

A JOURNAL OF EXPRESSION FROM BEHIND BARS

# PAPER CHAINED



**CRC** community  
restorative  
centre

**ATFJ**

**ISSUE 20 / DEC 2025**

Posted free to incarcerated people

**UniSQ**

**Curtin University**

# PAPER CHAINED



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*Paper Chained* is printed and produced on the stolen lands of the Awabakal people. We acknowledge the rightful owners of these lands; sovereignty was never ceded.



In 2025, over 3,000 victims of strip searching launched a class action lawsuit against the NSW police. The lead plaintiff was strip searched after a dog sniffed in her direction, but then walked on. The victim was threatened by the officer performing the search, and was told to remove her tampon. At one point a male officer walked in on the search unannounced. For two and a half years, the NSW police insisted the search of the woman was legal, until the case went to court, when they admitted it was unlawful and unjustified. The victim won her case against the police and was awarded \$93,000 in damages. This drawing is an artistic representation of NSW police officers about to carry out an illegal strip search.

# WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE

*Paper Chained* is a free, not-for-profit quarterly journal for incarcerated people, funded primarily by the Community Restorative Centre. This issue is also made possible with the help of Curtin University, the University of Southern Queensland and About Time For Justice.

If you would like to support *Paper Chained* through sponsorship, please contact us. Donations can also be made via our website.

If you are currently in prison, have experienced time in prison, or have a loved one in prison, we welcome your contributions to this journal. Contributions from those supportive of prison reform will also be considered.

Submissions are accepted all year round. Contributions can be writings or artworks in any style. While exceptions can be made, we strongly prefer that submissions do not exceed 1,500 words. Please advise us if you would like submitted art returned.

Please specify if you would like your contributions to be anonymous. Due to our agreements with Corrections in Victoria, NSW and New Zealand, people incarcerated there may only be credited by their first name, initials, or a pseudonym.

If you are currently in prison and would like to receive a posted copy of the journal, please see the details to the right. Those outside prison may access the journal free online via our website, [PaperChained.com](http://PaperChained.com).

## TERMS OF PUBLICATION

Handwritten contributions will be typed unless the author requests to have a scan of the original text in the journal. *Paper Chained* reserves the right to edit contributions for grammar, length, clarity, and to remove any stigmatising language. Please advise us if you are not open to your contribution being edited.

Copyright for art and writing is retained by the contributor. Please advise *Paper Chained* if submitted contributions have previously been published elsewhere.

Due to limited printing space and other logistical concerns, accepted contributions may not necessarily appear in the next issue of *Paper Chained*, and may be held on file for future issues.

We will not publish any contributions that are perceived to contain forms of oppressive language such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, nationalism, xenophobia, or ableism. We also do not publish evangelism, or any material that encourages violence or violates the privacy of others.

## WARNING: CONTAINS EXPLICIT LANGUAGE

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## SUBSCRIPTION AND SUBMISSION DETAILS

**South Australia:** Corrections in SA will not allow individual subscribers. Copies will instead be posted to the prison GM. Each GM will decide where copies are made available. Submissions from SA prisons must be approved by the Chief Executive prior to sending them to us.

**Northern Territory:** We cannot post copies to NT prisoners due to Correction's ban on anyone receiving mail exceeding five pages. Please request a copy from the library or a PSO.

**New South Wales:** *Paper Chained* is free digitally on the prison tablets in the 'L&D' section. Please do not subscribe for posted copies unless you do not have access to a tablet.

**New Zealand:** Contributions must be submitted for approval to education or the prison librarian, who will then send them to us. Please request the magazine from your library.

**United States:** *Paper Chained* is free digitally on the Edovo Learning Platform, available in most prisons. We are unable to post anyone hard copies due to budget limitations.

If you can access *Paper Chained* via your prison library, please continue to do so, or request it be made available in your library. Otherwise, incarcerated people in Australia outside SA and NT can subscribe by the address below. **Please let us know your release date (or if you don't have one) when subscribing.** Send submissions to:

**Paper Chained**  
**PO Box 2073, Dangar NSW 2309, Australia**



# Curtin University



## Study at Curtin from Prison

**At Curtin, we want everyone to be able to access the benefits of higher education.**

We provide a range of Curtin courses that our incarcerated students can study while in prison, helping them gain valuable skills, confidence and enhancing their career opportunities.

We know that as an incarcerated student, you have a unique study environment and may experience restrictions with internet access, accessing learning materials and undertaking assessments. So, we provide support and adjustments and flexibility to accommodate your student needs.

Courses currently available include:

- **Enabling pathways** - Unready and Indigenous Tertiary Enabling Course (WA prisons only)
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- **Commerce** (majors in Management, Marketing, Business Law, International Business, Taxation)
- **Fine Arts** (Justice and Equity Through Art program)
- **Health Science, Health Safety and Environment, Health Promotion**
- **Indigenous Mental Health**
- **Science** (selected foundation units only)

For more information, speak to your prison Education Officer.

Curtin University Prison Outreach  
GPO Box U1987 Perth 6845  
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**About Time For Justice** is an Australian family-owned and operated organisation specialising in assisting survivors of historical institutional child abuse and stolen generation members in seeking justice, healing and possible compensation.

Our passion is helping survivors who have been affected by abuse within private and public institutions across Australia. The team from About Time for Justice understands that taking the first steps towards seeking justice can be intimidating, especially for those

who have had issues with trusting people, systems or organisations they have been exposed to in the past. Our experienced team, many of who have shared their own story and experience in this area, are trained to eliminate stress and navigate the complex process of approaching and dealing with the most appropriate legal representatives. They are trauma-informed and culturally trained to deal with the most complex stories.

We provide full support to our clients so they know all the options available, taking away the anxiety of having to tell your story to many people, and assist in liaison with legal firms and lawyers to minimise the fears involved in taking legal action. We partner with legal representatives from some of Australia's largest firms, as well as smaller specialised law firms that

provide targeted legal advice based on client needs. Our team have the skills to explain what is happening with your matter in simple terms, is available to answer any questions, and works flexibly with each survivor to achieve the best outcome for their individual circumstances.

Write to us for more information or call for an obligation-free chat.

**About Time For Justice**  
**PO Box 1182,**  
**Kingscliff NSW, 2487**  
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02 5632 1291  
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NT: 08 7918 0817  
SA: 08 7079 8356

**AboutTimeForJustice.com**  
**@AboutTimeForJustice**

*About Time For Justice is one of many organisations offering no-win-no-fee services for victims of institutional child abuse. Other similar organisations can be found on the National Redress Scheme website. A prison support officer may be able to print you a list of organisations operating in your state by visiting <https://www.nationalredress.gov.au/institutions/joined-scheme>*



University of  
**Southern  
Queensland**

**Supporting  
Incarcerated  
Students**

At UniSQ, we believe everyone should have the opportunity to access higher education. To support our prospective and current incarcerated students, we've developed a selection of resources that will support individuals make well informed career decisions and a suite of programs that can be studied whilst incarcerated.

We understand that as an incarcerated student your needs are unique and internet restrictions will impact how you are able to study. UniSQ has developed learning materials in an 'offline' format which means you will be able to complete your program without the need for online resources or internet access.

During your studies, Correctional Centre staff such as an Education Officer may be able to provide you with support throughout your program including by communicating with UniSQ, applying for and enrolling you in courses, submitting assignments and coordination and facilitation of exams.

UniSQ has developed a series of workbooks called Unlocking the Future, which are designed to help you with the decision to study at university and provide support for students soon to be released from a correctional centre. If you would like a copy of these workbooks, please ask your Education Officer.

Unfortunately not all correctional centres can facilitate students studying at a tertiary level. For further information, or to talk about enrolling, please contact your Education Officer.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

BY DAMIEN LINNANE

Something few people may know is that I have to have an issue of *Paper Chained* ready more than a couple months before they are actually sent to prisons. This is mostly because I have to submit the magazine in advance for approval with Corrections in different jurisdictions, some of whom take a long time to approve the magazine. Due to our limited budget, we only print one version of the magazine, so we have to wait until we're approved everywhere before we can hit 'print'. By the time you're reading this December issue in print form, or digitally on tablets in NSW prisons, or via the intranet in Victorian prisons, I will have a draft of the March 2026 issue ready to start the approval process again.

By the time you're reading this, we will also have recently held our third art exhibition in Newcastle in November 2025, which featured the works of Palestinian artist and formerly incarcerated person Mohannad Al Azzeh. But there won't be enough time in our printing and approval process to share photos of that till the March 2026 issue. Likewise, our fourth art exhibition, and the third iteration of the Paper Chained International (PCI) exhibition, will take place at The Creator Incubator, an art gallery in Newcastle, from 12-22 February 2026. We won't be able to share photos from that until our June 2026 issue, but there's still just enough time for you to send us artworks if you'd like to have a piece featured in our show.

PCI is an exhibition showcasing art from incarcerated people around Australia and the world. The first version was held at Boom Gate, the art gallery outside Long Bay Correctional Centre in Sydney, in May 2024. The second exhibition was held at the Superordinary art gallery in Brisbane, in conjunction with the Beyond the Bars event run by Green Fox Studios. PCI is an evolving exhibition. Some pieces sell at each exhibition, and new pieces arrive all the time, meaning that each version of the exhibition is different from the last. While our first exhibition featured over 100 artworks from prisons in eight countries, we now have at least 150 artworks from prisons in twelve countries. Funding permitting, we aim to tour the exhibition to a new city each year.

If you'd like your art to be included in the 2026 exhibition, please post it to us before the end of December. We can only display original artworks, not photos or photocopies. Due to limited space, artworks cannot be guaranteed a spot in the show, but any art received may still be featured in our magazine (as per the details on page 2). Unfortunately, we cannot assist with getting your art to us, but we can either post the artworks to your friends or family after the exhibition (in Australia only; overseas artists will have to pay postage for art to be returned), as prisons typically won't allow art posted back in. Or, we

can hold onto them for the 2027 show. It's up to you. In any case, we look forward to sharing you pictures from our exhibition for Mohannad in the March 2026 issue, and from the next PCI exhibition in the June 2026 issue.



*A painting of Paper Chained's mascot Izzy, by Ashley McGoldrick, which will be one of many artworks on display at PCI in February 2026.*

I'm also very excited to let you know that *Paper Chained* has recently been approved in the United States and is now accessible on over one million tablets computers available to prisoners there. We'll hopefully share more about this in a future issue. And shout-out to the people reading this issue in the prisons in New Zealand that we've also recently been approved in. – Damien Linnane

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Paper Chained

I have a lot of different views on things. Here's one on Aboriginal dot paintings. I've seen white people do this in prison and a lot and blackfellas go off at them. I say blackfella because I am a blackfella and always will be (proud of it). I'm sick of political correctness. Sometimes the do-gooders need to stop and give everyone a breather. I feel like they have the world walking on egg shells. Anyway, I love art. Just because we're the oldest people on the planet or the first to do dot paintings doesn't give my culture the right to tell another human what he/she can paint. This annoys me and it is biased. Are we to stop making the wheel because some caveman invented that? I love all art and believe it should all be shared, just like the land, as long as it is respected. Please make this anonymous otherwise I will probably have to argue with every blackfella in the unit (ha ha).

*Name withheld*

Dear Paper Chained

My name is Matthew and I'm incarcerated in NSW. First, I would like to say congrats on such an awesome magazine, keep it up. I look forward to reading every issue on my tablet here in jail. I would like to talk about a very important issue here in NSW Correctional Centres regarding the methadone opioid substitution treatment program, or more likely the lack of treatment. I have been a heroin user since I was 14/15. I have been on the methadone program twice before, and the Buvidal injection program four times before, including right now. It's extremely hard to get back on the methadone program whilst in jail, and it takes at least six months to get into the Buvidal program. I have been trying for over two-and-a-half years to switch from Buvidal to methadone. It can be done in rare cases. I get swollen feet/ankles for one or two weeks from the injections, I get a massive rash in and around the injection site, and the dose doesn't even hold me. The maximum dose is 160mg, which I am currently on. I still crave heroin on that. My body is aching and cramping and I have diarrhea. Because the dose isn't enough, I am still using drugs to stop me from hanging out. I'm at risk of catching Hep C again for the fifth time since 2019 and Justice Health still won't switch me over to methadone. I'm currently looking at another five-to-eight years minimum in jail again once I am fully sentenced. The trouble is AOD nurses tell the doctor, "Don't switch them over to methadone we can't and won't do it," then the doctors say no and they shut it down straight away. The idea is that they believe Buvidal is good for everyone, but clearly it isn't. I have just given you five good reasons why I need to switch over to methadone. Once the local doctors say they've given the A-OK to switch over or start on methadone, the paperwork then gets sent to somewhere in Sydney for them to give the final decision, then you start on opioid substitution treatment within a week or two. I know my own body. I need methadone as it holds me for 24 hours until my next dose. When I'm on methadone I'm not using drugs on top as I'm stable, which means that I also won't be able to catch Hep C or HIV. Also, outside of prison if we go to an opioid prescriber, we have multiple options, including either buprenorphine tablets or strips, methadone, or Buvidal. In jail we have minimal-to-no choice of what substitution we can go on. It's only the Buvidal program. If you came into custody on methadone back in 2013 you could continue on methadone, but not now.

