from the world beyond.

But our minds are far away.

Here in our cage, on the inside, we sit in a sleepy trance, cushioned against the sordid outside world of daily prison life. We take comfort to remain cocooned cosily in that twilight state of awakening, unwilling or unable to permit our well-dressed dreams entry into the starkness of the now.

Sunlight begins to filter gently, softly, into our gloom, revealing the shadowy outlines of our dark lives. But, in the partial light, we cannot easily distinguish dreams from reality, pleasure from pain, nor life from death.

Our minds are far away.

This is our time of morning communion when no-one speaks; to do so would be irreverent, would desecrate the sacred silence which we share, and upon which we feed. Instead, we sit and stare into the still-cool morning air while slowly sipping sweet, insipid coffee from our bright-red melamine mugs.

Our thoughts, memories, and desires are like fragments of bleached confetti, now scattered into dark and secret places, hidden beyond our knowing. Strewn over bygone days, our former lives have shrivelled beneath skies that once seemed so sure, so vast, so cloudless, and so intensely cobalt blue.

Yes, our minds are far away.

Regret is the bitter pill we swallow with every sunrise. It clings closely to our hearts.

We mourn the paths not taken, the bridges burned, the dreams left to gather dust. We are old men now, our time for redemption slips through our hands like grains of sand.

Yet, a flicker of hope remains, a fragile ember we hold onto in the darkness. The dream of freedom, of starting anew, of weaving a new tapestry, not of regret, but of a life finally lived.

Until then, we are here in our cage, bound to the past but imaging a future bathed in the soft light of a new beginning.

Our minds are far away.

"But there is within me that shall tire Torture and Time, and breathe when I expire"

– Byron

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How Music Saved Me in Prison



Gabriel Gurrola via Unsplash

By Daz Scott

Daz Scott is a former inmate, having served time in Victorian prisons. He is an advocate for positive change in prisons and removing society's stigma associated with current and former inmates.

Going to prison feels, for most, like the end of life as they knew it. The world keeps moving outside while time inside grinds to a halt. A sentence measured in years can make hope feel like a distant memory.

But even behind bars, there are ways to soften the edges. Ways not just to pass the time, but to leave prison carrying something more than the baggage you came in with.

Even long before I went to prison, I've always had the need to feed a creative spark. In medium security, I painted and wrote, though opportunities were scarce. It wasn't until I was moved to a minimum-security farm that my creativity truly opened up. Access to a pottery studio and kiln felt like a gift. Yet it was music – learning guitar properly – that gave me peace of mind and steadied my soul.

As a kid I'd bounced between lessons: guitar, piano, drums, sports. ADHD kept me restless, always chasing the next thing. I could strum a few chords by ear around a campfire, but I'd never performed, never played a song anyone would recognise. For 30 years an acoustic guitar sat in the corner of my home, strings dusty, silently judging me every time I walked past. "I should sit down and learn properly," I'd always say. But never did. Never took the time. Life got in the way.

Prison gave me no more excuses. It gave me time – too much of it. Time to reflect, to read, to watch bad TV, to stare at walls. With four years left until parole, I decided I would finally learn. My old guitar was sent in, and I borrowed books from the library. At first my fingers stumbled, clumsy and sore. Then a fellow inmate showed me the simplicity of rhythm and chords. That changed everything. I practiced daily, sometimes for hours, until my fingertips were raw and callused.

Progress came quickly. A mentor appeared in my friend Dave, a professional bass guitarist, who guided me through the craft. Soon I had written my first song – a piece I remain proud of. More songs followed, and with them came a surge of creativity and a lift in my mental health.

Within a year I was performing with Dave on bass and another inmate on drums, playing my own original material. The reception was good. Negativity existed, as it always does, but I learned to block it out. Guitar magazines from a friend on the outside fed my learning, and I eventually bought an electric guitar through the prison hobby shop. We became a band. When Dave was released, I upgraded to a twelve-string and performed solo, pushing my songwriting further.

Now, at home, I have a studio where I record, write for others, and share videos online. I never aimed to be a rock star. What mattered was the transformation: that dusty guitar and the opportunity to create became more valuable to me than any team of psychologists or programs.

Being in prison is not the end. For some of us, it can be a restart – a reboot of a life that was missing something essential.

I refused to waste my sentence. Every day became an opportunity to create, to learn, to give back. The guitar was only one path. Pottery turned into gifts for friends and loved ones. Leatherwork carried its own satisfaction. Selling artwork after release brought a joy I hadn't felt in years. And now, I make my living as a writer.

The buzz of playing in front of an appreciative crowd is indescribable – a rush you have to feel to believe. In prison, it's often fellow inmates who pass on their musical knowledge, because long-term tutors are hard to secure. Yet the benefits are undeniable. Learning an instrument sharpens the mind, eases stress, and tempers anger. Whenever agitation rose inside me, I reached for my guitar. I still do.

Music gives different gifts to different people. For me, it was salvation, redemption, and a path toward becoming better than I was. Looking back, those eight years were not wasted. They were an enforced pause – the break I needed to rediscover my creative spark.

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● Reintegration

Finding Yourself Again



Willy Pleasance

Start preparing for re-entry today, from within

By Dr Carollyne Youssef

Dr Carollyne Youssef is a Clinical & Forensic Psychologist at PsychOrium.

When the walls close in, both physically and mentally, it is easy to feel like the person you once was has been lost. For many, incarceration becomes not only a punishment but a pause. A disconnection from one's true self. But you are not gone. You are not broken. You are still in there, waiting to be rediscovered.

As a psychologist who works with many people released from prison, I really value both the process of looking inward and focusing on helping others find their truth. I have sat with many people who feel like they have lost their identity after prison. Some feel crushed by guilt. Others feel numb, hardened, or simply invisible. And some feel they should give in to the opinion of others. But what I have seen repeatedly is that the human spirit is much stronger than it appears. And even behind bars, healing is possible, growth is possible, and transformation is possible.

Who were you before?

Who were you before the noise, the chaos, the choices that led you here? Deep down, beneath survival mode and defence mechanisms, there is a core self, a part of you that existed before life got complicated. Maybe you remember being kind, curious, protective, or creative. Maybe you were someone who felt deeply but did not always know how to express it. That version of you may feel distant now, but it is not gone.

One of the most powerful acts of reclaiming yourself is giving yourself permission to remember who you were, and who you wanted to be. Even if the person you were made mistakes, there were also strengths, values, and dreams in you. Those things do not die because of time, trauma, or prison. They just get buried and can be uncovered again.

Reflection

Ironically, prison may be a place where you can be left alone with your thoughts with minimal distraction. Take time to reflect, not just on your past, but on your potential. Ask yourself:

- What moments in life felt most meaningful to me?
- When did I feel proud of who I was?
- What kind of person do I want to be remembered as?

You do not need to solve everything at once, just start small. Journaling, meditation, or quiet walks can help you reconnect to your inner voice. That's the one that gets drowned out by regret, anger, or fear. That's the inner voice that we are sometimes shamed into not listening to. That voice is not there to punish you, but there to guide you home.

