

Media release

Report 130: 2019 Inspection of Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison

Embargoed until 12:00 PM on Monday 13 July 2020

In his first inspection of the unique Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison, the Inspector of Custodial Services found that the innovative model of a therapeutic community for women prisoners was showing great promise and achievement.

Inspector Eamon Ryan said that despite only having been operational for 15 months, the therapeutic community model seemed to have been successfully adapted into a prison environment, that treated women respectfully and empowered them towards change.

‘Relatively speaking, it is early days, but feedback from those in the program was very positive. Of course, true success can only be measured by a sustained record of achievement. This will require some form of longitudinal tracking of the participants, which we encourage,’ Mr Ryan said.

Mr Ryan noted that Wandoo operates differently to most prisons and presents many challenges for both prisoners and staff. A number of women who started the program struggled with the very different kind of prison life there. For those who go there and embrace the underpinning philosophy of the therapeutic community, the potential for changed thinking and rehabilitation is significant.

By the time of our inspection, 459 applications for placement had been received, 135 had been accepted and 50 women had graduated from the program.

Part of the program at Wandoo involves a comprehensive drug management regime. This includes weekly random drug testing, breath analysis, local searching, and regular drug detection dog presence. At the time of our inspection Wandoo had been drug free since opening and had remained so to date. “This is a remarkable achievement for a medium security facility”, Mr Ryan said.

Mr Ryan said most residents welcomed the additional scrutiny. 'Many of the participants said it gave them a sense of pride in their achievements, made them feel safe and held them to account as part of their rehabilitation journey,' Mr Ryan said.

It was important to recognise that rehabilitation from addiction is not achieved just by completing a program - it requires sustained practice over the long term. Mr Ryan said the availability of ongoing support to the women would be vital to maximise Wandoo's success.

'Many of the residents were anxious about what the future held for them once they left Wandoo. They wanted to break out of the addiction cycle, but to do so they would need safe accommodation, ongoing counselling, support and employment,' Mr Ryan said.

The Department should be congratulated for looking for a different solution for the women who are able to access Wandoo's program. Mr Ryan encouraged the Department to make sure the planned men's alcohol and other drugs treatment facility at Casuarina is able to 'be different' in a similar way to ensure it too is a success.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector of Custodial Services

For further media information:

The Inspector, Mr Eamon Ryan, will be available for comment from 12:00 PM on Monday 13 July 2020 and can be contacted on 0421 480 925.