I want to ask other readers, have you heard of it being so hard to get onto the correct opioid substitution program anywhere else besides NSW? And does anyone know if it will ever go back to the way it was pre-2013? In other words, will it ever be easy to get onto other opioid treatment such as Bupe tablets/strips, methadone, or Buvidal. Can someone please answer? I'm sure I'm not the only person wondering. Thanks.

Matthew, NSW

Dear Paper Chained

Hi and hello fellow readers all over planet earth. My name's Kaiya, pronounced Ka-Ya, meaning peace. If y'all already know this, respect. I am 30 and am a proud First Nations Gamilaraay/Gomerioi woman. I have been incarcerated for 48 months, now in maximum security. This letter is my 'thank you guys' for all the inspiring artists that have contributed to this community. This newsletter is a representation of solidarity. United as one. We da real MVPs! The editor and peoples and peers who manage the well-awaited issues gift us with expertise of the unknown and the very much needed knowledge, feedback and clarification. Knowledge is power! And in here, the pen should be our most feared weapon. Every month like clockwork I check the tablet for new issues and updates, and pocket key past pieces of the gaol management's constant dismissal of our understanding, and most importantly, to oppose and challenge their stereotyping of us and our social or cultural backgrounds. I'm tired of them constantly character assassinating us, insulting our intelligence, and reminding us of our fuck-ups without giving us anything to gain or benefit from. If we were given everyday life essentials as a priority and not as a privilege, things like employment, education, library access, cultural programs and healing practices like art and dance, it would help build foundations and be tools to learn how to cope. We are pleading for help and healing and it takes a lot of bravery to admit you need help and support!

And instead we have the system that's supposed to keep us safe, locking our faults, flaws, and vulnerability, and using it as ammunition to belittle and dictate our futures. Sorry I've gone rogue, it just agitates me to the core. I am here, I've done it and I'm still doing it. Sometimes it feels like giving up is the easier route because for real it's exhausting trying to survive. I see you and I feel you baby. But hell naw fuck that. Head down, eyes up. Read books, ask questions, don't be ashamed to educate yourselves my people it's sexy, it's growth, it's gangsta, it's the struggle but don't ya love it. If not, what we doing right now, other than gaol? Anyhow, onwards. I highly recommend this magazine. Get in on this! It's interesting, it's insightful, and it's dope! It's a healthy reminder that you are not alone. We are over here too, come kick it. Come chop it up with us. Shout-out real quick to my O.G favs: LenPen, KCDC, Malnight, Dewitt, Ashley McGoldrick, Kelly Flanagan, Simon Evans, and Damien Linnane of course! I be fangirling over every edition. Love your work. Ima check-in next time so stay tuned until then stay true and stay sexy. Yours truly xxx.

Kaiya, NSW

*Editor's note: Paper Chained has referred Matthew to a government agency that may be able to help. If you can answer his questions about opioid treatments in prisons elsewhere, or if you have your own letters for Paper Chained, please send them to us.*

# ART AND WRITING

## I AM NOT SANTA

My brothers and sisters, Christmas has come again at a high price, messing up the family. Everybody singing Jingle Bells all the way. I say this is the Lord's day. I praise him while everybody is cutting down trees for presents while they all wait for the big red and white Santa man to come down the chimney to save the day. Really Santa sucks them into buying everything at high-price. Don't you know Christmas is a profit making business for the rich? And don't you know child's Christmas destroys the poor cause Santa is the capitalist who's there to fool you and drain your mum and your dad of all the money they have. So now tell me how can you be merry when your brothers and sisters have nothing, or people are living on the streets or starving or living in bad homes. How can you be merry on a day when the world is at war? Well, if in your heart you want to be merry then do it. Every moon and full star shining and dawn. Make sure you catch the sun before Santa comes and takes your presents! Fuck Santa. God bless and don't stress.

*By Troy, Northern Territory*



*Comic originally published in Freeway, the magazine of Cessnock Correctional Centre. Issue 10, December 1975.*



*Art by DeWitt, NSW*



*Art by Ashley McGoldrick*

## THE KEY

I entrust this key to you my love  
 A key of which there's only one  
 This key can open no lock, no doors, no gate  
 But it's a key I trust you'll always keep safe  
 It's a key to riches inside my treasured chest  
 With this key our lives I mesh  
 I send this key as a token of love  
 Here for *habibti*: the key to my heart

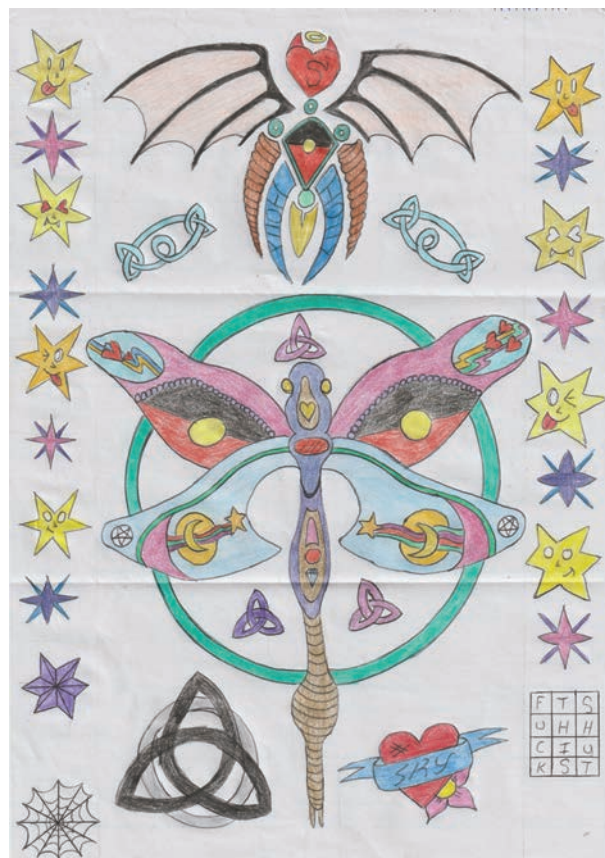


By Sheikh Jaxan Khalil Assad O'Reilly, E14512  
 Brisbane C. C. Locked Bag 13101, Archerfield, QLD 4108

## A DRAW

Football season, bring on the hot pies and cold beers  
 For some unlucky supporters only shed tears  
 The crowds they cheer every mark and fall  
 While players run around chasing the ball  
 After four quarters, someone must win  
 Sometimes the result feels so dim  
 As two teams fight with all might  
 Only one point can end their season delight  
 A draw is possible, the siren rings out  
 Two teams can be separated,  
 the invincible win is in doubt  
 68 points each  
 Not one score more  
 We all didn't want it  
 "A fucking draw"

By Ross, Victoria



Art by Sky, Queensland

Six plovers squabble  
 Water pools on concrete paths  
 Damp dreary Monday

Haiku by Clayton



Art by Clayton Tierney



Art by Franky, New Zealand



Art by 'Rejected', Japan

## FOR JOHNNO

Disappointment once more, once again I'm not there,  
For my family who spend every day in despair,  
I selfishly think about how I've been wronged,  
When the trauma for those outside is sadly prolonged.  
I've missed weddings and funerals, opportunities gone,  
Three meals a day, shelter, while out there hearts are torn,  
Why do I keep hurting my loved ones that care?  
And all I can think is *Why me?* It's not fair.  
We're blind to think that we don't cause them pain,  
When we come back to prison again and again,  
This place, a reunion, we laugh and we joke,  
Talking shit, drinking coffee with a tea-bacco smoke.  
We're put here for punishment, rehab and such,  
But we learn about how to do crime just as much,  
The government, cops, judges, have nothing to lose,  
We're all statistics, they've never walked in our shoes.  
We're all just numbers, caged and herded like cattle,  
Lacking recourses for the hundreds,  
and the demons we battle  
What's rehabilitation? Freedom taken by force?  
Let's load them up with opiates,  
and methadone of course!  
We live in a world where the media rules,  
And you believe what they say, you idiots, you fools,  
*Innocent until proven guilty*, what an absolute lie,  
In fact, it's the opposite, they cannot deny.  
Let's load them with charges, cops lie under oath,  
Yet they wonder why prisons have seen such growth,  
Do the crime, do the time, that's justice they say,  
Then why are we judged until the end of our days.  
Each time from now on that we make a mistake,  
We question how much of our lives they will take,  
We're not judged on the crime, but our past is used,  
In a system that is broken and is being abused.

Poet's note: I have written this knowing full well a good percentage of those who read it will be quick to judge, some may ignorantly say "just do the right thing and live a normal life", but I can say this from the bottom of my heart that it's not that black and white. People need to open their eyes to the real problems people face in life once they have made a few bad choices. We are all human beings and have all had very different experiences in life. We have faced different mental health issues, and we all handle things differently. Some can do things better than others and some struggle with issues some of us find easy to manage in our lives. We are quick to judge, and I am guilty of that. I have been that person before and it's a real eye opener when you find out the real issues that some people are facing. You try to put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine facing the same circumstances as them. But we can't because we are not them, there is no way to accurately make judgement on someone for what they have done or are doing at times in their lives. Tonight, I found out that my cousin who was three

months younger than I am took his own life, and it made me think of everything that I have written in my poem, and as much as I tried to think what could have been that bad for him to take such a dramatic path, I just couldn't do it, because it's not me. I have no clue what he was feeling, no clue what he had been through, and it was not my place to make judgment. We can't say he was selfish; we can't say anything because we don't know what he was feeling. I can only say that it's an extremely dark and lonely place to be when you are in that mindset, when ending your own life comes into mind, I can say that because I have experienced it, and thankfully I am still here to write about it.

Some of this poem has nothing to do with the news of my cousin's passing but it made me think of my life and the judgments I have faced and made myself. We tend to forget that the ones that judge us more than anyone else are ourselves: we are our biggest critics. We criticise ourselves for hurting loved ones, being a failure, letting people down, and we judge ourselves harshly. Then dealing with the judgement from others on top is sometimes too much to bear.

The main thing I want people to take from this poem is this: don't be quick to make judgement, don't say that you know how someone feels because you simply don't. Think about how you and your actions affect others and what you can do to make someone feel better or to help someone who's struggling. Try and be open minded and realise that just because you see things in a particular way it doesn't mean that's how everyone sees it. Leave the past in the past and focus on the now. Be the best person you can be for yourself and others. If what I have written helps one person think differently, then I am grateful that I have made a positive difference in someone's life! Thanks for reading.

By Jake, Victoria



By Dave. Davao City Jail, the Philippines.  
See more of Dave's art on Instagram @ibaodabo

## I'M SORRY

I'm sorry that I let you down, I'm sorry I chased fame round town. Man, I feel so lame now that all I ever wanted was to be like him, live royal like my own kin. Instead I got lost in his shadow, can't find my way out of the dark, monsters from my past. Just take another pill, surely then you will close your eyes and forget you're locked in a box, social exile surrounded by hate, is this really fate? I don't have much more I can take, chain links and concrete walls, growing up in a system with too many flaws, but that's what you get for breaking laws, screaming judge please forgive, I'm just a kid. Nineteen was my age, but still nine years was the sentence you gave. Now it's time to be brave as I enter this cage. All I want to say is I'm sorry to the ones I let down, I'm sorry I'm not around when you need. Four years to go, I'll be home soon, love you to the moon.

*By Lil Casper, New Zealand*



*Art by LenPen, Victoria*



*Art by James, NSW.*

## THE VOID

Bismillahi  
Dreams of a child, a life to be had  
Seems every choice I made turned out bad.  
Mistakes repeated, lessons not learnt  
A habit to feed, bridges burnt.  
Always running from what was always there,  
Always wondering, why they don't care.  
Getting older fast and learning slow  
Always hustling, easy come easy go.  
Everything gone, no one stays  
Always plotting for what pays.  
The void grew bigger, it had to be fed  
The more I used, the more I wished I was dead.  
Lost in hate, obsessed with the dark  
Get on the nod, kill the spark.  
Feelings were enemies, enemies must die  
Ruled by a pick, I'd have to get high.  
Year after year and deeper I got  
I wanted an end, I'd have one more shot.  
A glimpse of reality – I'd lost my shit  
It only got worse with every hit.  
An addict I am, that truth is clear  
Only emotions I knew were rage and fear.  
The gear now long gone, given up long ago.  
Now urges and cravings are all I know  
The rage, the fear, it's all come back  
I want to be a number, slip into the black.  
The life of an addict is hectic at best  
Only the strong can pass the test.  
Many are lost, many were friends  
Being an addict never ends.  
A day at a time, and then we can live  
This won't happen unless we forgive.

*By Jason Ryan 595683, Darwin Correctional Centre  
PO Box 1066, Howard Springs, NT 0835*

## WHEN

When I cannot breathe you fill my lungs  
When I'm feeling old you make me feel young  
When I am lost you show me the way  
When I can't think of the words you know what to say  
When I'm surrounded by darkness you show me the light  
When I think I'm wrong you show me I'm right  
When I'm angry then you calm me down  
When I need a laugh you are my clown  
When I need a friend you're always there  
When I feel a bit common you show me I'm rare  
When I have the lock you hold the key  
When I need love that's when you love me

*By Josh, NSW*



*Art by Samantha, Queensland*



*Art by Simon, New Zealand*

## THE SHEARERS

They roamed this great expanse of country  
 Travel was just one part of their job  
 As they moved from station to station  
 Where they sheared the squatter's mob  
 One of the icons of Australian legend  
 The shearers were men of a hardier breed  
 Not unlike the swaggies and drovers  
 Or the daring light horseman on his steed  
 They were the local hotels best customers  
 When all the shearing had been done.  
 There was many a cheque to be cashed  
 And many a two-up game to be won  
 Their exploits were known Australia-wide  
 The stuff of which our legends are made  
 Like the shearer who rings the top shed's bell  
 The temperature a hundred and twenty in the shade  
 They are a part of our Australian heritage  
 Earned by legendary women and men  
 And I wonder if in the future to come  
 We will ever see their like again.

