



OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR
OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES

2020 INSPECTION OF WEST KIMBERLEY
REGIONAL PRISON

133

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Inspector's Overview

WEST KIMBERLEY REGIONAL PRISON'S SUCCESS HINGES ON A RETURN TO ITS ORIGINAL DESIGN AND OPERATING PHILOSOPHY

Our 2020 inspection of the West Kimberley Regional Prison (WKRП), originally scheduled to commence at the end of March 2020, was interrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Following escalation of the State Government's COVID-19 response, including the declaration of a state of emergency and the implementation of regional travel restrictions, we decided to suspend the on-site component of the inspection. We were, however, able to undertake many aspects of the planned inspection using tele-conferencing and video-conferencing with staff and small groups of prisoners.

In September 2020 we were able to undertake a site visit and I have included some brief notes on that visit at the end of this Overview.

Throughout this report we refer to the original design and operating philosophy for WKRП. This was centred on five principles designed to promote and facilitate Aboriginal wellness, including harmony between physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural components of the individual and the community. The unique infrastructure was designed around this with the four units grouped into an open campus style, with self-catering houses, rather than traditional unit-based accommodation. Only the maximum-security Unit 3 had meals prepared in the central kitchen. The only internal barrier fences were around Unit 3 and the Women's Unit (Unit 4).

We have always strongly supported and advocated for implementation of the original design and operating philosophy at WKRП and we had been concerned that the philosophy had eroded in previous years. But we were encouraged by what we were told by the prison leadership about steps being taken to return to that operating philosophy.

At the time of our inspection just under 30 per cent of Kimberley prisoners (both men and women) were recorded as being held outside of the region. This was a notable improvement from our previous inspection in 2017 where that number was closer to 50 per cent. This improvement is consistent with the intent of the operating philosophy of having Kimberley men and women located at WKRП and developing their independent living skills and self-determination. These efforts need sustained local focus and system level resourcing and support.

Women at WKRП make up a small but very important part of the prison population. The number of women held at WKRП generally fluctuates between 30 and 40. Currently, a number of these are foreign national women who are located there because they don't receive in-person visits.

At a system level, many women in regional prisons are overlooked for services and marginalised due to their low numbers. The women at WKRП were no different in that regard. At the time of our inspection we identified limited opportunities for work, education, recreation and programs.

A good example of this systemic marginalisation is found in the Department's response to Recommendation 6 which relates to developing and delivering culturally appropriate offender treatment programs for men and women at WKRП. The response indicated

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support for the recommendation and listed programs being delivered for men. It went on to note that the Department supported delivery of programs to women at WKRP, but there were insufficient numbers of women assessed with similar program needs to justify delivery. This appears to accept that the current cohort of women at WKRP are unlikely to have their identified criminogenic program needs addressed. One obvious consequence of this is that they are placed at an increased risk of having their parole denied for unmet treatment needs. This is unacceptable and discriminates against women who are entitled to have their identified program needs met in the same way as men are. The absence of a critical mass of suitably assessed women is an unfair basis on which to simply ignore the obligation to provide required programs.

We were pleased to see support for, and some positive steps towards, implementing Recommendations 1 and 2 around providing an Aboriginal Visitor Scheme and Elders program, and developing specific cultural awareness training for staff at WKRP. When these are fully implemented, they will both be positive steps towards embracing the original operational philosophy of WKRP.

In early September we travelled to Derby and spent some time in WKRP. We met with the acting Superintendent and members of the senior management team. We inspected the facilities and met with staff and prisoners. We were informed about changes that had been implemented since the time of our inspection, some of which had been identified in our draft report sent to the Department for comment. We heard of ongoing difficulties in attracting and retaining staff to work across most areas of the prison, particularly health, education and industries. This appears to be an issue facing many employers in the region as it was mentioned as a challenge when we met with the CEO of Centacare, the prison re-entry service provider.

The acting Superintendent also told us that she had put forward a business case to improve infrastructure barriers around Units 3 and 4 following a security incident earlier in the year.

What we observed during our brief visit was encouraging but we will continue to maintain a strong presence in WKRP via our ongoing liaison with the prison.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The decision not to undertake a site-visit, together with internal arrangements to deal with the COVID-19 response phase, resulted in the process of drafting and finalising this report taking longer than planned and has led to a delay of several months in its publication.

I want to acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at WKRP and from key personnel in the Department. Their willingness to accommodate our decision to suspend the on-site component of our inspection and to reschedule planned meetings was very much appreciated by the inspection team. The men and women who spoke with us via video conference to share their perspective also deserve our acknowledgment and thanks.

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Finally, I would also like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection, particularly given that the changes in the approach had a significant impact on their planned work schedules and they adapted very well. I would particularly acknowledge Matt Boyd for his work in planning the inspection and Charlie Staples for his work as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan
Inspector

20 January 2021