

# Parliamentary Inquiry into strategies to prevent and reduce criminal activity in Queensland

Crime Inquiry 2014  
Submission 040

Together Queensland Submission by  
Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre (BWCC) members

## Background

Any review of strategies to reduce and prevent criminal activity must also consider the important role Queensland Corrective Services plays in this endeavour.

According to the Report on Government Services 2014, Corrective services “aim to provide a safe, secure and humane custodial environment and an effective community corrections environment in which prisoners and offenders are effectively managed, commensurate with their needs and the risks they pose to the community. Additionally, corrective services *aim to reduce the risk of re-offending by providing services and program interventions that address the causes of offending, maximise the chances of successful reintegration into the community and encourage offenders to adopt a law - abiding way of life.*”<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

This submission calls on the inquiry to consider the negative impacts recent changes in Correctional Centres have had on the ability to achieve these goals.

## Centre Profile

The current profile of Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre ( BWCC )is as follows:

Location:	Grindle Rd Wacol		
Current Centre Population:	371		
Sections			
Secure:	Build Capacity	136	Current Population
			174

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Government. *Report on Government Services 2014*. Released 29 January 2014. Vol C, Chap 8 at 8.1. [http://www.pc.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/132324/rogs-2014-volumec-chapter8.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/132324/rogs-2014-volumec-chapter8.pdf)

Residential:

Build Capacity	142	Current Population	197
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Inclusive in Residential are 2 x 4 Cell Mothers Units.

For quite some time now only one Mothers Unit is being utilised for prisoners with infants.

The other 4 Cell Mothers unit is accommodating 10 prisoners including 2 prisoners sleeping in a play room without a cell intercom.

### **Changes introduced since March 2012**

The following changes have been introduced in the centre:

- Reductions in prisoner out of cell time from 11 hours a day to 10 hours a day has created lost opportunities for meaningful work for prisoners and 5 staff members not utilising their skill set due to being moved from their previously employed position as a Trade Instructor.
- Changes in industries at Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre immediately reduced meaningful employment for prisoners by reducing working hours of Trade Instructors.
- Effective changes were Trade Instructor staffing reduced by 5 full-time positions.
- Workshops were no longer working a 7 days operational week.
- Prisoners are only employed in Industries for 6 - 6.5 hrs per day on average 3 – 4 days per week. Prior to the 10hr out of cell day prisoners worked 8.5 – 10hrs per day 6 or 7 days per week.
- Trade Instructors were replaced for Annual Leave whereas no replacement staffing is provided since the introduction of the 10hr day
- Prisoners have greatly reduced meaningful working opportunities due to these changes.
- Prisoners who are unemployed are 9 times more likely to be perpetrators of assault on other persons inside prisons due to boredom as per QCS 2010 Report commissioned into prison violence. A copy can be provided upon request.
- Together Union delegates employed at BWCC have recently raised the lack of meaningful activity for prisoners and resultant increased incidents via submission with QLD Corrective Services Deputy Commissioner McDermott at Agency Custodial Committee meetings. Despite detailed information stating our case no changes were forthcoming to the current position on prisoner employment at BWCC.

### **Effect of changes on security within the centre and to the Queensland community**

These changes have had the resulting effects on security:

- Integrated Offender Management. System (IOMS) computer program lists all incidents across the state and would be available to the Parliamentary inquiry. Prisoner incidents at BWCC are at record breaking levels. Violence towards staff has rapidly increased with the introduction of the 10hr day and chronically overcrowded prisoner accommodation.