*By DeWitt, NSW*



*Art by Sharon, NSW*

## LET DOWN

I hear the sirens wailing  
 I know the cops are coming to my door  
 I let down my family  
 even my kids, friends and all  
 I promised I wasn't going back to jail  
 They said, *We've heard all this before*  
 As I get handcuffed,  
 and put in the paddy wagon door  
 My eleven-year-old son follows, crying and all  
 I will never forget the words he said to me  
*Dad, you have let me down like before*  
 These words have stuck right into my head  
 It's time for me to wake up,  
 and do the right thing instead  
 This is what motivates me,  
 every day and every night  
 Knowing I'm going to get out  
 I cannot wait 'til that day

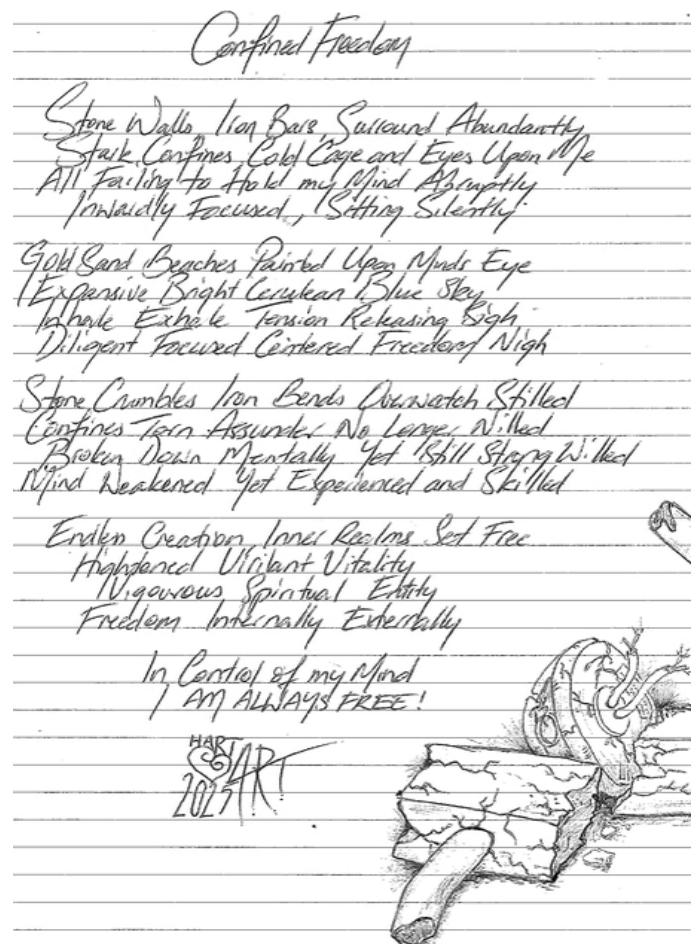
By Mr Wellington



## YOU ARE LOVE

The night is ours tonight  
 With stars so bright  
 Under this canopy  
 Deep love shared easy  
 No reason to hide such a thrill  
 What the heart truly feels  
 When you fall for me too  
 I am ready to catch you  
 Do away with shame  
 Light the candle tend the flame  
 In the midst of these I sing  
 My love for you darling  
 While holding each other  
 Look at me straight in the eyes my lover  
 As you find the words to utter  
 Maybe unspoken forever  
 For a long time this is true  
 My heart beats for you too  
 Even you open my heart inside  
 You see your name etched alive  
 Under the bright moon tonight  
 Amongst the stars in sight  
 I promise you my love rock-solid  
 With all praises my only beloved

By Anna Rocel Parreno, the Philippines  
 Translated by Ma Rosalie Abeto Zerrudo



Art and writing by Hart, New Zealand

## TO FALLEN SOLDIERS

I wanna leave LSDs under rain-soaked trees  
Road graffiti and strings of expletives  
Curses to Valkyries for stripping soldiers from battlefields  
Tears like a stream to ward off the dreams  
Your voice in my head of the last words we said  
And memories more for those that we know  
God forgive my grief, I'll keep this thing brief  
Cut and run hun, time short but hearts won

*By Bronwyn Williams, Bandyup Women's Prison  
PO Box 100, Guildford, WA 6935*

## TOSSED OUT

No house, no phone, next meal unknown  
Through the gates, I'm all alone  
Doubting myself is all I know  
No seeds to sow, no paddles to row  
Life's fast, I'm too slow, freezing cold, out in the snow  
No warm places, I can go, heart heavy, full of woe  
I'm way down on the status quo  
Through my clothes, the cold wind blows  
This is goodbye, no more hellos  
I've got to go, I'm down so low  
I don't need saving, no hero  
This could have been avoided though  
Self-sabotage, knows I'm a pro  
This time though, I was tossed out and alone.



*Art and writing by Storm Tientjes, Tasmania*

## GETTING CLOSER

It's been almost ten years now  
Since my life has changed  
For better or worse  
Nothing will ever be the same

So much is different today  
Both parents now gone  
Never able to say goodbye  
Sometimes sorry that I was born

My father gone seven years  
My mother gone six  
Never to hear their voices again  
Thank goodness I have my pics

I've missed out on so much  
I'm now a grandmother of three  
Wishing I could be there in person  
Hoping they know how much they mean to me.

My grandson is almost six years old  
My first granddaughter almost four  
My newest granddaughter born on Mother's Day  
There is only one thing I want more

That is to get the hell out of here  
To leave this place behind me  
To be the mother and grandmother  
The best person that I can be

Just over five years to go  
Until my earliest release date  
Hoping I get close to this  
My life left up to fate

Whatever will be, will be  
Do whatever I need to do  
To get out as soon as possible  
Release never up to you

*Writing by Lanie, Victoria*

Swallow swoops to perch  
Men in search of hot coffee  
Weekends go too slow

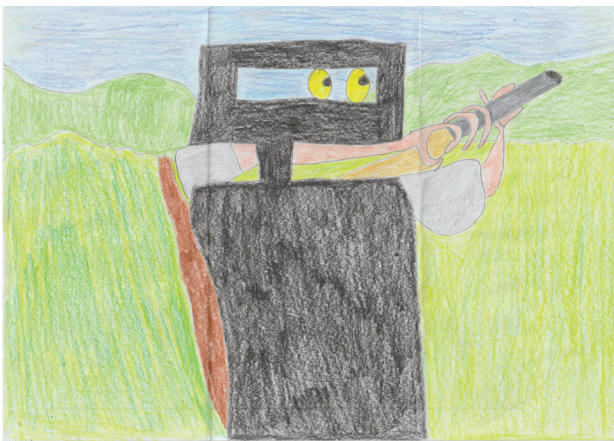
*Haiku by Clayton*

## TIME OF MAN

I think of all my time that's gone taken from where I belong. A son who I have never held, who I have never smelled. He is 18 months' old now. What does he look like? Me or his Mum? Does he have her chubby bum? Is he quiet or is he bold? I hope I'm home before I'm old. I just want to raise my son, so when I'm old and when I'm done, my son will know that he was when my life begun. I can't wait to see you become a man, my little man.



Art and writing by Lewis Comb, Queensland



Art by Phillip, Victoria

## WHAT LIES BENEATH THE SURFACE

Do you know what lies behind this smile  
Have you walked the same mile  
Have you crossed the same mile  
Have you crossed your own River Nile  
And have you witnessed what the world will defile?  
Think about it for a while  
Do you know what lies behind these eyes  
Have you witnessed what you despise  
Have you soared through open skies  
Into the sun where Icarus flies  
Don't you know everything dies?  
But not everyone truly lives  
Not everyone truly gives  
Do you give what you don't need  
Or do you live a life of only greed  
Would you starve for others to seed  
To cut yourself in order to bleed  
Do you know what goes on in this head  
Or the words in this poem that you have read  
Do you listen to the words that someone has said  
For we all, in the end, end up dead

*By Lance*



Art by RFGY



Self-portrait by Steven, our cover artist for this issue.  
Steven Labelle, BG3974, Correctional Training Facility  
P.O. Box 705, Soledad, California, 93960, USA



Above: Art by DP and RW, New Zealand

Below: Art by Tony Minahan



## HER - LOVE - MINE

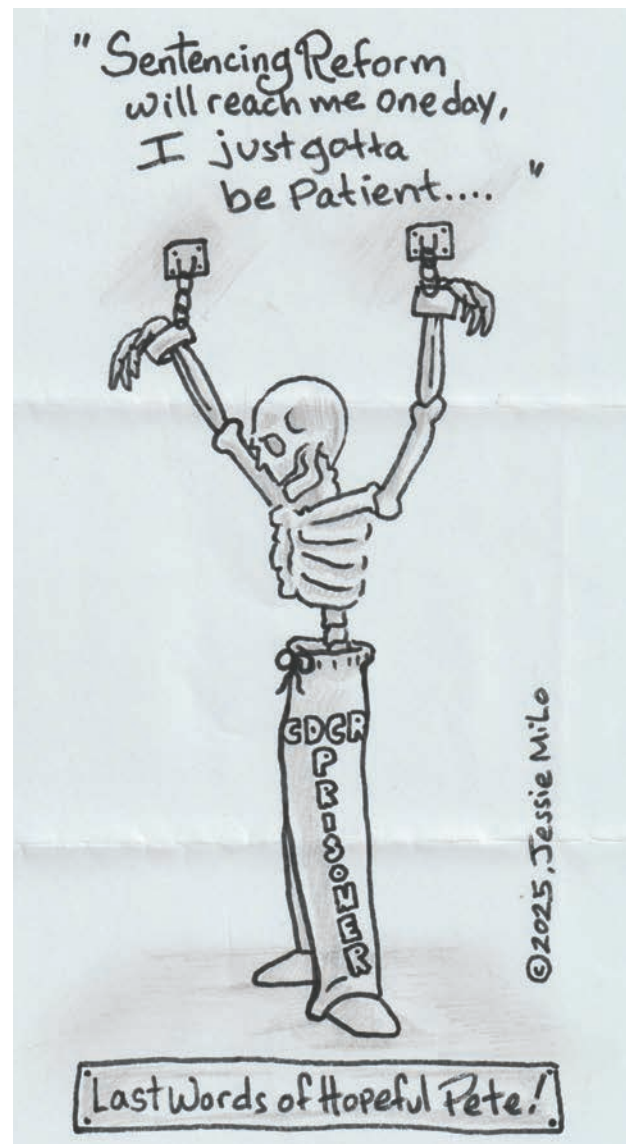
Not many men have known of a love  
 That's as important to oneself, as that of life's blood  
 The power of the beating, that echoes my heart  
 The knowledge of her love, my pulse race starts  
 My breath does leave me, as though I would choke,  
 I'm lost in her power, in the land of no-hope  
 Your beauty to me, is the greatest of all  
 For within my gaze, your love stands tall  
 Your movements remind me, of a great bird in flight  
 So graceful, so mystic, a most pleasing of sights  
 Higher than others, immortalised with song  
 So high my emotion, you could never do wrong  
 A man with this love could face down all things  
 No one could defeat me, oh! The strength that it gives  
 You could calm me with gaze, with the touch of your hand  
 The sound of your voice could turn stone into sand  
 Upon this earth, there are many I've tried  
 But none could compare, to your arms in the night  
 You're supportive with love, and strong with its reason  
 And your thoughts are of me, not ever of treason  
 The thought that can terrify, and fill me with dread  
 Is that your love might someday, just come to an end  
 It is the chalice of love, that in you, I would seek  
 A prize for a lifetime, this love I can keep  
 Its never been brutal, with my heart that it holds  
 It treasures my love, and values as gold  
 The love that you give, I'll pride and I'll keep  
 For your love, I well know, is free and runs deep  
 As a man earth-bound, I'd be unfulfilled in my life  
 Had I not met you, and your love been denied.

By Kenneth Monley, aka Kenoath, written on 31 July 1994.

Editor's note: Paper Chained began sharing the historical poems of Ken Monley back in issue 12, where we also shared a short biography of his life and times in prison. This is the last of Ken's poems that we have to share. We hope you have enjoyed his writing. R.I.P. Kenneth John Monley. 1957-2010.



Art by Preston, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre



Art by Jessie Milo, California



Art by ShadowArt

## 6 DIGITS

6 digits replace my name  
There's no one else to blame  
I feel so ashamed  
Expecting sympathy for my pain  
Self-rehabilitation has been my concentration  
In charge of my own destination  
My future my creation  
G22737 is my name  
It's like I'm making a fucking claim  
Some think it's cool I think it's lame  
It's not a game they don't feel my pain  
I feel like I'm going insane  
G22737 is my name.