Guilt is not an enemy

I have worked with people who feel like they do not deserve redemption. I hear things like: "I ruined my chance", or "People like me don't change". But guilt, when faced honestly, is not your enemy. It is in fact a signal that you care. It means there is still a part of you that wants to do better. The danger comes when guilt turns into shame. Guilt says, "I made a mistake" while shame says, "I am the mistake". Be careful of that difference, as you could find yourself spiralling down that all too familiar rabbit hole, that seems bottomless. Self-forgiveness does not mean forgetting the past. It means acknowledging it, learning from it, and choosing to grow. Repeatedly, if needed.

Purpose is important

You do not need to wait until you are released to start living a life of purpose. Purpose is found in the small choices we make every day. For example, being kind when it would be easier to be cold, apologising when we hurt someone, or picking up a book, instead of giving up. Purpose could be mentoring someone younger or more vulnerable than you. It could be learning a new skill, writing letters, taking classes, or simply treating others with dignity. These are the things that strengthen your soul and keep you connected to the person you are becoming. I have worked with people who spent decades behind bars becoming counsellors, writers, fathers, teachers, peacekeepers to others and acting in accordance with their values. Their circumstances did not define them. Their choices did.

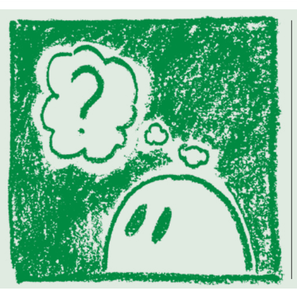
You are still becoming

There is no expiration date on your humanity. The journey back to yourself will not always be smooth. Some days will feel hopeless. But the fact that you are reading this, that you are willing to reflect, means that something in you is still alive and reaching for more. You do not need to be perfect to begin – none of us are. You just need to be willing.

Start by asking yourself this: What kind of person do I want to become, and what can I do today, if even just one thing, to move closer to that vision?

Write it down and think about it often. Let it shape your steps, day by day. You are not the same person you were yesterday. You are still becoming. And that is one of the most hopeful truths there is.

"The harder the conflict, the greater the triumph" – George Washington



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● Legal Corner

How to Prepare for Your Defence



Willy Pleasance

Tips from a jail house lawyer

This is from a booklet of legal information from an anonymous prisoner.

This is legal information and not legal advice. If you need legal advice, please contact your lawyer immediately.

General principles

As a general rule, you should not talk to people about your case. You can ask for help from the few people in prison who are known to assist others with legal matters. If you're seen to be helping yourself, making an effort to work on your case, and educating yourself, then people will help you – but no one, including your lawyer, is going to do it all for you.

Use the phone as little as possible. Even if you think you won't say anything inappropriate, all calls are recorded.

If you're placed in a security or management unit rather than mainstream, you need to complain about this every day and push your lawyer about it. Your ability to defend yourself from these units is limited. Your priority at this point must be dealing with your defence – which means no drug use and no playing up.

Don't trust your lawyer too much; your case is ultimately your own responsibility. You must drive your defence by giving written instructions and keeping copies. Lawyers do not automatically do everything that is needed. A lawyer is like a taxi for hire – if you get in and say nothing, the meter runs, but you go nowhere. If you give poor instructions, you'll be taken the long way around.

You must understand that you, the client, own the work done by your lawyer on your behalf. All documents and communication between you and your lawyer are confidential and remain your property unless you sign away that right. This is called Legal Professional Privilege, and it belongs to you, not the lawyer.

Where to start

First, write a detailed personal history so your lawyer understands you as a real person and not just a defendant. Include:

- Your family
- Your background and upbringing
- Your schooling
- Your work history
- Your relationships with your partner, friends, and others
- Your community ties, activities, and social lifestyle
- Your physical and mental health (including any substance use issues)

Secondly, write a detailed account of the events that are the subject of the criminal charges against you.

When preparing these documents:

- Number each page
- Leave space around the margins
- Write on every second line
- Keep a copy for yourself
- Type it if possible

Send a copy to your lawyer labelled "draft copy" and ask for their thoughts. They may suggest removing some details or expanding others. It's normal to go through multiple versions.

Reading and writing skills

If your reading or writing skills are not strong, ask for help. In prison you can buy a dictionary and do a TAFE English course. Ask a friend to help, or let your lawyer interpret your writing. Do not let literacy issues stop you from defending yourself.

Understanding lawyers

Part of a lawyer's job is to comfort and reassure clients by saying things like "you have a good chance," or "we'll have to wait and see." The legal process takes time, and as the case develops – if your chances worsen – lawyers try to let you down gradually. They do this because clients can become distressed, lose control, or even harm themselves. They want to keep you stable.

You might hear things like:

- "We did very well at the committal; they probably won't take it to trial."
- "Don't worry, a jury will never convict on this evidence."
- "We have strong grounds of appeal."

If you're pleading guilty, you may hear:

- "Don't worry, this is a good judge."
- "The Crown is not going too hard."
- "We'll look at an appeal – I'll see you next week."

If you are going to plead guilty, do it sooner rather than later.

Being realistic about your case

You must focus on the problems with your case, not the good points. Concentrate on what work needs to be done and how to do it – whether you're fighting the charges or pleading guilty.

Don't rely on "good chances." Don't sit back and "wait and see" – that is the worst thing you can do.

Work out your real chances. If they are not good, recognise that the earlier you plead guilty, the larger the sentencing discount. At the same time, leave nothing undone. You have only one chance. If you do not raise an issue at trial or at the plea hearing, you cannot raise it on appeal.

Never hold anything in reserve. If you have evidence, use it at the earliest opportunity.

Obtaining the evidence

Write to your lawyer and ask for the Hand-up Brief.

You can also make a Freedom of Information (FOI) request for the police brief. Refer your lawyer to *Sobh v Police Force of Victoria* [1994] 1 VR 41. If making an FOI request, do it early.

Working with the hand-up brief

Once you have the brief:

- Read all the documents
- Make notes on every witness statement

Use the page numbers in the brief as reference points. For example:

- "On page 45, witness Brian Smith says, 'I saw him run down the street.' This cannot be true because..."
- "On page 56, witness Jenny Smith says she asked Brian what he saw out the window, and he said he could see nothing at all."

Continue like this for all witnesses.

Conclusion

The criminal justice system deals with proof, not truth. The police and Crown present allegations; the defence rebuts them; the jury decides whether the Crown has met the required standard of proof. "Truth" and "innocence" are not part of the legal equation.

The system is not concerned with abstract truth in jury reasoning. Many people wrongly believe "truth" matters in court, but it doesn't. Juries determine facts as proven or not proven based on the law and required standards of proof.

It is therefore your job to deal with the situation responsibly and obtain the best possible outcome for yourself.

● Have a Question?

Do you have a legal query that you want answered? Is there an area of law that you think people inside should know more about?

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• Health

Choose Your Fuel: The Importance of Eating Well



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.