- Prisoner behaviour has more recently deteriorated to a situation in Secure Accommodation in BWCC that the General Manager Holman converted the Secure 9 unit which is a 24 Cell unit into a Safety Unit , Sec 53. Prisoners who were placed in this unit continually exhibited extremely poor behaviour. This is exemplified by assaults on other prisoners, threatening to assault Custodial Officers and other prisoners. Included in this behaviour is the drug standover perpetrators or continual breaches of QCS regulations and the associated issues with other prisoners. This isn't the first occasion Section 9 (S9) or Section 10 (S10) have been converted to a Lock Down unit in the past 18 months but this is the most restricted unit created for such a large number of prisoners exhibiting extremely poor behaviours. Prisoners in this new S9 unit were restricted to basic toiletries and only a few other in cell items . No access allowed for an in-room television, no personal phone calls, however access was still allowed to legal phone calls and some limited personal visits.
- The deterioration in prisoner behaviour can be directly linked to the 10hr out of cell changes and no meaningful work for 70% of the BWCC prisoner population. This along with the chronic overcrowding, smoking ban ,infiltration of drugs into the centre by new Reception prisoners due to standover tactics by jail heavies.
- On one occasion the General Manager attended S9 and was verbally abused and threatened by prisoners inside their cells and also informed staff present that they were considering self-harm as a group as they couldn't possibly see how they would be able to move out of S9 due to their uncontrollable behaviours. The next day it is understood some form of self harm was attempted by prisoners inside S9.
- It is also understood the way Secure 9 operates has been slightly changed due to internal pressures within QCS in the past weeks but remains an area where difficult prisoners are held in a very restricted manner. Breaches of regulations by prisoners are at record breaking levels and punishments determined for said breaches of discipline by prisoners at BWCC are being reduced to such a degree Custodial Officers are truly disheartened. The main reason breaches of discipline are being downgraded is solely no were to put them which will restrict them to access to normal routines in association with other prisoners.
- Recently BWCC received a large intake of new officers which have been expected to work immediately like a veteran officer. In fact the lack of recognition for experienced staff is overwhelming at times and extremely disappointing for what is almost a silent majority (experienced officers with more than 10years service) and a matter which should be addressed by QCS.
- There is basically no reward across the lower ranks for being an excellent officer anymore apart from being paid. Recent restrictions on ease of movement to Cert 1V has been created to stymie officers pay point movements. Custodial officers are finding it quite difficult now with the increased strict examinations to get an increment even though their Supervisor could easily make an informed judgement that an officer with 5 yrs service is competent or otherwise.
- Prisoner incidents at BWCC are at record breaking levels. In an incident in Residential in June 2014 a prisoner received 10 facial fractures and was found unconscious after being attacked over drugs. It was later found that the attack was a case of mistaken identity.
- Last year a female prisoner was held down by 5 other prisoners in Residential and digitally penetrated over drugs within an accommodation unit. Serious assault between inmates has been rapidly increasing with the implementation of 10 hr out of cell operation and huge increase in prisoners at BWCC.

Together Union delegates at BWCC have made many representations to GM Holman over past years to build infrastructure within the Residential compound where officers could conduct closer monitoring of prisoners and complete relevant duties to assist prisoners from a secure location within each accommodation area. Delegates believe 2 x demountable air conditioned buildings could easily be provided with a phone and a network computer at a very reasonable cost.

Delegates were advised this would not be provided even though it is quite clear an escalation in prisoner on prisoner violence is occurring within the Residential compound.

- Assaults as listed on IOMS have dramatically increased at BWCC since the introduction of 10hr out of cell day. E.g. Secure 7 at BWCC is a 24 cell unit and has been accommodating 42 prisoners regularly. The only infrastructure changes were provision of some double bunks on the lower landing which by design make the area extremely cramped and a WPH&S issue for the prisoner sleeping on the top bunk. Most of the other cells have prisoners sleeping on a mattress on the floor of the cell which is also a WPH&S hazard.
- No additional Washing machines or dryers have been provided despite staff making representations with suggestions and solutions to BWCC General Manager Holman. One washing machine and one dryer are provided to wash clothing for 42 prisoners. Replacement machines are not immediately available and in some cases repairs have taken several weeks. There are not enough hours in the day to complete the basic washing requirements of this amount of inmates and this is constantly causing incidents between prisoners. All Secure units face similar situations. The large influx of new and Inexperienced staff to BWCC being expected to work like a veteran officer after a couple of weeks is also affecting health and safety of others in BWCC.
- There has been an impact and effectiveness of the Governments strategies on prisoner rehabilitation and this is evident just by perusing the daily listed educational programs at BWCC rehabilitation of prisoners through educational programs has been slashed. As previously stated prisoner meaningful employment has effectively been halved due to the 10hr day, removal of 5 Trade Instructors in Industries and cessation of weekend workshop prisoner work.
- Prisoners are simply being fast tracked to lower security due to overcrowding at BWCC and this practice does have potential to threaten perimeter security and because Impact of changes to the Centre and this increases likelihood of prisoner escape
- Prisoners are not gaining an adequate grounding on prison life and this is having a negative effect on rehabilitation and respect towards Custodial staff. Unfortunately there are basically no other options left at the disposal centre management due to the lack of any substantial new and additional prisoner accommodation being built for women.
- Delegates have been advised the vacuum sewerage system will possibly accommodate up to 420 prisoners at its maximum capacity. BWCC has currently less than 50 prisoners from that overload point. The lack of vision displayed by closing Borallon CC and not opening Gatton SEQ Prison as originally intended has created this emerging situation.