6 digits replace my name  
I realise I'm no longer the same  
My lifestyle has landed me here  
And now I just feel shame and fear  
No longer do I want the life I led  
Any longer I'd probably be dead.  
Stripped of my freedom and pride  
Locked behind bars I cannot hide  
I really regret all I've done and come  
To realise it wasn't even fun  
Jail shows you what you are  
Exposes inner demons and leaves a scar  
None of us are damaged beyond repair  
It only takes someone else to come  
It's easy to judge and say and do nasty things  
But do you realise the destruction it brings.  
It's hard in here, I'll admit that  
Sure as hell I won't be back.

*By Julie Cameron, Queensland*

## FORGOTTEN SMILE

You fill yourself with hate,  
Feed yourself on the myths, lies and deceit of their words.  
You yell, scream at, and abuse me.  
And you don't know why.  
Do you know why?  
All that pain you hold inside,  
God knows if I could I would take it all away.  
Push it up inside myself despite myself,  
I hate myself and what you put me through.  
If only I could just see that smile,  
That smile, those eyes that light up the room.

It seems this you have forgotten,  
But I haven't forgotten that feeling I get,  
when I hit the bottom,  
when I know I am broken but I won't be forgotten.

*By "Bail Gakz", New Zealand*

## DOING LIFE

When that sentence is handed down upon you, you cannot comprehend its meaning and what it is about to mean. Your heart sinks, your mind goes numb, and your mindset enters a realm of surrealism.

Over time, you begin to exit this surrealism and start to tackle this indefinite term of incarceration. You may come to the realisation that you have to accept what you can and let go of what you cannot control. You can allow yourself to be consumed by the guilt, and darkness that you can easily succumb to. Or you can start to deal with what transpired to place you in this place.

You can forgive yourself and start the long journey to redemption and begin to work on yourself. You can start to look for the positives around you – which if you search hard enough, you will find.

You can begin to fill up your time with work, courses, education programs and working on yourself to ensure that this time is not lost. You have choices that you can make – this you can control, and work towards making amends. Where there is darkness, there will always be light – you can choose the path you wish to follow. You may wander off this path at times, but you will be able to find your way back.

Nine years down, with many more to go – what I have written so far is what I have learnt. You can lose yourself in despair or choose to take all of the positives in your prison life and strive to better yourself. Yes, it is hard, but you can do it, as many of those have done before us. Yes, we are losing time by being in here, but we can choose to fulfill our lives the best we can in the situation we are in.

Take care, do not give up. There is always hope, even for us.

*By Trudi, Western Australia*

## TOO MANY LINES

From time to time I see a face in the mirror,  
 Before I leave in a cold mid-winter to be greeted by the  
 cold of a life without family.  
 It shows me the story writ large,  
 Of the unloved, weary, forgotten face I see.  
 The eyes stare back into nothing in those eyes except the  
 painful trilogy of regret, sadness, and loss  
 So deep and vast that the bridge to happiness cannot  
 span that far.  
 Spurned was the offer of an olive branch,  
 An overture of peace of a sort,  
 Weeks after your only visit,  
 Weeks after that overwhelming sense  
 In March of the thrusting of your new man inside you.  
 The visit had a smile, a hug, a farewell kiss  
 Masking the message it was indeed to say goodbye.  
 Once so loud was your call of love, loyalty which after  
 I left our home lasted for less time than your favourite  
 Duran Duran song.  
 I'd wondered why our life together was never formalised  
 in ceremony with our children.  
 You'll never understand the hurt made when you said you  
 thought I was joking  
 A punchline that shattered my heart.  
 You'll never understand the hurt made when you  
 withdrew your care, you withdrew your love,  
 The cause of those now too many lines  
 Writing the story of the unbridgeable distance you created  
 between now and:  
 "It's OK, you can kiss me, you know"

By KCDC



Art by 'Om Ali', Queensland

## 'OLD OZ'

I not know what I was meant to be?  
 For I only know what I was,  
 My past and present to not be free,  
 In the merry land of Oz.  
 Misjudgement it may be my guide,  
 To things that I know not,  
 Forsaken to thus time inside,  
 For all that I've begot.  
 Thy lucky country I know none,  
 Henceforth my ship's but sailed,  
 Thy dragged into oblivion,  
 No love, for I've been jailed.  
 A caring finger not be laid,  
 Thus, buried in thy hole,  
 From my misfortune, debt be paid,  
 Brings burden to thy soul.  
 Thy memories, of past regret,  
 Not to be taken back,  
 Oh, calamity I met,  
 Far off the beaten track.  
 For oft me thou not careth,  
 There'll be no released dove,  
 Only pain thy punisheth,  
 A man whom no one love!

By Bukks



Art by Scott



Art by Kelly Flanagan



Art by Zac, Victoria



Art by Ojore McKinnon. Death Row, California



Art by Nigel



Art by Park, NSW



## INNOCENT SCARS

To Charlie,

To my darling boy, there is something you should know,  
all wounds heal in time but scars and memories don't  
A scar can tell a billion stories some of which you'll want  
to hide, to store them in your memories, to push down  
deep inside

But my boy, this is so dangerous, just deal with it there  
and then, and if you don't they come back and haunt you  
until the bitter end

You just need to remember me and mum are always  
here, to bandage up your scrapes and cuts to help the  
bleeding all disappear

You are stronger than you know with the blood of your  
mum and dad, we can tell you all our stories the good  
and all the bad

We will share all our misfortunes and even our mistakes,  
to show you your full potential so you can truly be  
something great

Love Dad

By EVO1, NSW

## JAH-JAH, THE GANGA MAN

The big idea behind this artwork is to showcase the damaging effects caused by smoking Ganja/weed, cigarette, hashish, banga and every other substance abused. I have a close friend of mine who always gets in my ear about how much he would like to quit smoking, but the temptation of having another hit would always draw him back into smoking more weed. For this reason, I did this painting to remind him about how stupid he looks whenever he tries lying to me about quitting.

My inspiration came from seeing a picture of a wild chimps' book in the library, so I copied the picture to create a positive message to my poor friend, Jah-Jah. One of the things I tried in this artwork was a freehand painting using the chimp's picture in the library book.

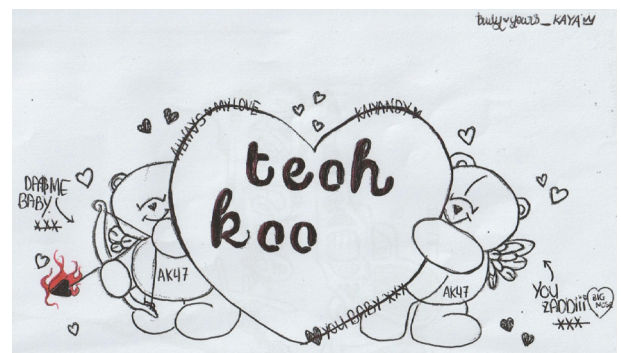
This artwork could inspire some weed and bong smokers to understand the bad effects substance abuse is having in their system, which is highly toxic and dangerous. As a non-user myself, I hope this picture conveys a strong message so that users of substance can draw inspiration through the satirical image.

Art and writing by Henry, Victoria



Above: Art by Robert McCullough, California

Below: Art by Kaiya, NSW



## GREEN GHOSTS

The crowd's murmuring echoed throughout the tall, narrow tomb of a building. The tour guide climbed a few steps to the upper levels. The fluorescents gave her a sickly pallor.

"This was one of the maximum security blocks of Goulburn Prison," she explained. "It's pretty dreary." That got a few chuckles.

"But even though this facility began operations nearly two hundred years ago, in 1894, these one-person cells housed two people each up until the cessation of incarceration for punishment only seventeen years ago." As the tour guide recounted history, a man at the back of the crowd heard a whisper.

"Chief!"

The man looked over his shoulder. There was no one there.

"Chief!" It came from inside cell three, insistent. "Chief!" The man crept up to the bolted metal door. He listened. The tour guide droned on. The man let out a tentative, "Hello?"

"Hey, chief," said a voice behind the door, "Are we gettin' out for showers today? 'Cause we haven't gotten a shower for over a week chief, it's putrid."

The man looked around. No one was paying him any attention.

A new voice spoke from within the cell, "Chief. Chief are you there?"

"Yeah," the man replied, "I'm here."

"Chief, can I please just get out for a six-minute phone call? I usually call my kids every day but they haven't let me do it all lock-in."

The man looked at the oversized deadbolt on the door. It was rusted in place.

"Chief?" asked the first voice.

"Oi Chief!" called out the second.

No one reacted.

"Hey, Chief, don't just leave us in 'ere!"

The man stepped back.

"CHIEF!" they screamed, "CHIEF!" The steel door jumped into the bolt, BANG! BANG! BANG!, like gunshots.

Everyone was silenced. All eyes on Cell 3 and the man. He put his hands up. It wasn't me.

Above them a voice cheered, "WOO!"

"Shut up!" yelled Cell 26.

The whole building rang, BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! "LET US OUT!"

*By Kyle Zammit*



Art by 'The Mysterious Artist D': Yokohama Prison, Japan.

# NOT QUITE LOAVES AND FISHES

BY RONIN GREY

It's no secret that the food in prison sucks. Everybody knows that, even on the street where people generally have no idea what it's like in prison, it's universal: the food in the joint is terrible, predictable as California sunshine.

Prison food is not bad by accident; it's disgusting by design. It is not any more expensive or time-consuming to prepare and serve food that isn't tasteless, under or overcooked, or at least vaguely recognizable. But if prisons feed their denizens a halfway decent meal, that cuts into a different bottom line: the company store.

Call it commissary, canteen, store, whatever. Prisons feed garbage to the inmates who can't afford to shop, then rake in the dough selling junk food and massively overpriced staples such as beans, rice, top ramen, and oatmeal to the subset of the population who can afford it. It's a racket, and we all know it is, and we all complain about it, but we still all live and die by the store because it's the only game in town and as they say, a motherfucker's gotta eat.

But the canteen is not the only way the prison cleans up on hunger. There's also the vaunted food sales, rare events when real food from outside is trucked in and sold to prisoners at a vicious markup. Perhaps it's a testament to the level to which budget cuts have degraded our already meager fare inside that a thousand guys will stand outside all day on the yard in the rain just to buy some cold, day-old Little Caesar's pizza - or just hope one of the homies did and kicks them a slice.

Personally, I don't like food sale days because everyone you talk to thinks you're running game, being nice so they'll give you something. Which many folks do, but that's beside the point. But the off-and-on rain had driven the stray cats I come out to visit to ground, so I ended up in the mob talking to a buddy when I happened to bear witness to an even more stark display of how desperate the slow starvation of our prison diet had made people.

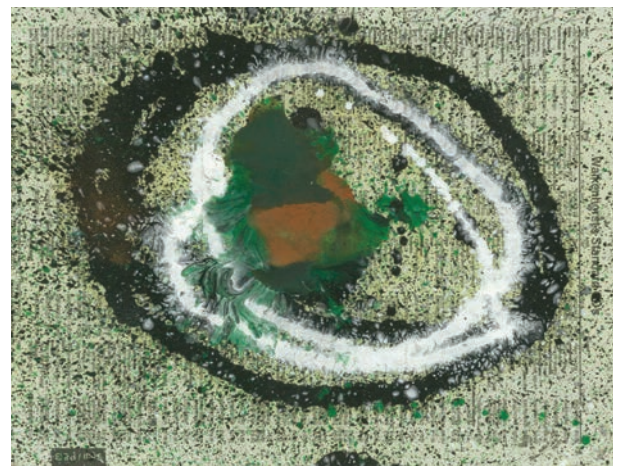
One lucky buyer parted the crowd with his prize, boxes piled high in his arms and hungry homies in tow. He'd bought so much that he couldn't manage it all. In slow motion, we watched a plastic tray of yesterday's chicken wings fall like a dying star and break apart on the asphalt.

A collective groan rose from the crowd - don't let anyone tell you folks inside don't understand sympathetic pain - but the shopper just shook his head. He and his entourage walked on, abandoning the half dozen wings

that lay scattered across the track. In the dirt. Where everybody walks. Where everybody spits. As the owner relinquished his claim others nearby exchanged looks. You could hear the wheels turning above the murmur of commiseration. Then, despite laughs and half-hearted cries of, "Don't do it, brother!" One guy darted in to grab a piece of road chicken. Then another guy grabbed one, and another, until only the most forlorn wing, the one even the scavengers neglected, lay by its lonesome. Then someone nabbed that one too.

In the past, the jeers and public shaming would have been much louder, and I think few, if any, would have braved the immense peer pressure. After all, it's not like we don't see each other every day, and you're risking a reputation of being some dirtbag who eats out of the trash. But in the end, nobody really even talked about it for more than a few minutes. Hunger is a badger gnawing a hole in an empty belly. Instead of joining the lukewarm public outcry, all I could think in the moment was, *Damn, I should've been quicker.*

Our food scraps and leftovers from breakfast and dinner used to be gathered up and sent to the hog farms, but apparently our slop is so substandard that it made the pigs sick, so the farms don't want it anymore and now it all just goes in a dumpster.



*Art and writing by Cameron Terhune, who writes under the pen name Ronin Grey*

*Read more at <http://roningrey.substack.com>*

*Cameron Terhune, AD0786  
California Training Facility North  
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California, 93960, USA*

# PATIENCE IS AN EDGE - A LIFE LESSON FROM POKER

BY ALAN, NEW JERSEY

The pot is three soups and a stamp. The TV in the dayroom is stuck on weather, no sound. We're at a worn-out table that rocks if someone leans too hard. I'm 'on the button,' which in poker just means I act last. Acting last isn't fancy. It's waiting your turn so you get more information before you decide.