If you finally bought your dream car, what kind of fuel would you put in it?

The answer for most people would be the premium. After all, you want to protect this precious thing that you worked so hard for. With this in mind, think of what a privilege it is to be in these bodies, with these minds. To comprehend the tiniest of matter such as atoms and get lost in the endlessness of the universe with all of its galaxies and incomprehensible distances.



The fact that you even came into existence defies crazy odds. Yet, what fuel do you choose for your body? The easy, the cheap, the tasty yet toxic.

Cars come and go. So let's pay some more attention to what we put in our bodies and how it affects us. Some cheap, dirty fuel may taste good and sure, it's supposed to be delicious – but the damage that it causes to your gut health also affects your brain function. The highs from the dopamine hit from sugars spike your insulin leaving you craving – more like a drug addiction. Even after one of these meals it could take anywhere from three to six days to detox out of your system. And regular meals like this cause cholesterol to build up in your arteries restricting blood flow causing a number of problems.

So what fuel is good for you? Well, everyone is different. The way I choose to jump start things is with some old fashioned fasting. Then, the process is more about finding what throws your system out of whack. For example, after I finished a fast, I noticed that dairy didn't agree with me. I felt gassy, tired, irritated in my gut like reflux or heartburn. I took note and removed that thing.

If you start to pay attention to what you consume you will notice more clarity in your thoughts, an inner peace and presence that will make you glow inside and out.

While you have this time away from all the choices and distractions of the outside world, take the time to study yourself: what works and benefits your life and purpose and what pulls you away from it. Your choice of fuel and how your body operates could be the thing that will keep you out of prison. A bad meal or lack of exercise today could turn into a week, then into drinking, into drug use, depression, loss of relationships with family and friends and lost in a sea of green shirts and broken dreams. This is your chance to build back up.

Your health is the most important thing and the fuel you choose powers that and everything else in your life. Choose with awareness and intention and make the most of body, mind and time.

I hope this information finds you at the right time.

Take care

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Mind on Loop: Dealing With Rumination

Rumination is often an attempt to rewrite an unbearable past – breaking its spell is a key to better mental health.

By Stephen Rothwell

Steve spent many years running from the trauma of his incarcerated past until he broke down and realised he had to face his demons. He is now devoted to helping others overcome trauma.

"You're stupid. Why did you do that? You should have...."

This was only one of the dozens of variations of should have, could have, would have that I inflicted on myself every day.

But what exactly was I trying to fix? What was so unbearable that I kept replaying the same moment, hoping this time I'd make a different decision?

I should have stayed in control and resisted the compulsion to do that robbery. If I had, I wouldn't have been sentenced to three years in prison.

That is the weight I was carrying, compounded by imprisonment trauma and amplified by undiagnosed OCD, ADHD, autism and a neurodiverse sensitivity that made everything cut deeper.

Back to the dreaded edge

Again and again, I found myself pulled back to the precipice of that single decision. I was locked in an agonising loop for decades. My confidence was shredded by self-hatred, my self-image reduced to embers.

I kept replaying the trauma, desperately hoping for a different ending, driven by an intensity of pain I could not bear.

I had become trapped in stuck thinking points – my mind's default response to unhealed imprisonment trauma.

Ideas That Help

Two insights could have reduced years of suffering had I known them earlier:

1. **Some ruminations feel impossible to move past because they cut so deeply.**

This is a normal trauma response. The "stickiness" of rumination is proportional to the depth of the hurt underneath.

2. **Once you recognise this, you can separate the hurt from the belief that it can never be healed.**

That separation creates a small but powerful space where change becomes possible.

I needed to acknowledge the hurt, recognise it as separate from me, and then work toward peace with it.

From that little bit of distance, I could finally question some of the beliefs that had tormented me for years, such as:

- "I can't get over this because the system failed to diagnose my OCD, ADHD and autism."
- "Anyone in my position would be destroyed by this."
- "You didn't just mess up – you are a mess-up. Uniquely damned."
- "People must be disgusted with me. Of course they'd reject me."

From here I uncovered two more truths that helped pull me out of the ruminative cycle:

1. **These mental loops were voluntary once I understood them.**

I didn't have to enter them. I could interrupt the thought, mentally hit reset, and choose acceptance.

2. **I had the power to reassess and reframe my thinking.**

I could reduce the catastrophising and allow reality to be less absolute, less condemning.

Moving Forward

I realised my story wasn't as uniquely catastrophic as I imagined. I wasn't alone. Some statistics suggest around 40 percent of prisoners live with mental illness.

Still, I knew I needed something practical – simple shorthand prompts to interrupt rumination the moment it began. That's where my **Safe → Now → Control → Reset** system came from. These prompts are easy to remember and surprisingly effective when the mind starts spiralling.

Safe

You are safe. You may feel distressed, but you are not in danger. Say the word safe and mentally lay that word over the room, like a protective blanket. Repeat it as many times as necessary. Safe. Safe. Safe.

Now

This brings you back into the present moment. You are not back in the trauma. You are not trapped in the loop. You are here, now. Repeat it to steady yourself.

Control

You can regulate your emotions. You have survived worse. You have endured harder things. Use the word control to remind yourself: you can do this. You are capable. You're in control.

Reset

A cue for when you feel anxiety, dread or depression building. Reset your system. Breathe. Relax. Return to the last moment you felt steadier. Clear the slate and come back to yourself. This prompt has been particularly effective for many people I've shared it with. In a world full of electronics, the idea of a quick "reset" feels instinctively familiar and easy to apply to our own thoughts.

A kinder way forward

Rumination can feel overwhelming, but it is a human response to unresolved pain. Understanding its roots can help us meet ourselves with greater compassion. Healing began for me when I stopped interpreting rumination as a personal failing and instead saw it as a sign that something within me needed acknowledgement, safety and care.

Want to Get Fit for 2026?

Exercises reprinted with permission from *Inside Time*

Whether you want to get in gear to transform your physique, or maybe just tone up, there is a selection of exercises you can do without any equipment, in your cell or in the exercise yard.

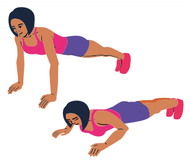
If you have a medical condition that may affect your ability to exercise, you should check with a doctor before you start this. If you're injured, don't start this programme until you've recovered.



Tricep dips

Target muscles: Triceps

1. Stand up straight with a fixed surface or a sturdy chair behind you, for example the side of the bottom bunk, your table, or your chair.
2. Place the palms of your hands flat on this surface.
3. Facing away from the surface, dip your backside towards the ground by bending your arms.
4. Straighten your arms and rise back up to the starting position.
5. Repeat exercise.



Push-ups

Target muscles: Pectorals (chest muscles); Anterior Deltoids (front of your shoulders); Triceps.

1. Lay forward with your arms extended supporting your body so it is parallel to the ground.
2. Bend your elbows so that your torso lowers to the ground. Keep your body straight.
3. Push back up – returning to the arms-extended position.



Sit-ups

Target muscles: Abs; Obliques (muscles at the sides of your abs); Tensor fasciae latae (muscles between your hips and thighs).