**Conclusion** (please provide an overview conclusion as a collective view of members at your centre)

Together members employed at the Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre are of the opinion that the Queensland Government's strategy of the increasing incarceration of offenders and the overcrowding of the Centre has decreased the effectiveness of Prisoner rehabilitation and increased the likelihood.

This along with the reduction in programmes and employment has also significantly increased the level of serious incidents and assaults of prisoner on officer and prisoner on prisoner.

The impacts have serious and long-term implications for prisoners, staff and their families.

The impacts also have significant and cost effectiveness implications for the State and the local community as follows but not limited to:

- cost of sick leave and Workcover QLD premiums to the taxpayer when Custodial Correctional Officers are injured at work
- Medical costs associated with prisoner injury due to increase in assaults
- Cost of lengthening incarceration due to charges arising from offences of prisoners
- Cost of increase re-offending and return to incarceration due to the lack of rehabilitation programmes preparing prisoners to re-enter the community
- Cost to local businesses who longer have prison industry supplying goods and knock on effect to local employment
- Cost and risk to safety of the community due to increase in escapes and perimeter breaches

## **Recommendations**

The Together members of Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre recommend the following to the Committee for consideration:

- Increase unlock out of cell time for prisoners to 11 hours a day.
- Immediately reintroduce 7 day with full day operational working hours of the Workshops and Kitchen at BWCC .
- Increased working hours will provide greater meaningful activity for prisoners and immediately assist in reducing assaults and other incidents in BWCC. Currently approximately only 30% of the prisoners in BWCC are employed in meaningful working activity.
- Reintroduce programs and other activities designed to rehabilitate prisoners.
- Reconsider moving female prisoners to Gatton and make Borallon a Womens prison as a significant number of female prisoners don't require the same level of heavily fortified high security accommodation.

- Build infrastructure within the Residential Prisoner Accommodation clusters in BWCC to provide a fixed security officer station in both clusters. Currently supervision of prisoners within Residential relies on random officer patrols. Provision of an Officer Station in each of the Residential Clusters would greatly enhance supervision of prisoners and prevent further escalation of prisoner on prisoner violence in a supposed lower security area. All other High Security prisons have fixed officer stations or cluster offices within Residential compounds to closely monitor prisoner behaviour.
- Build a Detention Unit at BWCC which has more than 6 cells as Custodial Officers can't maintain discipline when breaches are dismissed or downgraded due to lack of Detention Unit cells.  
E.g. The vast majority of prisoners who serve out time in exclusion from others for a Breach of Discipline do so in their own prison cell.
- Ensure Prisoner Assaults occurring are recorded as a Level One incident at all times rather than downgrading of the event to Offensive Behaviour. Officers are complaining this is occurring at BWCC.
- Provide additional personal laundering facilities for prisoners in Secure Accommodation areas.
- Ensure QCS has adequate contingency plans exist and seek an assurance from QCS the Vacuum Sewerage system at BWCC will cope with the predicted continued growth in prisoner numbers over the next 2 years at BWCC.
- Review the current practice by QCS of placing large and consecutive groups of New Officers into jails ,as this has a detrimental effect of safety and security within any prison.  
E.g New Custodial officers are expected to have the same ability of veteran officers after a few weeks on the job.
- Review what prisoners can purchase through internal buy up as prisoners virtually have access to far too much confectionery, junk food with only a few limitations when the centre supplies a huge variety of foodstuffs daily which meets all genuine dietary requirements.  
Prisoners decreasing health standards inside prisons are affecting the state budget.