Two players call the blind. The loud one taps his fingers like he already won. The other one doesn't look up. I look left to see who's breathing fast and who can't sit still. Then I look down. My hand is decent, but not great. On a different night I'd talk myself into a quick raise. Tonight I wait. The cards don't get better if I rush.

People think poker is about big bluffs and dramatic calls. Most of it is small decisions and quiet folds. You give up a lot of hands so you can be strong when it matters. Patience is not passive in that setting. It's an active choice to save your chips for a spot where the odds are on your side.

Prison is the same. Nothing here moves fast, yet you want it to. You want to get home, get a job, get your life back. The clock doesn't care. You can spend your time staring at the gate, or you can learn to act last. Wait, collect the information you need, then make a better decision when it's your turn. When I got here, I wanted to fix everything at once: career, school, money, reputation. That impulse feels productive, but it isn't. My experience playing poker taught me to slow down. In poker, position gives you more information; in here, patience does. It buys you one more beat to notice what's actually in front of you.

I built a rule for myself at the table: if I felt hurried, I folded. I applied the same rule away from the table. If I was rushing a choice, I stepped back and asked three simple questions:

1. What information do I get if I wait a week?
2. What can I do in that week to improve my position?
3. What does "winning" look like one year from now, not one hour?

That changed how I use my days. I stopped trying to win fast. I started stacking small edges. I drafted a twelve-week health-literacy class and pushed it through the Education Department until it was approved. I outlined a reentry plan that assumes nothing will be easy: housing, limited work opportunities, and basic budgets. I studied real estate investing to someday be my own boss. None of that feels exciting in the moment. It's footnotes, but footnotes add up to chapters.

Back at the table, the flop, three community cards everyone can use, comes down. The loud one bets too big, like he's trying to push us off. The other player hesitates, then calls. It's on me. I count my outs in plain English. What cards help me? How often? If I pay now, what will I have left if I'm wrong? The price is bad. The temptation is strong, and I want action. I fold.

Folding isn't giving up. It's saving your stack for a better spot. In here, folding might look like saying no to a pointless argument, skipping a risky favor, or dropping a project that burns hours without moving anything forward. You keep your energy for work that compounds: classes, writing, skills that transcend these walls.

There's a concept in poker called "bankroll". Bankroll is the money you can lose without breaking yourself. In here the bankroll is your time and focus. Once it's spent, it's gone. Patience protects it. You don't chase every hand. You choose the ones that matter and you play them well.

Patience also breaks "tilt," the state where anger or ego make your decisions for you. Tilt shows up fast in a housing unit in the form of a missed call-out, bad news from home, or someone who bumps your chair and doesn't say sorry. The old me would react. Now I notice the adrenaline, breathe once, and ask those same three questions. That one breath is position. It puts me back in control.

The hand I folded doesn't haunt me when the loud one drags the pot and talks. There will always be another hand. Later that night one shows up: same table, smaller pot, better price. I'm still acting last. I already know how both players behave when the pressure hits because I watched them earlier. I bet, not big but just enough. This time I take the soups and the stamp without a speech.

If you don't play cards, the lesson still holds. Act last when you can. Use the time to gather the details that matter, not the drama that doesn't. Fold fast when the terms are bad. Save your bankroll, your time and focus, for the spots that matter.

Patience isn't a personality trait; it's a strategy. It looks like one more page in the notebook, one more clean set in the weight pit, or one more module of a class you'll teach later. It looks boring until it doesn't. Then one day you notice you're not reacting anymore. You're choosing. And when your turn finally comes to walk out of that gate, you're ready.

# SEVEN YEARS IN A THAI PRISON

Back in Issue 18, we published a review of the memoir *Holly's Hell*. In that book, Holly Dean-Johns recounts a life where she was raised around domestic violence, before turning to addiction, and eventually spending seven years in a Thai prison for attempting to post 15 grams of heroin back to Australia. Holly's book focuses primarily on her time in prison, which includes her long fight to be extradited to serve the remainder of her sentence back in Western Australia, which was rejected and delayed by the politician Margaret Quirk for over three years. *Paper Chained* editor Damien Linnane talks to Holly directly about her book, prison experience, and what she is doing now.

## ***What made you want to write a book about your story?***

The main motivation for me was I knew that through telling my story, it would help a lot of people who are going through something similar to what I went through, or those who know of somebody going through the same sort of struggles. I hoped that my story would help people in some way.

## ***How long did it take you to write?***

I started writing this book on the first day I was arrested in Thailand. So it was many years in the making. There were times when I couldn't even write about it for years, and other days I would be in the writing headspace and I'd just write like crazy. That's why it took as long as it did. I had notebooks, and I would write as much as I could and smuggle it out through visits. Because none of that would have been allowed to go out through security.

## ***What's the best thing about having written your memoir?***

I've noticed from telling my story that it gives other people real hope and real motivation to try and get out of addiction. That's the main thing I've found, even in my work these days, when I tell people of my former life, they don't believe it. They're like, "Fuck off, no way." Like, "Look at you." And I'm like, "Yeah, this is me now. But back in the day when I was an addict, I was exactly like you. You know, I was you." So when they hear that sort of statement, they're like, "Wow, if you can do it, maybe I can too." That's what I love about it.

## ***How well has the book sold?***

The book has sold really well, which I'm happy about. But I didn't write this book to make money from it. That wasn't my motivation or intention at the time. How I went about it was I self-published. I ended up publishing through Hemry Books. I was their first client. On the back of my book, which went amazingly, they've just started to get more and more work. What helped me a lot was hiring a media specialist. She helped in arranging podcast, TV, and radio interviews. If I hadn't have hired somebody to do that, my story wouldn't have blown up as big as it has.



## ***Did you ever run into any problems or criticism with the whole 'profiting from crime' laws?***

No. That's something that I did ask about. And what came back to me was, if somebody wants to come up after me for proceeds of crime, they would do that only if they thought that the money I was making from my story was going back into committing a crime, and it's not. Maybe they could further down the line. Who knows? I'll just go about my life as I always would. If something happens, I'll deal with it when it happens.

## ***Because you had previous drug convictions in Australia, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) tipped off the Thai authorities when you went to live there, which is what led to your arrest. Can you remind me what the AFP did after you were arrested by Thai police?***

They came and spoke to me in custody and mocked the fact that I was facing the death penalty for being caught with only a small amount of heroin. They were really happy to be throwing that in my face, because they wanted information and they thought they'd scare me into giving it. But when you grow up in the criminal world, there's ways to do things and there's ways not to do things. So, you know, telling the police anything is just not in me.

***Is there one thing in particular about conditions in Thai prisons that people have a hard time believing is true?***

Oh, so many things, Damien. Like I said in the book, when I'd heard of all the horror stories of a Thai prison before I went in, I didn't believe them. I thought they were very exaggerated. But once I walked in there and lived there and experienced everything, what I'd been told wasn't really true enough. I think everything about it is unbelievable to some people. It's indescribable. How you sleep on a floor, how you have to go to the toilet. Sometimes there's no water to go to the toilet. In the whole prison, there were 6,000 people. In the first section I went to, there were 2,000 women. And in the yard there were ten toilets. 2,000 people and ten toilets. How you sleep, how many people are crammed into a line that you're sleeping in? If one person has to turn over, the whole line has to turn over. That's pretty unbelievable shit.

***I was surprised to learn in your book that there are no male guards in the female prisons in Thailand. Do you think this is a better approach?***

I think it was a good thing that there were no male guards. Because if there were, there would have been a lot of women getting pregnant for sure. Even here in Australia, that happens with male guards. Otherwise, personally, other than that, I don't think it makes any difference.

***Politician Margaret Quirk had the power to bring you back to Australia but opposed you being extradited home and essentially kept you in a Thai prison for an extra three years. What would you say to her now?***

I did meet her. I saw her one day at a shopping centre. I had dreamed about that scenario every single night since she knocked my application to return to Australia back, and I swore to myself that if I ever saw her, I would go and speak my mind. And I saw her this day and I thought, "Oh, you know what, Holly? Don't even worry about it. It's not worth it." But then as I was walking off, I was like, "Nah, fuck that. So I turned around and ran up to her and I said, 'Oh, remember me?' And she's like, 'I recognise the face, but I can't put a name to it.' And I said, 'Holly Deane-Johns, do you remember me now?'" And she was sort of like, "Shit." And I more or less said, "What you did to me was disgusting. I'm an Australian citizen. You made me do three-and-a-half more years than I needed to in a Thai prison. You should really look at the decisions that you make because you're dealing with people's lives. I was in a place where dying was a possibility every single day." I just had my say and hopefully it was food for thought for her.

***Did she end up attacking you at all?***

No, she said, "Well, you made the mistake that landed you in prison." And I said, "Yeah, I did, and I paid for it ten times over. You could have brought me home to my family three and a half years earlier." It was just shit what she did.

***You tried to go back to Thailand once you completed your sentence at Bandyup Women's Prison, and they didn't let you in at the airport. I once went to Thailand from Laos and it wasn't complicated: somebody took my passport, stamped it, and gave it back. Have you ever considered trying to get back into Thailand via a bordering country?***

No. Many people have suggested that as well and I've always known that's a possibility. But the way I live my life, I believe that everything happens for a reason. And me not being allowed back into Thailand, there's obviously a reason I'm not meant to go back. That's how I look at it.

All my friends are out of prison now, so there's no reason that I'd want to go back anyway. That was my only reason to go, to be able to see them in jail, buy food for them, and put money into their prison accounts.

***I was shocked when you wrote about your mother letting you try heroin for the first time when you were 15. Do you hold any resentment to her for that and how that might have impacted your life?***

No, not one bit. And the reason is we'd never known anybody who was a drug addict. We'd never seen drugs. So at the time of all this happening, my mother had no idea that letting me have that one snort would snowball into what it did. She was very naive. She didn't really know what the implications could or would be. If she had have known, there's no way in the world that it would have happened. So no, I don't.

***What are you doing these days?***

I work at Wungening Aboriginal Corporation. The team that I work with look after people who are going through the courts on charges, and who are self-referring to our program, which is a 12-week program where they come in once a week and talk to a caseworker and address as many issues as can be addressed through that three-month program.

I'm a peer worker who works with this organisation. People on the program have access to me, which is really helpful because I can relate to everything they're going through, whereas their caseworkers have never been to prison. They've never been addicted to drugs, they've never been in a violent household. So these women and men have me to sort of bounce stuff off. Having lived the life that I've lived has worked out to be a great thing for this job.

***What's your advice for people currently in prison?***

Well, this is one thing that I can say, that I do say quite often, Australian prisons have much better access to education. So my advice to people would be instead of sitting around talking shit every day with your mates about your old fucking stories and shit like that, use your time and get educated. Think of what you'd like to do with your life once you get outside of prison.

That's what I did when I got back to an Australian jail. I just hit that education centre so hard. I got a diploma. I got certificates. I did so much study to be able to do what I'm doing today. That's one message that I really think is important to put out there. Education in jails is free. Use the resources. Figure out what you want to do when you get out. Make a start on getting educated. If you're not using your time constructively in there, you're just doing dead time.

*Learn more about Holly at [hollydeanejohns.com.au](http://hollydeanejohns.com.au)*

# BOOK REVIEWS

BY PAIGE FULLERTON, CRIMINOLOGY STUDENT

## *Freedom, Only Freedom*

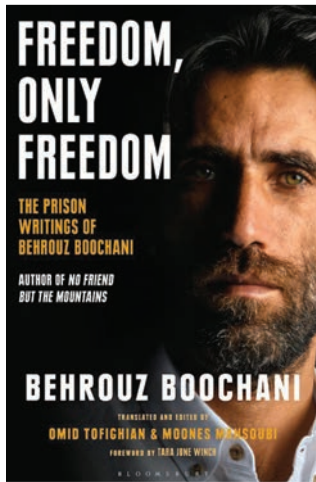
by Behrouz Boochani is a harrowing retelling of the torture and horrible conditions juxtaposed with the resilience of humanity, as he endures over six years imprisoned in Australia's offshore Manus Island detention system.

Boochani was held in detention after attempting to claim asylum in Australia, and his book documents the daily life and psychological torment he experienced inside. He uses his background in journalism to ensure he gives a detailed recount whilst also including excerpts of poetry that allow for the reader to comprehend the details in a different way.

In the book Boochani is able to highlight the solidarity and resistance amongst the many detainees. He is also able to bring uncomfortable truths forward regarding injustice and challenge the reader's knowledge on such issues. Boochani brings important topics to the reader's attention and breaks down many of the lies and misconceptions that we are told by political figures and the media regarding issues of refugees entering Australia.

The book is one of much sadness as Boochani details the horrific reality of detainees in Australian offshore migrant detention centres. The book explores the drastic and horrible effect that the detention centres have on detainees by conveying the sadness and cruelty that leads to many detainees resorting to suicide and self-harming. Boochani does not shy away from the gruesome details which I believe has helped to ensure this book is not just powerful but also a must-read for those interested in human rights and social justice.