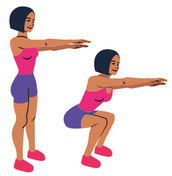
1. Find a flat surface that will not hurt your back if you lie down on it; use an exercise mat if possible.
2. Lay on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, hands by the sides of your head.
3. Raise your torso up off the ground by rounding your back and lifting your shoulders and stomach towards your knees.
4. Slowly return to the starting position.



Ab crunches

Target muscles: Abs; Obliques; Quadriceps.

1. Lay flat on your back and bend your knees to a 90° angle so your feet are vertical to the floor.
2. Raise your shoulders up off the ground and bring them towards your knees, bringing your head forward and rounding your back.
3. Return to the starting position.



Squats

Target muscles: Glutes; Quadriceps; Hamstrings (back of your thighs).

1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Bend down through your hips until your thighs are horizontal with the floor. Keep your back straight and don't let it roll around.
3. Straighten your legs upwards and lift your torso back to the starting position.

Mob

Voices From Beyond the Bars 2025



By About Time

Beyond the Bars is a radio program giving a voice to First Nations people in prison in Victoria.

The live prison radio broadcasts are aired on 3CR and released on CD each year. This year, the program interviewed a number of First Nations people across six prisons during NAIDOC week.

The program has now been running for 24 years.

These are some of the voices included in the 2025 edition of Beyond Bars.

JORDAN

What is your purpose in life?
Mine was having my babies, my three beautiful kids. Gave me a bit more of a purpose in life, as a father it was a proud moment. Can't wait to get back to them, think of them every day in there.

I always just shout out connection to country, connection to family. Any time you're stuck, go sit by the fire or go sit by the river – water is life, fire is life.

Especially with broken families out there, hold on to what's true, what's close to you. Anywhere you go, especially in our society – lapsing, relapsing – you have to try to stay true and stick to your guns and do what you need to do for yourself first and your community.

SAM

Painting is a big thing for everyone, even if you don't think you're good at painting, a lot of people still do it.

When you're in jail, especially with your family on the outside, you don't really have anything to give them for birthdays or Christmas. When it was my partner's birthday, all I wanted to do was make a painting, to show how grateful I am for the stuff she's done for me and continues to do for me. But I couldn't even do that – it's been two weeks.

My youngest is only 15 months old, my oldest is three. When I was younger I didn't even know we were Koori until I was 19 years old and in jail. I want to teach them how to paint and keep that culture strong in the family, and keep it going.

It makes you feel humble and whole, to give something to someone that didn't cost you any money, but it's worth more than money. I can't wait to teach my kids how to paint. It's a way to express how you're feeling without having to talk about it. You can put it straight on a canvas.

You don't have to confide with anyone, you can confide to the canvas. Sometimes you don't want to talk, sometimes you want to let it out in your own way.

We all share our stories and the stuff we've been through. The canvas to me is like having a notepad in your pocket. If you can't express yourself, what can you do?

JACOB

Here it's all self catered, you have to cook for yourself. You get a budget, you get an IGA spend $51.40 a week per person.

I like to get a few of the boys together and bank it up and eat together, that's nice. I cook for my lodge. I've been cooking for eight fellas for the last six months.

My favourite meal is just a roast lamb with a potato salad. Just two elements to it but it's delicious.

JOSH

Ever since getting locked up, I can't wait for the journey in front of me.

When I was a kid I didn't have the perfect role model, I thought I wasn't even going to live, with my dad doing what he was doing.

Now he's on the right path, and I can't wait to take that path with, being that good role model for my kids.

I know I haven't been the best role model, but I've done my traffic management course at Fulham and I just want to do that. I can't wait to take this path and be out there for my kids.

Hopefully one day I get that opportunity and take it and live a good life.

DAISY

When I got out the first time, there was no housing. The second time I got out, there was no housing. The third time I got out there was housing. But there were no structures with my day. I'm waking up every day, I'm getting on the drugs and I find myself doing crime again. It's just not right.

The third time I got out I got accepted in the ARC Program. They accepted me and they gave me a certificate and said 'you now have housing'. Ages ago you'd get out and they'd put you on the normal housing list. As soon as I got on that program, I got housing.



Reconnecting With Family
By S. Baker
Yorta Yorta/Bunurong people
2024

This painting represents me as the goanna, going back home to freedom, reconnecting with my dad, mum, brother and sister and the rest of family, and going back to Country.

Learn

National Dishes From Around the World

Some countries have officially declared national dishes while others rely on beloved culinary traditions. Here's a quick-stop global tour of the plates that define national identity and the stories simmering behind them.

By Shae Wiedermann

Shae Wiedermann is a writer and editor based in Naarm, Melbourne.

Have you ever heard of a national dish? No doubt you're aware of a national anthem or a national flag, but what is a national dish?

National dishes represent a country's culinary culture.

Some countries have officially designated national dishes, while others have unofficial dishes that are widely considered to be the national dish. Additionally, some countries have too diverse a population, food, or cultural practices to have one or two national dishes that represent them.

So, which countries have official and unofficial national dishes, and what are they?



John Aledia via Unsplash

Thailand
It mightn't come as a shock that Thailand's national dish is Pad Thai – it's in the name after all.

Flat rice noodles, protein (such as chicken, shrimp or tofu), a sweet, salty and sour sauce, and vegetables combine in this flavourful dish.

The famous dish was born during the height of World War II and was created by the then-Prime Minister of Thailand, who actually declared the dish to be the national dish of Thailand.



Silvia Trigo via Unsplash

Peru
Ceviche, a cold dish made from soaking raw fish or shellfish in lime or lemon juice, is Peru's national dish. There are many variations of the dish, but it often features sliced onion, corn, chilli and herbs.

The Peruvian government declared it the official national dish in 2004, and a National Ceviche Day is even celebrated on June 28.



Mirela Andoni

Albania
Tavë kosi is the national dish of the Balkan country. It is a baked casserole of lamb and rice topped with a yoghurt and egg sauce.

There has been no official declaration regarding this, but tavë kosi is widely considered by Albanians to be the country's national dish.



withlovefromchile via Unsplash

Canada
Poutine – French fries topped with cheese and gravy – is widely considered Canada's unofficial national dish.

The dish originated in Quebec in the late 1950s and gained popularity throughout the country.

Many still consider Canada to be too diverse to have just one national dish representing the entire country, however, and poutine remains "unofficial" in this regard.



Douglas Lopez via Unsplash

Spain
Originating from the Valencia region, paella consists of short-grain rice, vegetables and meat infused with saffron.

There are many variations, including seafood paella, chicken paella and rabbit paella.

The name comes from the flat, round pan it's cooked in, which is called a "paellera" in Valencian and Catalan.

It hasn't been declared an official national dish, representing more the Valencia region than the entire country. Still, it is undoubtedly one of Spain's most well-known dishes, especially among non-Spaniards.



Daniel via Unsplash

South Korea
Kimchi is widely regarded as the national dish of South Korea.

