

Inspector's Overview

EARLY SUCCESS IS CREATING HOPE FOR THE RESIDENTS AND IT MUST BE SUSTAINED

Wandoo Rehabilitation Prison is like no other we have seen in Western Australia. It is not for everyone, and this applies equally to staff and residents. It operates differently and presents many challenges. For those who go there and embrace the underpinning philosophy of the therapeutic community, the potential for changed thinking and rehabilitation is significant.

It took only 11 months from the time the Government first announced that Wandoo would become a drug and alcohol rehabilitation prison for women, until the first residents arrived at the end of July 2018. The establishment of Wandoo was not without many hurdles, but it is a remarkable achievement and a credit to all the individuals and organisations involved.

Even more remarkable is that Wandoo only came back into the public system in May 2018, and the contract for the therapeutic community was only formally awarded to Cyrenian House at the beginning of July 2018.

At the time of our inspection Wandoo had been operating for 15 months. During that time, they had received 459 applications for placement. Of these, 135 had been accepted and 50 had graduated from the program.

We did not undertake an evaluation of the modified therapeutic community operating at Wandoo, but it would be impossible to write about this inspection without some discussion of how it has been integrated into a medium security prison. Relatively speaking it is early days, but based on what we saw and heard, the integration has been successful. True success can only be measured by a sustained record of achievement. This will require some form of longitudinal tracking of the rehabilitation progress of the women who complete the program.

During this inspection, we talked to residents and staff from both Cyrenian House and Wandoo. With consent, we observed or participated in group therapy sessions and whole community meetings. Outside of the inspection we attended a number of graduation ceremonies. Overall, it is hard not to conclude that what is being achieved at Wandoo is impressive.

At the time of our inspection Wandoo had been drug free since opening. There is a comprehensive drug testing regime where residents are subjected to weekly random drug testing and breath analysis. There is also a comprehensive local search strategy, covering individuals, property and locations. This is supported by an active presence of the Department's Drug Detection Unit, including regular attendance of the drug detection dog.

When we spoke with residents about the drug testing regime, many welcomed the additional scrutiny and said that 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. Key staff members felt that this was pivotal to the changes they had seen in the women.

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Rehabilitation from any form of addiction is not likely to be achieved by only completing a program, it requires sustained practice over the long term. The availability of ongoing support will be vital to maximise the success of the program at Wandoo. Many of the residents we spoke to 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. The Wandoo program alone cannot provide this, nor can Cyrenian House with their community programs. Sustaining the success we are seeing at Wandoo will require transition housing and support mechanisms for women once they are released back into the community.

Despite these uncertainties, many of the residents we spoke to talked about their hopes and dreams for the future, which in itself would not seem all that remarkable, but many also said that this was the first time in their lives they saw themselves with a future.

Wandoo must be supported and encouraged to sustain the early success we have seen so far.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the support and cooperation we received during this inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Wandoo, from the Manager and staff at Cyrenian House and from key personnel within the Department.

The residents at Wandoo also deserve special mention and thanks. They willingly shared their time and personal stories with us and this was invaluable to our work during the inspection.

I would also like to thank each of the members of the inspection team for their significant contribution to this inspection. I would particularly like to acknowledge Natasha Erlandson for all her hard work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

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