Throughout *Freedom, Only Freedom*, Boochani conveys the meaning of freedom, identity, and resistance. Whilst he was detained, he alongside the other asylum seekers, were stripped of their basic rights and subjected to relentless psychological torment. Whilst experiencing many lows Boochani was able to find small aspects of hope and solidarity, highlighting the ways in which the detainees leaned on each other to gather strength and resist the forces that aimed to diminish them. *Freedom, Only Freedom* is a powerful and captivating story. Boochani's ability to seek out the good in humanity and hope for freedom is something to be admired. I highly recommend it to all people with a belief in human rights and social justice.



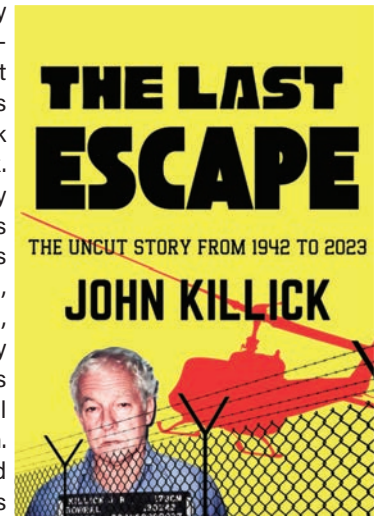
## *The Last Escape*

by John Killick is a quick-witted and raw insight into the life of infamous Australian bank robber John Killick. Killick's autobiography explores all aspects of his life from his troubled upbringing, gambling addiction, the difficulties of family life, his experiences in jail and his several escapes from prison. I thoroughly enjoyed the way Killick uses humour to navigate

his many stories. Whilst the book is titled *The Last Escape*, much of the book details Killick's experiences prior to the escape. The book follows his journey from youth to a man who had spent more than 30 years imprisoned. He is faced with many choices, and in many he ultimately makes the wrong decision and finds himself re-incarcerated once again. Killick details the inhumane conditions he experienced behind the bars of Australian jails and how he chose to fight back against the criminal legal system.

Many autobiographies written by former prisoners consist of exaggerated anecdotes that are almost impossible to gauge. While many of Killick's experiences are extreme he was able to capture them seamlessly. Killick uses historical events to aid the reader's understanding of the period of time when his stories are taking place. For example, he was incarcerated in H Division of Pentridge jail when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Killick spent many years incarcerated and had interactions with many fellow notorious prisoners such as Arthur 'Neddy' Smith and Robert 'Bertie' Kidd – this adds more depth to his stories. I appreciated the way that his life before his infamous helicopter escape is conveyed, which means that the reader is able to grasp a sense of Killick's personality. Killick has a collection of photographs in the book which I found to be a very useful component as there was a visual aid to help bring the actuality of the book to life.

Overall, I really enjoyed *The Last Escape*. Aside from a few editing errors it was a well-constructed detailed retelling of the stories of John Killick and his many escapes from correctional centres. *The Last Escape* is a book that I believe anyone with a fascination into the world of crime, specifically that of Australia, would thoroughly appreciate. John Killick articulates his experiences in a manner that allows for the audience to sympathise alongside him without taking away the severity of his crimes.



# FILM REVIEWS

*Midas Man* (2024) is the story of the man behind the Beatles. This film is an exposé of the trials and triumphs of Brian Epstein (played excellently by Jacob Fortune-Lloyd). More than just the manager of the 'fab four', *Midas Man* portrays Brian as a determined, ambitious, and savvy businessman who was adept at selling and promoting musical talent. Brian's immense skills deliver him phenomenal professional success as well as first-hand experience of the power of Beatlemania.



As a gay man, Brian was living at a time when homosexual acts were illegal in Britain. The movie shows the personal toll this had on him as he did his utmost to keep his sexual orientation hidden from the authorities. When seeking out gay sex at 'beats' (homosexual hook-up locations), Brian experiences a number of horrifying encounters. He was blackmailed, robbed, and brutally assaulted. Brian's concern after each ordeal is the welfare of his supportive parents and anxiety over whether his secret was out. Ultimately, Brian's frantic lifestyle, assisted with a dependence on amphetamines, leads to a nervous breakdown and a stint at a mental hospital. He emerges from this period with a renewed sense of purpose and vigour.

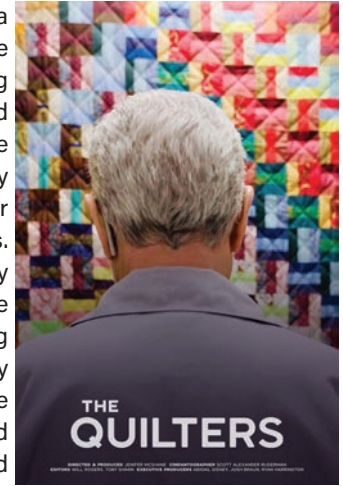
Brian's story is told with wit, humour, and sincerity. The picture's dialogue and narration contain insights into what drove Brian and how he processed particular moments in his life. Comedic discourses between Brian and the Beatles highlight the contrast between elegant and pompous Brian, and the working-class boys from Liverpool. The audience may reasonably expect to hear a few of the Beatles' top hits throughout the movie. However, this is not the case. It would appear that copyright laws and royalty arrangements had the final say in score of the *Midas Man*.

"Everything he touched he turned into pop culture gold"

Rating: 4 jailbirds out of 5

By Vincent, Long Bay Correctional Centre. NSW

*The Quilters* (2024) is a tear-jerking 33-minute documentary following a group of incarcerated men attempting to make birthday quilts for every foster child in their surrounding counties. The film explores the daily routine of a restorative justice program running out of a maximum-security prison in Missouri, where the group designs and sews vibrant quilts and vests for foster children, special needs schools and local nonprofit charities.



Inside the sewing room, we get to see their tough exteriors soften. We hear the men reflect on the positive effects that the quilting has on their mental health. Many reflect that sewing helps them reconnect with their memories of family, and I think it also helps them find a connection to their inner child. They can focus on the art while reflecting on their past, and emotions such as guilt or regret. "Most men can't forgive themselves, that's why they can't change," says Ricki, the group's teacher and leader.

We see the men spending most of their time outside the sewing room, sketching designs. Many describe the quilts as a way to send a message to children who may feel forgotten, as a way of showing them that somebody still cares. We get to see lots of heartfelt thank-you letters pinned to the wall in the sewing room, "This is the best Christmas gift I've ever gotten," one reads.

The film quietly reveals the transformative power of the creative arts. It's a beautiful example of the positive impact that restorative programs can have in prisons. They can bring a sense of purpose to people serving time, while also making a real difference for children and the community. A warm documentary, it explores themes of personal responsibility, redemption and growth. We get to see how the quilting program changes these men, many of whom are serving life sentences, and helps them heal. "We ain't perfect but we trying to be better," says Mr White 'Chill'.

This is a very special film: must-watch.

By Josie Bull, Criminology student

# SEODAEMUN PRISON HISTORY MUSEUM

BY DAMIEN LINNANE

It's my first time in South Korea, and I've come here to see Seodaemun Prison. Or as it's called now, the Seodaemun Prison History Museum. The prison, located in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, has a unique history. Korea officially came under Japanese control in 1910, and this only ended in 1945 when Japan was defeated at the end of the Second World War, and was forced to surrender all their occupied territories. However, Japan had significant influence and power over the country from the 1800s. Seodaemun Prison was built by Japanese forces and opened in 1908. It was used to detain Korean political prisoners who were campaigning for independence from Japanese rule, torture them for information, and subject them to forced labour.



*The prison's entrance*

Originally built to hold 500 people, by 1919 there was so much support for Korean independence that over 3,000 people were being detained there. Many were executed or died from the brutal conditions inflicted on them, which included physical and psychological torture. Seodaemun was one of 30 such prisons built around the country to suppress Korean political resistance.



*The prison viewed from one corner. Modern buildings and the nearby Mount Ansan can be seen in the distance.*

After South Korea gained independence, Seodaemun was converted into a regular prison and operated until 1987.

In 1998, it was turned into its current form as a prison museum, a monument to freedom, peace and South Korea's proud resistance to occupation.

Many of the original buildings have been preserved, and the methods of torture and isolation are well documented and displayed. Pictures speak louder than words, so let me show you a small sample of what you can see on display if you are ever able to visit the museum yourself.



*Above: A display of a typical interrogation cell, featuring dressed mannequins depicting a verbal interrogation.*

*Below: The size of solitary confinement cells. The hole at the back is the 'toilet', which allowed waste to flow outside.*





Above: The 'box.' People were placed inside and then the box, which was filled with spikes, was shaken to inflict pain and injury. Below: The narrow rooms, where people were locked in so they could not sit or stand properly.



Panopticon-style exercise yards. People could exercise in each space but were not allowed to talk to each other. One guard could observe ten prisoners exercising in isolation.



Typical cell blocks with wooden doors.



An early form of 'knock-up' button. The wooden lever can be pushed out from inside cells. Prison guards could then physically see the lever was sticking out and investigate.

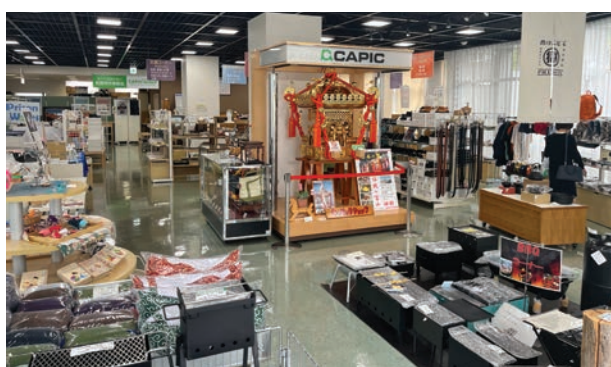


The South Korean flag, known as the Taegukgi, is now displayed over former cell blocks, giving the impression of South Korea's reclaimed power over the former prison.

# PRISON LABOUR IN JAPAN

BY DAMIEN LINNANE

Many prisons in Japan have a small CAPIC store attached to them, but the main store in Tokyo is unlike any other shop I have ever visited before. On sale is everything from barbecue pits, to shoes, shirts, stationery, furniture, handwoven rugs and handcrafted wooden sculptures. For 4.8 million Yen (\$50,000 AUD) you can even buy a handcrafted portable shrine, the kind used in traditional festivals in this country. What's extremely interesting about all these items though, is that every single one of them was made in a prison by incarcerated people.



*An overview of the CAPIC shop in Nakano, Tokyo*

CAPIC is the Correctional Association Prison Industry Cooperation, the corporation in Japan responsible for selling items made from prison labour to the public. They have been operating for 42 years, and this shop in Nakano, Tokyo has been operating for 23 years.

There are about 40,000 prisoners in Japan in about 70 prisons. According to CAPIC, about 10% of them make goods like this for sale to the general public. The rest of the people in prison are making goods for other prisons, such as new beds. It is perhaps not surprising that almost everyone in prison in Japan is working, as since 1907, people in Japan were explicitly sentenced to imprisonment with labour. Working is considered part of the prison sentence, and is not optional like it is in Australia.



*Damien and Tadaaki (front centre) and others at CAPIC*

Tadaaki Nakagawa, CAPIC's senior researcher, agreed to meet me at the store for an interview. I ask him if prisoners can request to transfer to other prisons to work in specific industries. He tells me this is not normally possible,

as the prison factories will be based on the security classification. It would only be possible to transfer to a prison with the same classification type, which will probably be making similar items. I also noted before travelling here that the CAPIC website promotes the use of prison labour to private companies, boasting that if they use prison labour, among other things, they will not have to pay the normal welfare and insurance benefits that ordinary workers require. I ask him if regular factories ever complain that prison labour is unfair competition.

"No, they used to decades ago, but these days the things the prisoners make do not compete with mainstream businesses, as manufacturing of competitive items has moved overseas," he tells me through a translator.

To get an outside perspective, I also interviewed Professor Carol Lawson, an Australian who is now a Professor at the University of Tokyo, specialising in criminal justice issues. She doesn't disagree.

"The prisons all have factories, because that's pretty much all there is. There are no gymnasiums and not enough exercise space. The factories were very initially lucrative", she tells me, "however, in recent decades they have been a drain on the national budget."



*Above: Hand-woven rugs, alongside a poster explaining how they are made. CAPIC state their prison workers are the only people in Japan still hand-making rugs this way. Below: A hand-made motorbike-style rocking horse.*



"But corrections here still need the factory set-up so they can manage prisoners with few staff and maintain order."

I can't help but wonder how ethical the labour for all the things around me in the shop are, so I run this by Professor Lawson as well. "Japanese prison labour is often referred to as forced labour by Western prisoners who spend time in there," she says. "But the Japanese perspective on that would be the prison is not forcing you to do labour. You are sentenced to imprisonment with work, which has been the primary sentence handed down since 1907. About 95% of prisoners are sentenced with work."

Prison labour in Japan is also silent. People are not allowed to speak to one another while working. Minor transgressions like talking will result in 30 days in solitary confinement. Professor Lawson, however, explains that workplaces are generally silent in Japan. "It's the norm to work silently in Japan, so there's more than just coercion going on. There's plenty of coercion, but it's also a cultural norm." Incarcerated people working in prison in Japan are paid a very small hourly allowance, on par with what people who choose to work in prisons in Australia are paid.

I'm curious if the average Japanese prisoner is miserable working. According to Professor Lawson, it's not necessarily the case. "For people who've had very difficult, dysfunctional lives and who suffer from intergenerational disadvantage, prison can be a haven. Because the order and peace and quiet is so unlike a hard life outside."