It is a side dish made from salted and fermented cabbage, seasoned with spices. Kimchi is a staple in Korean cooking and eating practices, and is known for its health benefits due to the probiotic bacteria that evolve in the fermentation process.

The good-for-your-gut food has been recognised as a vital part of Korean cultural identity, and was even sent to space with South Korea's first astronaut.



Shae Wiedermann

Iceland
While there is no official national dish of Iceland, the cold country has a popular dish called Hákarl, which is made from preserved Greenland shark.

The meat of a Greenland shark is poisonous if it's eaten raw, due to its high urea content. The traditional Icelandic people found a way around this, however.

The meat is buried for several months to ferment it and drain it of toxins, before being hung to dry for another several months.

The result is a very strong-flavoured meat, loved by some and hated by others.



Raman via Unsplash

England
As an incredibly diverse country, England doesn't have an official national dish, although there are two widely considered top contenders for the title, and one might surprise you.

The first is fish and chips, which is not entirely out of place for an island country. The second is Chicken Tikka Masala.

Chicken Tikka Masala was born from Indian influence and is very popular throughout the country. It is considered representative of the nation's multiculturalism.

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Culture

Straight Outta Risdon – Bars Behind Bars



Nikki Davis-Jones/The Mercury

By Sara

It takes real courage to grab the mic and share your story, especially in front of fellow inmates and complete strangers. Bars Behind Bars is more than a music program at Risdon Prison; it's a creative outlet that's uncovering raw talent and powerful voices. From the prison gym turned makeshift studio, some incredible rappers have stepped forward, transforming their experiences into lyrics that hit hard and speak truth.

LEVEL, one of the program's emerging talents, summed up the impact perfectly:

"It was a blowout. I didn't think we'd ever be able to do this shit from in here 'cos we've been trying to get something going for years and finally it happens. I am able to do the stuff I do on my own and actually have people listen to it. It makes me think I could actually make something of it."

That sense of possibility is what Bars Behind Bars is all about. It's not just about spitting rhymes. It's about reclaiming identity, building confidence, and learning a craft that demands discipline and creativity.

The Spark: FH2T and a PlayStation

The program's origin story is as raw and inventive as the music itself. It started with FH2T, an incarcerated artist who began making complex instrumentals on his PlayStation. When he shared his tracks with Creative Learning Officer Sara, the impact was immediate:

"FH2T's beats and bars were phenomenal—so real, so dark and dank yet still so beautiful to listen to. I couldn't get them out of my head, and I thought, this guy's onto something. We need proper artists on this who have the right equipment and can really make this work all that it could be."

That moment sparked a collaboration that would change the creative landscape inside Risdon Prison.

Building a studio behind bars

Enter local artists Hermit Kovacic and ROOboy, who answered the call. Together, they transformed the prison gym into a makeshift recording studio. Over several sessions, four tracks were recorded, each one a testament to resilience and artistry.

One standout track, *Switching My Life*, featuring FH2T and fellow artist KAPALA features as part of the soundtrack for a film of artists work for the recent Artists with Conviction exhibition, a film which is currently being 'toured' across all facilities.

Trust and transformation

In prison, circumstances can change quickly, and that meant different voices and artists stepping in each time recording happened. Sara reflects on what she witnessed:

"It was amazing to see the guys drop their guard in front of Hermit and ROOboy almost immediately. There was so much trust and honesty in that room."

That trust created an atmosphere where vulnerability and creativity could coexist – a rare and powerful thing behind bars.

The craft of rap

Rap is often misunderstood as raw aggression, but inside the studio, it's poetry with a pulse. LEVEL explains his writing process:

"I think of a cool thing to say like a simile or a metaphor and then I'll add a bar to it with something that sounds cool. It is writing poetry but just to a beat. It's more a craft where there's patterns."

Those patterns matter. They teach structure, timing, and flow – skills that translate far beyond music. LEVEL's own bars show the mix of wit and wordplay that makes rap so compelling:

"Sober rap then I pop the top when I rock the booth. Rhymes in the crib and I've got it locked like I'm Dr Seuss."

Why it matters

Programs like Bars Behind Bars do more than entertain they rehabilitate. They offer a sense of agency, create community and foster resilience.

For FH2T, LEVEL, and others, this isn't just a hobby. It's hope. It's the belief that their voices matter, that their stories can resonate beyond prison walls. And when that happens, transformation begins, not just for the artist, but for everyone who listens.



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Sports Round Up



By Goal Mouth



Marcus Wallis via Unsplash

Cricket: Six days of Ashes destruction

It took less than six days for England's cricketers to lose the first two tests of the five-match Ashes series against Australia. In that time, they proved that they have only three problems: batting, bowling and fielding. Perhaps a fourth is captaincy.

Cricket tests are scheduled to be played over five days. The first test, in Perth, was completed in two days. The second match, in Brisbane, lasted less than four days. Australia won both matches by eight wickets.

Before the series began, recently retired England fast bowler Stuart Broad labelled the Australian team the worst since 2010. He then had to watch and commentate as his ex-teammates fell in a heap when the pressure was applied by an Australian team missing key players including captain Pat Cummins.

The Aussie heroes were Travis Head, who hit a whirlwind 123 (from 83 balls) in Perth, and paceman Mitch Starc, who has taken 18 wickets so far and top-scored with 77 in Australia's first innings in Brisbane.

Of course, it's not too late for the Englishmen to fight back and win the series 3-2 (as predicted by yours truly). But history is certainly against them.



Liauzh via WikiCommons

F1: Piastri has to make do with bronze

Australian Oscar Piastri, who was favourite for the Formula 1 world drivers' title mid-season, dipped out, finishing third.

Piastri's McLaren teammate, Englishman Lando Norris won the championship, but the top driver was undoubtedly Dutchman Max Verstappen.

Despite perceptions that McLaren favoured Norris over the 24-year-old Piastri, 'our boy' paid the price for inconsistent form in the second half of the season.

Verstappen came within two points of a fifth consecutive title after a stunning comeback in his Red Bull car, ultimately winning eight grands prix, one more than Norris and Piastri. Norris finished 13 points clear of Piastri.

The 2026 F1 championship begins in Melbourne on 6-8 March.

In Supercars, Chaz Mostert starred in the new finals series format, becoming the first champion in a Ford since 2020, despite Chevrolet-mounted Broc Feeney dominating the year with 14 race wins (to Mostert's three) and 19 pole positions. Feeney's Triple Eight team will revert to Fords in 2026, while Mostert's Walkinshaw team will run new entrant Toyota.



Mark Pazolli via WikiCommons

Tennis: 'Demon' rated top player again

Australia's Alex De Minaur has won the John Newcombe Medal for the fourth time as Australia's top tennis player. Only Ash Barty (five) has won more of the medals.

In 2025, De Minaur won 56 matches, earning more than $5 million in prizemoney. He is ranked seventh in the world but has not won a grand slam or even made a semi-final. He has been a quarter-finalist six times.

