

Document tendered by
Mr Brett COLLINS ~~and to~~
~~Mr John Downie AC~~
Received by
Helen Hong
Date: 2 / 8 / 2018
Resolved to publish (Yes / No)

REPORT FROM PRISONERS AT HUNTER CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

June 29, 2018

Here is our report of the outstanding issues that is causing concern with inmates to the point that they are having psychological issues, emotional outbursts and are just generally depressed.

Before inmates were transferred to the prison, the Assistant Commissioner, Luke Grant, made a couple of documentaries describing what he termed as 'benefits' of the rapid-built prisons, here at the Hunter and Macquarie.

Inmates were sceptical of these documentaries and most inmates were strongly opposed to the dormitory style of accommodation, and for good reason.

Prior to this centre opening, correctional officers requested for volunteers to go to the Hunter Correctional Centre and when they didn't get the response they hoped for, CSNSW transferred inmates against their will, to the Hunter Correctional Centre.

Visits

In some cases, inmates have been moved from a prison facility that was close to family members, and transferred five hours north leaving them and their families emotionally distraught as they can no longer receive regular visits from their families.

Phone

One of the broken promises from Luke Grant was that inmates could make ten minute personal calls; however, this is not correct. Further inquiries from inmates has revealed that only six minute calls are available as that state prison phone provider can only change call; duration for all prisons throughout New South Wales. The promise of ten minute personal calls was a false promise which has left some inmates disgruntled, angry and depressed.

Movies

Another broken promise of Luke Grant was that the rapid built prisons would have up to fifty movies a month, however, this is not the case. For the first two months no movies were available. After that, inmates had access to approximately 8 movies a month. As of 4 May 2018, the movies channel has been disabled, this has the effect of causing further boredom and with this boredom, some inmates stay up playing cards or horsing around keeping the working inmates awake well past midnight. Working inmates are then expected to get up at 6am for work.

Dormitory Housing

The next issue of concern is the dormitory style of housing, there are 25 inmates per pod, all mixed together. There are the older quieter inmates who just want to do their time, who are forced to mix with younger inmates who just want to stir up trouble and cause fighting. This has created significant concerns for some inmates with fear of being attacked or assaulted while they sleep, especially since the prison has a no transfer policy from pod to pod. Therefore, there is no escaping the threats and abuse.

Inadequate Medical, Dental and Therapeutic Services

This centre has been open since March 2018 and to date there is no dental service at this prison. There is also no therapist here at the centre and for those inmates requiring those services, they are transferred to other centres throughout New South Wales.

There are lengthy delays in seeing a doctor and can personally attest to being on a waiting list to see the doctor for over three months. For example, for diabetics these long delays are not only ridiculous but also dangerous to their health. A diabetic blood sugar level must be regularly monitored and checked.

The Hunter Prison has no facilities to treat inmates dental problems, and they would need to be transferred to the old Cessnock Prison to see a dentist. There have been on occasion requests by some inmates to see a psychologist. In these situations, those inmates have been transferred to other prisons to receive such treatment. The withholding of medical treatment is in contravention to s57A of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 as it is the law that inmates receive medical treatment.

Compulsory Activities

Another concern for inmates is the compulsory activities that inmates here at the Hunter are subjected to. First, it is compulsory for inmates to participate in literacy and numeracy programs, five days a week. If inmates do not participate in these programs they are confined to solitary confinement at the clinic for up to eight hours. This style of punishment contravenes s164 of the Crime (Administration of Sentences) Regulations 2014 and s53 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999.

Ironically, it has been the position of the CSNSW Commissioner to deny distance education to inmates with a low LSI-R score, yet force those same inmates to participate in literacy and numeracy programs, regardless of inmates previous education level and particular skill set. Second, is the compulsory attendance at the oval five days a week. This becomes a bigger issue for the older inmates, where a typical week consists of work from 6:30am until 12:00pm, then lunch until 1:00pm. Then there is compulsory attendance at the oval from 1pm to 3pm and then programs until 5pm. This is a very long day for the inmates aged over 55 years and equates to an 11 hour work/programs day. These long days has caused stress and anxiety for some inmates, who desperately wish to transfer from this prison.

Lights

In each pod there are 40 fluorescent lights, each approximately 6ft long and 14 night lights. That equates almost two lights per inmate. These lights are a major cause of stress and anxiety. The main lights are switched on between the hours of 6:00am until 9:00pm. As the last muster of the day is conducted at 9:00pm, generally inmates do not quiet down until 11pm.

The main lights are on for 15 hours a day and working inmates are kept awake for 17 hours a day. Even when the main lights are switched off, the night lights illuminate the dorm and it becomes necessary to cover your head to get some sleep. Inmate have tried to cover up the night lights, but the officers switch on the main lights until the night lights are uncovered. This has resulted in deep resentment towards officers at the Hunter and every inmate I have spoken to are trying to get transferred to another prison.

Automatic Window Louvre

The window louvres are on automatic temperature control setting and once a day they repeatedly open and close as part of a maintenance routine. This maintenance routine is an hour in duration each day. The noise from this routine is extremely irritating to inmates. There is no reason why

this maintenance routine cannot be scheduled once a week, instead of daily, other than to irritate inmates. Requests to change this maintenance have been ignored.

Computer Access and Incentive Payments

In Luke Grant's documentaries, he suggests that computer access would be available to inmates up until 9pm. However, this is not the case, computer access is only available to distance education students during weekdays for two hours per day. Another false promise was incentive payments to inmates who participate in life skills programs and work. Inmates have inquired about this incentive payment and have been told, that such payments do not exist. These broken promises have resulted in inmates not wanting to participate in any further life skills programs.

Printing and Photocopying Costs

The governor at the Hunter Prison has set a minimum price of fifty cents per page to print and photocopy. At other prisons, the printing cost per page was free, while some prisons charge twenty cents per page. Up until the 7th June 2018, there was no cost for printing educational material however, upon the governor discovering that education staff were not charging for the printing of educational material he imposed a policy that all printing be charged at fifty cents per page,

This exorbitant fee has resulted in inmates not requesting any printing, putting at jeopardy their current legal matters.

No Privacy

Inmates were aware of the dormitory style setup here at the Hunter before arriving. Inmates do not like this as it diminishes privacy. So when CSNSW got not positive reply to requests to transfer to the Hunter, the Commissioner used his executive power to transfer inmates against their will. At the IDC delegates meeting, the governor approved a curtain for the doorway of each cubicle, however, that has not occurred. In addition to this, there are 15 cameras in each pod that monitors inmates movements 24 hours a day. The cubicle walls are 1.5 metres high, which inmates carry on conversations across cubicles, while other inmates are trying to sleep. There is no privacy whatsoever and we don't know any inmates who want to stay at this centre.

Conclusion

This centre has been a big disappointment and all the inmates that we have spoken to can't wait to transfer out of here, the majority of inmates here are medium and low security who have been relocated here to a maximum security prison. This is a major step backwards in progressing through the system. In addition to this, inmates are forced to participate in irrelevant programs in a hope to reduce recidivism, however, with the level of resentment as described above the programs will have the opposite effect and increase resentment against those in authority. To reduce recidivism inmates must want to change and this change should be encouraged and not forced. There needs to be more resources made available to those inmates who want to change and have demonstrated a willingness to change and not be repressed and held back.