Order and discipline are so strict that there are literally no contraband drugs in prisons here, or violence. The food is also incredible, compared to Western prisons. Prisoners are given three nutritious freshly-cooked balanced meals each day. People who come to prison overweight typically have obesity issues resolved by the high-quality catered diets. The amount of food they are given is determined by the work they do. If you sit down for work, you will be given fewer calories than a person who works on their feet. There is no food on buy-up, and prisoners are forbidden from trading or sharing food. Again, activity such as sharing food could result in 30 days solitary confinement.

"In prison you've got good sleep, good nutrition. No one is going to harm you physically. You won't get the healthcare that you want, but you'll get basic healthcare. For people on the fringe of society, that's actually quite attractive", Professor Lawson explains.

One thing I particularly wanted to see at the store were the famous bags made at Hakodate Juvenile Prison in Hokkaido. Shoulder bags, smartphone covers, pouches and even aprons featuring the word 'PRISON' and the Kanji character for 'goku' (Jail), became so popular in the 2010s their sales were even covered by BBC News. At one point, the bags were so sought after by the general public that two other prisons had to also start manufacturing them to keep up with the completely unexpected demand.

Tadaaki confirms the bags remain popular, and they occasionally have to stop people buying every single item, for the purpose of reselling them later at a higher price.

There are also handcrafted sculptures on shelves, however, none are unique. The same sculptures are made over and



*Above: A bag and pouch from Hakodate Juvenile prison. Below: A stencilled painting from Okinawa prison. Many versions of this painting were for sale. The colours change in the paintings, but the patterns are the same.*



over again. For example, there are zodiac sculptures made at Nara Juvenile prison, and also many stencilled paintings from Okinawa Prison. I ask Tadaaki if there are any places prisoners can currently make art and sculptures of their own designs. There are not.

My visit to Japan occurred in May 2025, three weeks before a massive change to prison sentencing in the country. After 118 years of people being sentenced to imprisonment with labour, on June 1, 2025, new laws came in which mean that prisoners will now instead be sentenced to imprisonment with rehabilitation and education.

Professor Lawson believes some factory work will simply be re-branded as "educational", and Tadaaki confirms that the making of prison products will continue. He says there will be two major differences. Elderly and handicapped prisoners will no longer be required to work, and will instead only have to attend education and psychological programs. He tells me the second change is that prisoners will no longer be passively creating whatever the prison tells them to, and will now also be involved in the design process. "Because after they go back to society, they need to learn more how to think for themselves," he says.

"There's no art programs yet," says Professor Lawson, "but sometime after June 1, a form of vocational or therapeutic art program will be made available somewhere."

# JAPAN'S VOLUNTEER PROBATION OFFICER SYSTEM

BY CAROL LAWSON

Japan closed its doors to other countries around 1600, though in the 1860s, it opened up again and needed to modernise quickly to avoid looking primitive and being colonised by western countries. Building a criminal justice system like those in Europe and America was one way to earn international respect and show that Japan could govern itself. But there wasn't enough money. Everything had to be built, and all staff had to be hired and trained. Ordinary citizens played a major role from the beginning, filling in gaps. This included volunteering to deliver community corrections services that the government could not afford.

Volunteering started in Shizuoka Prefecture; one of the prefectures that Mt. Fuji straddles, in 1889. A local leader noticed that former prisoners struggled to find a place to live and a job. He formed an organisation to help prisoners settle back into society and called for volunteers to help. Hundreds volunteered. Over the next 50 years, this charitable initiative expanded to other prefectures.

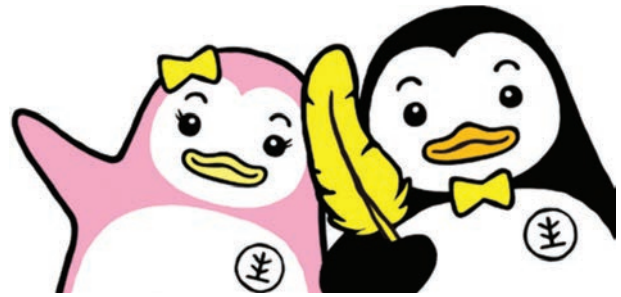
Government initiatives started later. Japan had no Rehabilitation Bureau until 1920 and it initially handled only juvenile probation. There was a strong belief, which continues today, that juvenile offenders should be protected, not criminalised. So, the Family Court handles cases of juvenile crime or delinquency – not the criminal courts. Probation orders, which focus on keeping juvenile offenders at home with their families, are a core part of Japan's juvenile justice system. From the very beginning, juvenile probation involved only a few government officials, whose role was to supervise a large number of unpaid volunteers. By the late 1930s, this system of public-private cooperation had spread to probation for adult offenders. The VPO system took shape in 1950. Even today, almost all day-to-day probation services are delivered by local volunteers.

In Japan, the word “probation” covers both probation and parole. There are around 46,000 Volunteer Probation Officers (VPOs). Many are older men – their average age is 65, though the percentage of women VPOs is slowly rising.

The criteria for becoming a VPO are simple. They must be of trustworthy character, be enthusiastic about the role and have enough free time, a stable life, and be healthy and active. Often a VPO is a retiree or local business owner who is a respected and well-known member of their local community. The idea that a VPO can be a person who is an ex-offender is new in Japan, but there now are a handful of cases – mostly people who offended as teenagers.

Rather than actively seeking the role, people who become VPOs are often “volunteered” by someone they know. When a serving VPO retires, which they must do before turning 78, they recommend someone they know from their local community to replace them.

VPOs are not paid, but they do receive a small monthly allowance of about 50 Australian dollars to cover costs such as phone calls and public transport.



*Ministry of Justice Rehabilitation Bureau mascots Mr. Hogo and Ms. Sara, who are said to have been in trouble with the law as teenagers. The yellow feather is a symbol used in Japan based on the idea in the 1973 hit song 'Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree' where a prisoner dreams of being welcomed when he returns home.*

VPOs are supervised by professional Probation Officers, who work for the Rehabilitation Bureau and are located across Japan. A professional Probation Officer can be responsible for dozens of VPOs at any time, while each VPO will have just one or two probationers to look after at a time.

The expression in Japanese that is translated as “probation” (hogo kansatsu) literally means to “protect and supervise.” The order of these words is important, because a lot of what VPOs do is protective, in a very flexible, practical sense. VPOs have three main duties – to undertake basic training sessions provided by professional Probation Officers; to help with outreach and educational activities aimed at preventing crime in the local community; and to work closely with the one or two probationers, people on probation, assigned to them. They do also “supervise” their probationers in the sense that they monitor whether they breach any conditions set by the courts or parole. If there is a breach, the VPO lets the professional Probation Officer know immediately. VPOs also submit a written report to the Probation Officer on each probationer in their care every month. The Probation Officer is the one who evaluates how the probationer's risk of offending is tracking and decides things like what therapeutic programs the probationer is to attend and whether to recommend revocation of probation. If things are not going well, the Probation Officer meets with the VPO and the probationer more often to try and resolve things before probation has to be revoked.

The VPO spends a lot of time networking and negotiating on the probationer's behalf in the local community. They work hard to increase the chances of successful reintegration and make it less likely that they will re-offend. A VPO meets with their assigned probationer/s at least once a month. In rural areas where homes are big enough to guarantee privacy, this often still happens in the VPO's own home and might include sharing a meal together. In cities, where homes tend to be small, cramped apartments with thin walls, these meetings usually happen in a public facility, called a Rehabilitation Protection Support Centre, where the local VPOs do their work.

A VPO is also responsible for 'hands on', real-time, all-hours troubleshooting in all the areas of a probationer's life that affect whether they will successfully complete their probation period. They prepare for this role by being briefed by a professional Probation Officer on the probationer's needs, then actively leveraging their own standing in the community to build relationships with people the probationer will need to rely on.

For example, they will meet with family members or others who have offered to be in a guardian role for a probationer being released from prison. They will also check on the probationer's housing arrangements and chat with the landlord and neighbours, and will meet with the decision makers at the probationer's job or school. Any people helping the probationer will receive the VPO's contact details. This means that if any misunderstanding or disagreement happens, the VPO is the first person a decision maker calls. The VPO can step in quickly to mediate and find a solution.

VPOs have no set work hours or limits on the amount of time they spend helping a probationer. How much they do and when they do it is up to them. Many serve in the role for decades, acting as a flexible buffer between probationers and their community as they settle in.

The VPO system needs to be very effective for three reasons. Firstly, Japan is a Confucian society where shame is a strong cultural factor. Families often disown a relative who has offended, particularly if they have re-offended. So there may be no family help available. Secondly, the welfare system is skeletal. It offers very little financial or practical help compared to western countries. While people who have offended are theoretically eligible for benefits, shame, stigma, and practical barriers often prevent them from applying.

Thirdly, even though Japan still uses the death penalty for capital crimes, very few people convicted of other crimes go to prison. A conviction typically leads to penalties like fines and probation. Prison sentences are short on average – about 3 years – and can also be wholly or partially suspended. So, Japan's incarceration rate is very low, just 33 people per 100,000 of population. The figure is around 150 in both Australia and New Zealand, and over 540 in the US.

The VPO system, which has such a central role in the criminal justice system, seems to be highly effective. The two-year reoffending rate is the percentage of prisoners released two years ago who are now back in prison. We use this figure to compare the success of criminal justice systems globally. In Japan, it has dropped from 19% in 2010 to 13% in 2022. The five-year reoffending rate dropped from 39% in 2010 to 34% in 2019. These figures are far lower than rates in Australia, New Zealand and the US.

So why has this happened? For around fifteen years, there has been a strong emphasis in Japan on making sure that probationers have secure housing and a place where they feel included and belong – like a school, a job or a therapeutic community. It is well known here that the risk that a person will re-offend is many times lower if these two things are

set up before the probationer arrives in a community, and if they are then supported until their probation period ends.

The Ministry of Justice has been keen to share the success of the VPO system with other countries for decades now. It tends to suit cultures where community life is strong, and where governments do not have a lot of resources. Each country that has adopted the VPO system creates its own version, to suit its own needs and society. So far, Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Kenya have all done this. China and Malaysia are also interested.

However, stresses are facing the VPO system. Japan's society is aging faster than any other country in the world. Already around 30% of the population is aged over 65. The share of the population made up of younger and middle-aged people gets smaller every year. As these younger cohorts shrink, it is harder and harder to find new recruits to become VPOs. Wages have stayed pretty much the same in Japan for over 30 years, even when prices have risen. So many more Japanese people are now experiencing financial stress and can't volunteer. At the same time, many experienced VPOs are retiring after they turn 78.

Offenders are aging too. Juvenile delinquency and crime are gradually disappearing while the share of offenders who have complex long-term needs is growing. VPOs are not professionals, so they can struggle to know how to help older repeat offenders with high needs.

***The five-year reoffending rate [in Japan] dropped from 39% in 2010 to 34% in 2019 ... far lower than rates in Australia ...***

Violence against VPOs is rare, but in mid-2024, a probationer attacked and killed his VPO in the VPO's home. This tragedy has sparked widespread efforts to reinforce the

system to ensure VPO safety – for example by always having two VPOs present during a meeting with a probationer.

Japan's VPO system began with ordinary people taking the initiative because the government did not have the resources to help people rehabilitate and reintegrate after they had offended. This almost accidental design, where local volunteers deliver most probation services and there are very few professional Probation Officers, has for more than 135 years, been central to the system's success.

In Australia, New Zealand, and the US, community corrections also began in the 1800s as local volunteers stepped up. But for decades now, professionally trained public servants have delivered most of these services. Volunteers are still involved, but only on the edges.

There are many advantages for probationers due to this change. But Japan's example shows us that we might have also lost something along the way. When local community volunteers take on a VPO-like role, the reintegration barriers that affect offenders everywhere are much lower. This leaves us wondering whether there might be elements of the VPO system that might fit well in and benefit our own community corrections systems.

*Carol Lawson is an Australian academic who is based in Japan. She studies, writes, and speaks about prison and probation in both countries.*

# LUCIOUS

## A STORY BY ASHLEY MCGOLDRICK

*All information about Australian Indigenous culture was generously provided by Wayne Kite, a proud member of the Wiradjuri Nation. Any mistakes are mine alone.*

Everyone looks at the new prisoners as they walk into the unit. We all do it. Nothing too obvious of course, but you want to know as quickly as possible what you may have to deal with. Friend or foe, predator or prey, psycho or sane. There were two other crims with Lucious when they walked into the block after getting off the bus. The other guys were standard: fair, shaved heads, tattoos and muscle. Not that dangerous, as long as you leave them alone. Lucious was different. Average build, average height, average looks. In a word, average. Except for his eyes; they were different. Dark and deep-set, tormented and trouble; indeed, haunted.

Here was a young man who hadn't simply looked into the abyss but had run and jumped in without a parachute. He packed his gear into his cell, then walked around the yard outside for a while. Afterwards he came back into the unit and sat at the table where I was reading *Paper Chained*, a prison newsletter. He introduced himself and we talked for a few minutes about not much at all, as two people will in a potentially volatile place. He seemed normal enough, until he said, "There's a lot of angry spirits around here!"

"Okay," I replied nonchalantly.

"Can you not hear their song?"

"I can only hear you," I say as unconfessionally as possible. I've learnt not to fear the tough guys, basically all you'll get from them is a bruise or two, at worst (in most cases) a trip to the medical unit to get stitched up.