The nation awaits his next challenge: the Australian Open at Melbourne Park from 12 January.



4TheWynne via WikiCommons

AFLW: All-conquering Roos leap to second consecutive flag

As widely expected, North Melbourne took out its second consecutive premiership, steamrolling Brisbane by 40 points in a lopsided grand final at Princes Park in Melbourne. It was the record-breaking Roos' 27th win in a row before a sold-out crowd of almost 13,000.

The AFL's support of the women's competition has been questioned recently and the timing of the grand final was a real head-scratcher. The game began at 7.45pm and young girls – who are the game's future – would have been in bed by halftime. The match could have started a few hours earlier to allow youngsters to enjoy the whole telecast, including the after-match celebrations. What were you thinking, AFL?

Meanwhile, the AFL would be happy with Tasmanian parliamentarians who gave the green light for construction of the 23,000-seat roofed Macquarie Point stadium in Hobart. The $1.13 billion stadium will be home for the new Tasmanian AFL/AFLW team, the Devils, from 2028.



JJaimin via WikiCommons

Commonwealth Games: India steps up

India will host the 2030 Commonwealth Games. The host city will be Ahmedabad, with the opening and closing ceremonies to be held at Narendra Modi Stadium, which has a capacity of 132,000. India last staged the Games in Delhi in 2010.

The Games have had a difficult time recently with Durban (2022) and Victoria (2026) dropping out controversially. British cities Birmingham and Glasgow took the baton as hosts for those two events.

Next year's Glasgow Games will have only 10 sports compared with Ahmedabad's 15 to 17 sports.



Fauzan Saari via Unsplash

Soccer: World Cup 'quarterises' matches

The 2026 World Cup starting in June will feature more countries than ever, with 48 teams competing for the trophy in the US, Canada and Mexico.

The organisers announced three-minute 'hydration breaks' in each half of every match of the summer tournament, regardless of the venue or whether the stadium has a roof. The decision effectively means that each game will be played in quarters, and opens up more opportunities for advertisers.

Another controversy that has emerged is Iran and Egypt's objections to Seattle's 'Pride Match' scheduled to take place within days of their fixture.

In the draw, Australia avoids some of the tournament's heavy hitters, sitting in Group D with co-hosts USA, Paraguay and the winner of a playoff, probably between Slovakia and Türkiye. The Socceroos' first game is on 14 June in Vancouver.

World Cup holder Argentina will fancy its chances, facing Austria, Algeria and Jordan in Group J, although superstar Lionel Messi is not a confirmed starter.

Creative

All Men Love Freedom!

By Bukks

Bukks writes from a prison in VIC.

All men love their freedom, and the freedom they do take
Freedom can be lost, by making many mistakes
Don't take freedom for granted, as they may take it away
Prisons were invented, just to make a young man pay
All men love their freedom, but are they prepared to fight
Freedom can be taken, but that doesn't make it right
Fighting for your freedom, is what all men need to do
Freedom's for the many, but fighting for it's for the few

All men love their freedom, but my freedom it is gone
Freedom's for the free, but they built prisons for the con
Don't take freedom for granted, when for many freedom's lost
Always be careful who you trust, for I was double-crossed
Freedom can be taken, and freedom can be fought
Freedom can be given up, and freedom can be taught

Some have lost their freedom; they didn't know what it was worth
Freedom should be given now, to every man on Earth
All men love their freedom, but there's pain in some men's heart
When they get no love from others, off to prison they depart

All men love their freedom, but sometimes freedom's not enough
Some men, they have nothing, sometimes life is just too tough
All men love their freedom, but there's some who love it not
Dictators and kings, who sometimes like to scheme and plot
If they take your land away, then fight to get them back
For freedom is a reason to riot and ransack

All men love their freedom, but some just don't know what it is
From too much time in prisons, he forgets it was once his
Without the taste of freedom, of which they are depraved
They respond the only way they know, it's why they misbehaved

All men love their freedom, just try to make them remember
Spending time with families, on the day that's in December
All men love their freedom, so I miss my freedom very much
I miss the unlimited choices, and I miss the woman's touch.

So much time in prison, where the time has been misspent
I was thus found guilty, so I am not innocent.
Freedom's for the winners, prison's for losers of the game
I have lost so much now, and yes, I know I am to blame.

All men love their freedom, and that is including me,
In prison I remain right now, I'll see you when I'm free!

Won't Quit

By Zoe

Zoe is a member of FIGJAM, a collective of formerly incarcerated women, trans and gender diverse folks who live, work and play across so-called Victoria.

My name is Zoe. I am 37 years old and I was in prison for 6 years. I am currently on parole and have been out of prison for a year and a half. Since then I have been a core member of the Formerly Incarcerated Girls Justice Advocates Melbourne (FIGJAM) Collective.

FIGJAM has supported what's important to me by helping me advocate for women who are currently in the prison system. I think the peer support we receive within FIGJAM is awesome – we always support one another and lift each other up. I became a FIGJAM member through a worker within Flat Out introducing me to Nina, who is also a FIGJAM member. FIGJAM has changed my life!!

Through FIGJAM I've had opportunities with the arts project through Melbourne University and interviews with several service providers, mostly being paid work. I have also been able to have my rap song that I wrote inside prison played at the end of a podcast I was involved in at 3CR radio station called Untold Stories of Injustice.

I was part of the research about child protection and criminalisation, but my story was redacted due to me still being on parole. I have to get permission for anything I'm a part of, but being a core member of FIGJAM has built rapport with my PO, which has made me able to get permission to travel interstate. Being a FIGJAM member has given me more skills to work within a group setting as I have autism and find this hard. I've also had the courage to chair our FIGJAM meetings.

Being a core member of FIGJAM has also given me the courage to apply for jobs in the community.

Won't Quit
By Zoe from FIGJAM

I'm working out but I'm feeling so unfit
I'm working hard but I'm really lacking grit
Lacking the momentum so I really wanna quit
Even though I know
It's for my benefit
Running fast, then I take another hit
One after the other and I'm being legit
And it's taking a toll
Making me feel shit
Said I feel so shit
And I really wanna quit

Chorus:
Keep a schedule cause I thrive on routine
Keep pushing, even when I'm feeling green
Keep working out so I become lean
God knows
This world can be so mean
So at the moment I train like a machine
Cause I gotta keep my mind and my body clean
Just need god to intervene
And try and contain this wolverine

Chorus x2:
Keep a schedule cause I thrive on routine
Keep pushing, even when I'm feeling green
Keep working out so I become lean
God knows
This world can be so mean
I'm going so fast but I feel afraid
But I push through to break the barricade
Pain penetrates as I bury the blade
Feel like I've been hit with a grenade
No one, no one, will come to my aid
Knowing this
I start to sink and fade
Feeling like I'm in a movie or charade
But the difference is
That I'm not being paid
Before you judge, you don't know where I've been
Even though you know that I'm wearing thin
Even though it's getting under my skin
I won't give up until I win
There's no way I'm gonna pull the pin
I'll get back up and start again
Like tough love a form of discipline
Until I'm totally clean off the heroin

Chorus x2:
Keep a schedule cause I thrive on routine
Keep pushing, even when I'm feeling green
Keep working out so I become lean
God knows
This world can be so mean
I'm tryna turn this situation around
Get myself off this merry-go-round
And at the same time
Keep my feet on the ground
But I'm feeling like I'm still chained and bound
Everything keeps going in the background
My head's been kicked to the ground
Noise and gun shots resound
As I fight in this battleground
There's something I need to address
Choose your next move in this game of chess
Cause this could all lead to distress
If you don't act smart or act in duress
If you don't use brains and use foolishness
If you bury emotions
Choose to compress
Create a mess choose not to express
You will start to lose your happiness

Chorus x4:
Keep a schedule cause I thrive on routine
Keep pushing, even when I'm feeling green
Keep working out so I become lean
God knows
This world can be so mean



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Poems by Denis

By Denis

Denis writes from a prison in VIC.

