

2024 INSPECTION OF BORONIA PRE-RELEASE CENTRE FOR WOMEN

BORONIA IS GOOD, BUT COULD BE MUCH BETTER WITH A LITTLE EXTRA SUPPORT

Our 2024 inspection of the Boronia Pre-Release Centre for Women has once again found it to be a high-quality facility, with staff working hard to provide support and rehabilitation opportunities for the women who reside there.

Boronia's philosophy of providing residents with opportunities for self-improvement in preparation for release was evident in most of the areas we examined. This has been bolstered by stability in leadership and improved communication, which has reinforced this approach in day-to-day operations.

The self-care living environment encouraged and developed residents to take up available opportunities for personal improvement and responsibility. But barriers remain to maximising the potential a placement at Boronia offers women prior to release.

We heard that access to education and self-improvement courses, including vocational skills-based training, is often hampered by limited or no access to online educational resources and material. Increasingly, the delivery of education, regardless of whether it is adult basic education, vocational training, or tertiary education, is reliant on an online component for learning and assessment. With such technology not readily available in prisons, this significantly impacts full participation and student completion rates. The latter point is critical for improvement in self-esteem and employability on release.

As we have seen elsewhere and commented on in several reports, we were told of long delays in the process for assessing and approving applications for external activities such as employment (Prisoner Employment Program), work outside the perimeter (section 95), and reintegration leave. This has been an ongoing challenge for quite some time and has a significant impact on individual prisoners. The Department's additional comments in response to a draft of this report noted that the process took time, but refusal rates were relatively low. We took no issue with approval or rejection rates; it was the length of time taken to process applications that has been a consistent complaint from both staff and prisoners at every facility we inspect. Fixing this would not appear to which require extensive resourcing or funding, but the reintegration benefits for residents would likely be significant.

The implementation of the smoking ban across the metropolitan women's prisons was well planned and managed at Boronia. Residents were involved early and had input into the program. Good communication, adequate support mechanisms, including withdrawal treatment and therapy were well managed. These factors and many others contributed to the overall success of the program, which should have long term health benefits for the residents who manage to remain smoke free on release.

Residents at Boronia also undertake commendable volunteer work either inside the facility or at external sites. This includes several residents volunteering at a nearby aged care facility. But the most impressive activity is the annual Boronia Gala Day. This is a community event where approved community members can attend the facility, participate in activities, and purchase items such as plants, crafts, and artworks. These items, including artworks, are provided by prisoners from prisons across Western Australia and not just Boronia. Each year a significant sum is raised from the Gala Day and donated to a selected charity. There are many benefits gained from these Gala Days, not just for prisoners and participants but also for the charities who are recipients of the funds raised. This is a highly valued initiative and credit must be given to all involved, including prison leadership, community participants, contributors, and residents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We had two Independent Prison Visitors for Boronia until early 2024. They were community volunteers appointed by the Minister for Corrective Services, who attended Boronia on a regular basis observing the operations of the facility and providing an opportunity for the women placed there to raise issues and complaints that informs the work of our office. I acknowledge the importance of the work undertaken and thank them for their contribution to our monitoring of Boronia. New opportunities exist for community minded individuals who are interested in being considered for such roles.

I also acknowledge the support and cooperation we received throughout the inspection from the Superintendent and staff at Boronia and from key personnel in the Department.

The women living in Boronia who took the time to speak with us and share their perspectives also deserve our acknowledgement and thanks.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the inspection team for their expertise and hard work throughout the inspection. I would also particularly acknowledge and thank Charlie Staples, for his work in planning this inspection and as principal drafter of this report.

Eamon Ryan

Inspector of Custodial Services

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