Violence in Australian correction centres, while very real, is not nearly as common as you may have been led to believe. Nothing at all like books or film. However, insane people scare me. You just never know which way they will go, because they're so unpredictable. The anguish on his face looks painful as he walked away saying, "Their misery is deafening, I don't know what to do, why are they so furious?" Great, I thought, another fucking psycho! Noticing the exchange, my friend and proud member of the Wiradjuri Nation, Wayne Songbird, strolled over with an amused look on his face.

"Judging by the perplexed look on your face, I'm guessing that it was an interesting conversation mate," he observed. After explaining what happened, Wayne told me that Lucious could be a guudingan.

"What's that?" I ask.

"A guudingan is someone who is a storyteller or more literally a composer of song," a person who can tell our history through music, painting or dance. If I'm right,

Lucious may be able to hear the voices of our ancestors and they would tell their stories through him. Either that or he could be crazier than a drunken kangaroo, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference. Should be entertaining to find out, don't you think?" he laughed. Nothing out of the ordinary happened the rest of that day; people worked out, relaxed, the junkies chased their drugs, the gangsters sharpened their blades, and the screws tried and failed to stop it all. Later that night it was a different story.

The screaming started around midnight, waking myself and everyone else in our block. A howling, sounding more demonic than human. Looking out of the small window in my cell door, I could see impossibly bright lights flashing inside Lucious' cell window. Just like lightning, with whites, silvers, yellows, and reds blazing on and off. However, it was the yelling that unsettled me most. We could all hear what sounded like a man being tortured to death, yet interspersed with chanting, like a tribal ceremony. After an extremely long hour of this, all sounds and sights stopped. A few of us called out to Lucious but received no reply.

It wasn't long before the night screws came around for their usual checks. They shone their lights into Lucious' cell, as they do with everyone's, and kept on walking. Assuming nothing was wrong, I went back to sleep. I was awakened later that morning by a frantic Wayne bashing on my cell door. "Get up bro, you've got to see this!" he told me. "What?" I asked, still half asleep, having forgotten the events of the night before. "Lucious's cell," he answered as I stumbled after him.

Looking through the small window in Lucious' cell door, there was a vision of hell itself. There was blood everywhere, on the walls, ceiling, bed and floor. Everywhere you could see was blood, but no Lucious. We all saw last night that nobody went either in or out of his cell, but how could one do this to themselves, and where was he now? That our custodial officers did not notice anything on their rounds throughout the night simply confirmed my suspicions of both their incompetence and their indifference. Nonetheless, they soon saw the commotion we were making and came over to investigate.

Upon seeing the blood and no prisoner a code was called. Officers ran into the unit and locked us all down. Sickened and confused, we were all kept that way for a couple of days while an investigation took place. A couple of months later the official report was released. Because of the massive amount of blood found in the cell it was considered unlikely that Lucious survived, but, because no body was found the overall verdict was inconclusive. It was considered by many of my fellow inmates that because another Aboriginal Death in custody would be more damaging to the QLD government, they ran with the conclusion that he must have escaped. One fascinating aspect of the inquest was unearthed by subpoenaing suppressed government files. It was discovered that the section of the prison where our unit was turned out to be an Indigenous sacred site. With committed protests, half the gaol was demolished and built elsewhere, and the sacred ground was returned to the Traditional Owners, who said that their ancestors could now rest in peace.

# HISTORICAL PRISON WRITING

## THE ESCORT

The Escort is leaving, there's one hour to pack.  
"Throw the lot in a box; you're not coming back".  
"Where am I going. Oh officer kind?"  
"Just get on the truck and never you mind".  
"What about visitors, mail, education?"  
"You're going on Escort, not bloody vacation.  
Now give us your smokes, your matches and comb.  
You'll get them all back when you reach your new home.  
That's if we're not busy and if we're not late,  
or until tomorrow you'll bloody well wait".  
All nine of us handcuffed on one crowded side.  
All C's together 'cept one B inside.  
Four hours of lurching and banging about,  
"Are we getting close now?" We cannot see out.  
"Stay in the truck until we are ready  
to throw out your boxes, if they're not too heavy".  
"Now stand in a line – what's your date of birth?  
Your next of kin's name who's living in Perth?"  
"Don't tell me you wanted to be near your family,  
we want you down here so they're not too handy".  
"Put in a 'bluey'; come back after muster.  
Another is on then, I know from the roster".  
"He'll deny any knowledge, send you to a room,  
that's closed in the morning and unstaffed after noon".  
"We don't know why you're here or where you are going,  
or where you are from or what we are doing."  
"Head Office will tell us and then we'll tell them,  
then they'll tell themselves and re-classo again".  
"You're going to Mannus or Cooma or Lithgow,  
depends on computers and numbers and gizmos".  
"It's all on a system of balls in a cage,  
we rattle 'em round then divide by your age"  
"That way we can get you to the place you don't want,  
that's farthest away from your Uncle and Aunt".  
"And those that are here and want to be there,  
have about as much chance as gas in the air".  
"But no one can blame us because we can say,  
IT CAME FROM HEAD OFFICE – ESCORT AWAY!"

*Anonymous. Originally published in Framed,  
Issue 26, December 1994*

## THE LADY HEROIN

There's deception in her presence  
and tombstones in her eyes  
For all who come to meet her  
it's with them I sympathise.

She's a disciple to the devil  
as she assists him with his deeds  
She relies on their addiction  
and delights in people's greed.  
You will lie cheat and steal  
just to feel her sweet affect,  
You will hassle for a lifetime  
and your loved ones you'll forget.  
She'll enslave your mind and body  
with her sweet narcotic charms  
You'll become the low of lowest  
just to have her in your arms.  
You will love her, yet you'll hate her  
but will want her more and more,  
Nothings of importance  
just as long as you can score.  
You'll experience sheer misery  
your soul you'd even sell,  
When you reach this desperate point  
you will live your life in hell.  
A life of pain and sickness  
A life of true despair  
A life when you are all alone  
When with yourself, you have to bear.  
Many who have met her  
have lived and died with her within.  
She will only bring you misery  
THE LADY HEROIN

*By Val. Originally published in Jail News,  
Volume 2 Number 4, 26 May 1976*

## PRISONS IN AUSTRALIA

I hate them because they are, in the main, inhuman and unnatural places. I hate them because each year they take large numbers of hopeless people and turn them into bitter people. I hate them because they are a part, among other things, of the systematic destruction of the Aboriginal race. I hate them because they institutionalise and make captive the people who work there. But above all I hate them because for hundreds of years the people who work in the criminal justice system as a whole – politicians and community leaders – have used prisoners to perpetuate the biggest and longest-running social fraud of the modern world ... that prisons serve a useful purpose in social control and crime prevention.

*Keith Hamburger  
Head of Queensland's Corrective Services, 1991*

## POST-RELEASE PROGRAMS IN NSW

CRC runs several post-release reintegration and support programs for people leaving custody. The most important things to know are:

- A referral at least three months before your earliest release date is needed for most programs
- CRC does not have any accommodation of its own; we help you to find suitable housing through places such as Homes NSW, social or affordable housing, boarding houses or transitional accommodation provided by others
- Unless you have somewhere to stay during your first few nights out, you will need to access temporary accommodation via Homes NSW or Link2Home. A SAPO or parole officer can book this for you before your release via the Set to Go program. You will then need to stay in close contact with Homes NSW and follow their rules to access further housing support
- Your caseworker can help you with other things in addition to finding accommodation, including clothing, food, identification, getting a phone, finding and engaging with mental health support, alcohol and other drug services, physical health services, support around trauma and counselling, connections with your Community Corrections Officer and more.

### To be eligible for one of our programs, you must:

- Be homeless or be at risk of homelessness on release
- Be voluntarily seeking support
- Have a release date confirmed and set if eligible for parole
- Have a number of identified complex support needs

Our programs include:

**Women's Transitional and Post-Release Service** (Inner City Sydney) - for people who identify as female who are looking to live in the Inner City Sydney Region.

**Transitional & Post Release** (Penrith / Blue Mountains) - for people of all genders who are looking to live in the Penrith and Blue Mountains Region.

**Transitional Indigenous Service** (Broken Hill / Wilcannia) - works with First Nations men and women on release from prison into the Broken Hill and Wilcannia regions.

**Pathways Home** - for young people aged up to 24 who are planning to live in the Greater Sydney metropolitan area and would like support for alcohol and/or other drug use.

We also have a few other programs that work a bit differently.

**Extended Reintegration Service** (Southwestern Sydney) - for people of all genders with complex needs, including intellectual disability and mental illness, who are at risk of homelessness and looking to live in Southwestern Sydney. You must be released on parole and referrals can only be made through your parole officer in the prison.

**Reintegration Housing Support Program** - CRC support workers are based in six Homes NSW Offices to work alongside housing staff to assist you to secure long-term housing. The Homes NSW offices involved include Strawberry Hills, Mount Druitt, Liverpool, Dubbo, Coniston (Wollongong) and Newcastle.

**Miranda Project** - for people who identify as female who are at risk of both domestic violence and criminal justice system involvement.

The best way is to make a referral is to ask a SAPO, Case Management Officer or parole officer to make a referral through our website at [www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au).

**Are you worried about your loved ones on the outside?**

**Do your family or friends need support?**

When someone has a loved one go to prison, they may also feel socially isolated and reluctant to seek support because of the stigma attached. For many families, the incarceration of a loved one can lead to financial and practical difficulties and many changes that can be stressful.

Counselling is often helpful in supporting families through the stressful process of incarceration and assist in planning for release and family reintegration following a period of imprisonment. You or your loved one can contact CRC to discuss how they can access support.

CRC's Family Counsellor provides telephone counselling and support to anyone in NSW with a family member or friend in a Correctional Centre. Face-to-face counselling may be available for families in the Canterbury-Bankstown Local Government Area.

### Community Restorative Centre

✉ PO Box 258, Canterbury, NSW 2193

☎ (02) 9288 8700

✉ [info@crcnsw.org.au](mailto:info@crcnsw.org.au)

🌐 [www.crcnsw.org.au](http://www.crcnsw.org.au)



**Breaking news:** Family and friends can now claim travel assistance for the purpose of taking people in NSW out on day or weekend leave. This includes fuel, public transport fares, taxis if no public transport exists near the prison, and accommodation if they live more than three hours away.

# IN THE NEXT ISSUE

ISSUE 21 DUE FOR RELEASE IN MARCH 2026



## OUR THIRD ART EXHIBITION

We report on our third art exhibition, which showcased the works of Mohannad Al Azzeh, a Palestinian artist previously detained in Israel.



## BANNED GAOL GAMES?

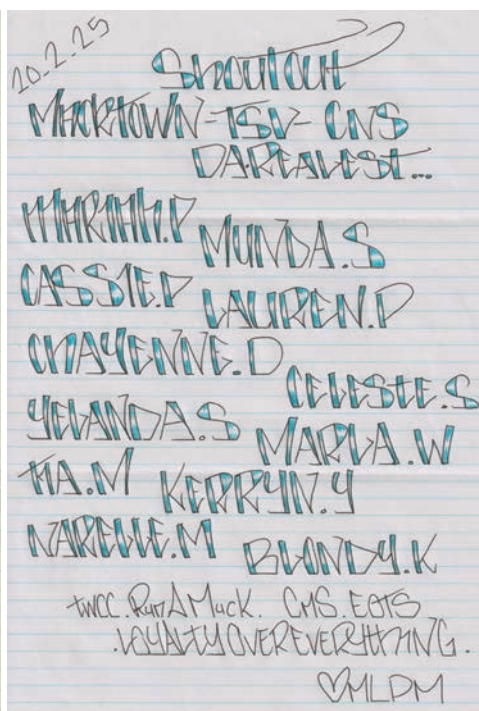
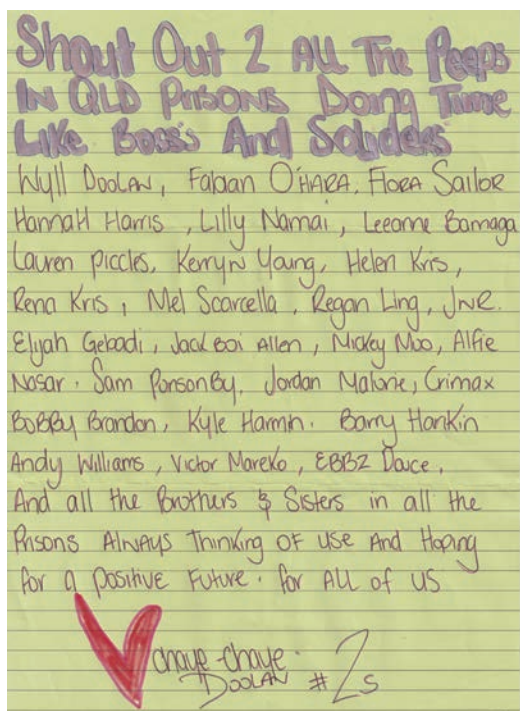
We share the story of how a normal tabletop game created by prisoners in Australia was banned, with the materials being partially destroyed.



## LONG BAY GAOL MURALS

*Paper Chained* talks to the artist who painted the iconic murals at Sydney's Long Bay Correctional Centre, and shares photos of their incredible work.

# SHOUT-OUTS





MOMENTO  
MORI

EMBRACE  
LIFE

ASHLEY