A Beacon of Joy
Memories arise, an echo's gentle sway,
Circling 'round me, crays of yesterday.
Recalling her smile, so beautiful and bright,
A beacon of joy in the softest light.
Her laughter, a melody, pure and clear,
Resonates within, though she's not here.
A bosom swelled, like creeks in spring's embrace,
Overflowing with love, a tender grace.
In every ripple, her essence I find,
A memory cherished, sweetly entwined.
Her smile, a memory, forever aglow,
Like creeks that swell, and never forego.

A Veil of Clouds
Through the window of my cell,
I gaze afar,
Into the mist where dreams and memories are.
A veil of clouds, so soft and yet so vast,
Hides the world, its future and its past.
Invisible they seem, these wisps of white,
A dance of shadows in the pale moonlight.
They whisper tales of what lies beyond,
Of sunlit fields and of the golden pond.
This cell, my confines, cannot hold my mind,
For in the clouds, a freedom I do find.
Each shapeless form, a story to impart,
A canvas vast for the imagination's art.
So let me look, let me dream and see,
In the mist of clouds, I find the key.
To unlock the chains, the walls, the bars,
And sail away to meet the stars.

Beautiful Souls

By RM

RM writes from a prison in QLD.

Why should you suffer for my pain.
Knowledge in this I should try to gain.

Does it feel I have left you alone?
It may feel I have cut you to the bone,

But please believe me, my love is true,
I know in the past I didn't know what to do,

Because being a father was new to me,
Over the years I was blind, but now I see,

That my responsibility is to be a dad,
Even me writing this poem, makes me sad,

Thinking of you all from this cell,
You beautiful things, I must have put you all through hell.

So now I have made some new goals,
And that is to save your beautiful souls.

Emotions, Love and Hate

By A

A writes from a prison in VIC.

Love's last pain;
It is everything.
It is nothing.
It is unbearable.

Love;
It is unbearable.
It is everything.
It is nothing.

Hate;
It is nothing.
It is unbearable.
It is everything.

Emotions are sometimes like being caught in a rip. You can't fight it, and if you anchor yourself to it, it will sink you.

You could kick and scream, dragging the next or closest person to you under to keep yourself afloat, but surely this results in you being alone and worse off than when you started.

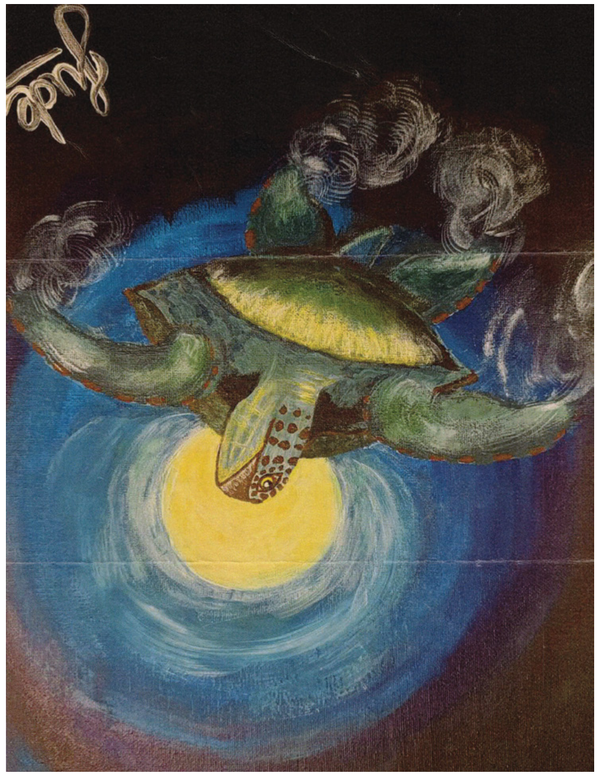
If you let it take you out, eventually it will allow you to swim back to shore.

Hope

By Elijah

Elijah writes from a prison in NSW.

From good to bad,
And up to down,
Life twisted us around,
Now here we stand,
On unknown ground,
This sinking sand,
Struggling to stay,
Hand in hand,
But our hearts prevail,
In this unknown tale,
I'll hold you up,
Into safety,
And out of danger,
My love with you,
Forever too,
My love I miss you,
But I still dream of you,
Rough paths ahead,
Of that we're sure,
But please with me,
Let's stand tall,
I bare it all,
My soul to you,
Forever more.



By Jude, from a prison in the ACT



Play

Quiz

Test your general knowledge on our monthly quiz!

1. What is the chemical symbol for gold?
2. Which language is primarily spoken in Brazil?
3. Who wrote *Pride and Prejudice*?
4. What is the smallest prime number greater than 100?
5. In computing, what does “HTTP” stand for?
6. Which gas makes up about 78% of Earth's atmosphere by volume?
7. What is the capital city of Canada?
8. In which year did humans first land on the Moon (Apollo 11)?
9. What is the square root of 144?
10. Who painted the *Mona Lisa*?

Card Game – Rolling Stone

Rolling Stone (also known as Enflé) is a shedding/trick-taking card game whose objective is to be the first player to discard all their cards. In the standard four-player version, you start with a 32-card deck – the 2s through 6s removed – so the cards range from 7 through Ace, with Aces high and 7s low. At the start of the game, a dealer is chosen. Then the deck is shuffled, and each player is dealt eight cards.

Play begins with the player to the dealer’s left, who may play any card face-up, and play moves clockwise. Each following player must “follow suit” (play a card of the same suit) if they can. If someone cannot follow suit, they must pick up all cards played so far and add them to their hand – and that player then starts the next round. If everyone does follow suit, the highest card of that suit wins the trick; the winner collects and discards those cards (they don’t count as part of the winner’s hand) then leads the next trick. The first player to get rid of all their cards wins.

Quiz Answers

1. Au
2. Portuguese
3. Jane Austen
4. 101
5. HyperText Transfer Protocol
6. Nitrogen
7. Ottawa
8. 1969
9. 12
10. Leonardo da Vinci

Crossword Answers

ACROSS
1. Help
4. Resolutions
6. Horse
8. Soccer
9. Year

DOWN
1. Health
2. Hope
3. Goal
5. New York
7. Reset

New Years Resolution

In the New Year I will aim to...

Sudoku

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

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

Bad Jokes

Submitted from someone incarcerated in NSW – thank you for the jokes!

Someone complimented me on my driving today. They left a note on my windscreen. It said, “Parking fine.” So that was nice.

I lost my job in a bank on my first day. Someone asked me to check their balance, so I pushed them over.

I really really care about the environment, so I plant a tree for every flight I take. The cabin crew hate it.

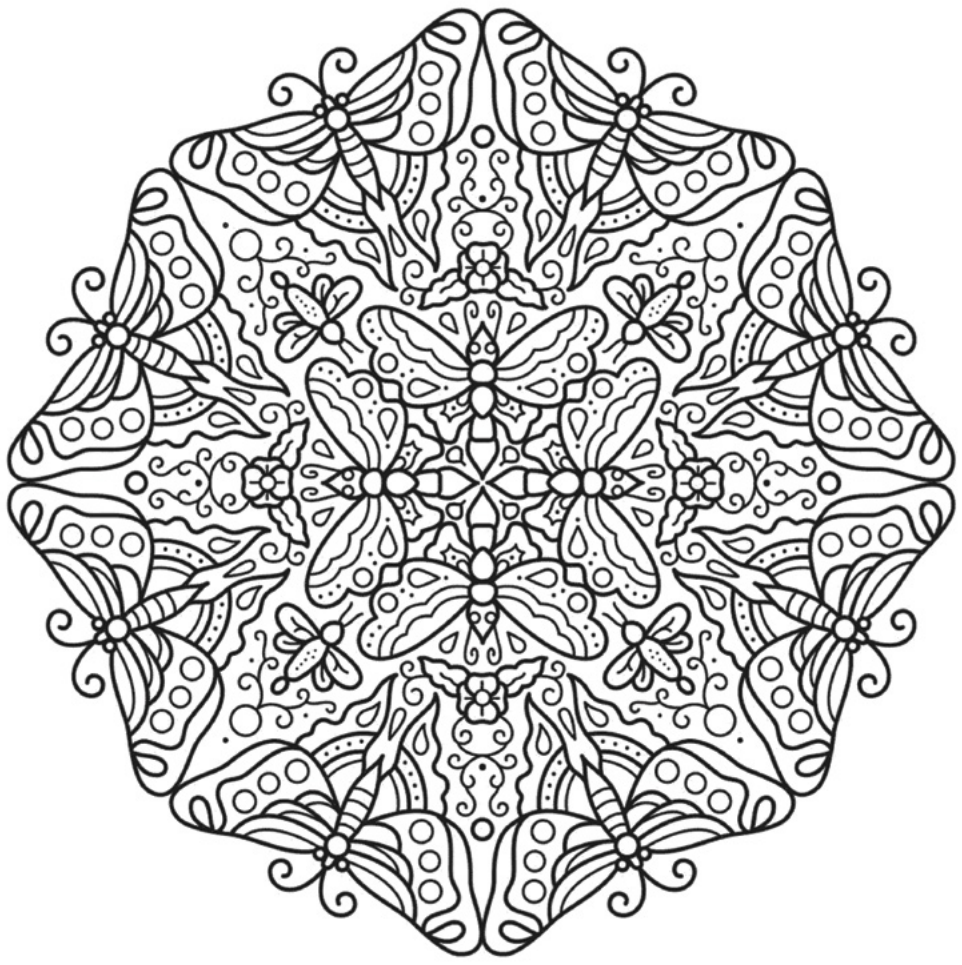
I'm so poor I can't even pay attention.

I can't even be bothered to be apathetic these days.

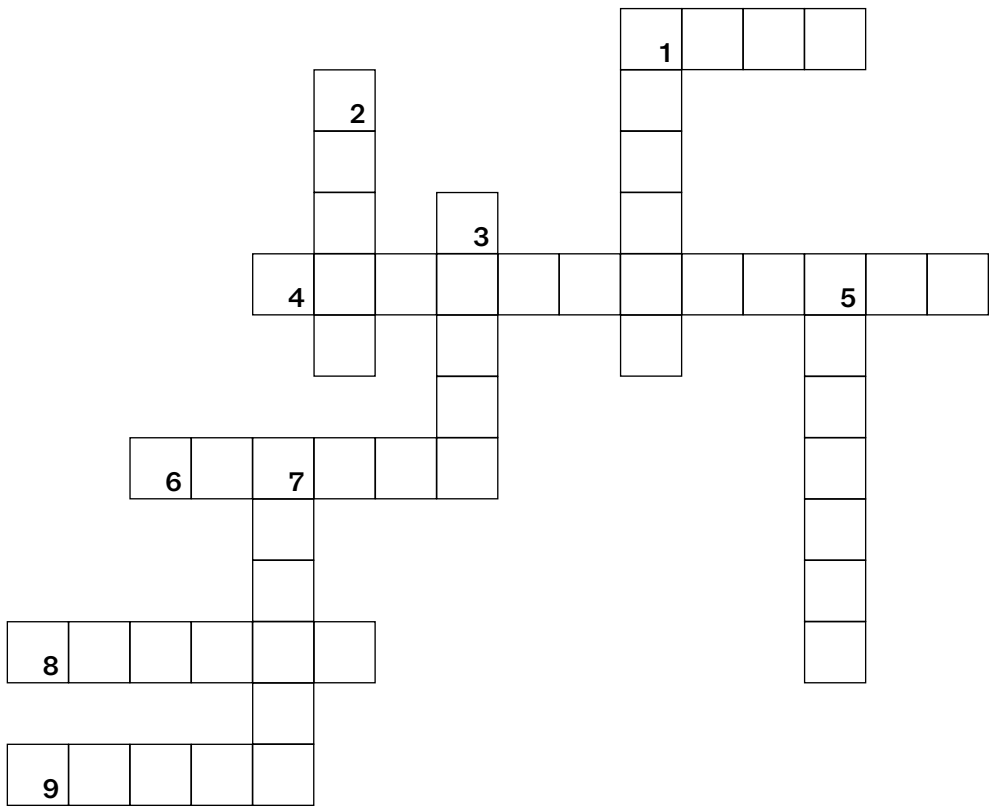
I don't like funerals. I'm not a mourning person.

Two cows were standing together in a field. One said, “Moooo.” The other replied, “I knew you were going to say that.”

Colouring In



Happy New Year Crossword



ACROSS
1. Another word for support (4)
4. Goals for the year ahead (10)
6. 2026 is the Chinese Zodiac year of which animal? (5)
8. The sport they'll be playing at the 2026 FIFA World Cup (6)
9. The new ____ begins on January 1st (4)

DOWN
1. A common focus for a New Year's Resolution (6)
2. A positive feeling about the future (4)
3. A thing you work toward in the new year (4)
5. The city where the famous Times Square NYE party is held (3, 4)
7. A fresh start or chance to begin again (5)