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EXCLUSIVE

Jail program that kept mums and bubs together halted as Emu Plains prison mothballed

Pregnant women or those already with children will no longer be able to stay with their kids in prison after a NSW program in operation for 30 years was axed along with a Sydney jail.

[Madeline Crittenden](#) and [Linda Silmalis](#)

2 min read

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Raising kids behind bars

Inmates in the "Mothers and Children's Program" at Jacaranda Cottages in the Emu Plains Correctional Centre

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A mothers and babies program that allowed female prisoners to keep their children with them as they did jail time has been halted indefinitely following the sudden closure of the prison.

Established almost 30 years ago, the Corrective Services NSW Mothers and Children's Program allowed a group of carefully-selected mothers to serve out their sentences while remaining the primary carer of their kids.

However, the program this year became a casualty of the State's shrinking prison population with Emu Plains jail in which the program operated out of mothballed.

Some of the mothers who were in the program were briefly accommodated at a transitional centre in Parramatta with their children. However, it's understood no mums and their children are currently being housed there.

Pregnant mums or those with children outside are now either assessed for a diversion scheme where they serve their sentence in the community, or spend their time in prison without their child.

Axed... Females in custody in the "Mothers and Childrens Program" at Jacaranda Cottages in the Emu Plains Correctional Centre. Picture: Sam Ruttyn

Operating out of the purpose-built Jacaranda Cottages at Emu Plains Correctional Centre, the program was one of several prison nursery programs established in Australia where children from birth to 12 years of age were able to live with their mother on a full time or occasional residential basis.

Advocates of the program said the aim of keeping mothers with their babies was to reduce the impact of incarceration on the children of inmates.

A prison source told The Sunday Telegraph that the program as it existed at Emu Plains had stopped operating when the jail was mothballed.

The source, who was not authorised to speak publicly, said two heavily pregnant women who had recently come into custody had been transferred to the Parramatta transitional facility where their babies were accommodated.

However, the facility was not replicating the Mothers and Children Program, the source said.

“The Emu Plains facility was purpose-built for mothers and babies,” the source said.

“It was a separate area to the jail. The program stopped when the jail was temporarily shut.”

A Correctives Services NSW spokesman said after Emu Plains Correctional Centre was closed, those in the program were “moved to other appropriate locations or programs”.

“Some mothers who met eligibility criteria, including but not limited to nearing the end of their custodial sentence, have been accommodated at Parramatta Transitional Centre where their child can reside with them full time,” they said.

“It is a core focus for CSNSW to improve outcomes for mothers in custody and we offer a variety of specific therapeutic programs to support and rehabilitate women offenders.”

Women’s prison advocate Debbie Kilroy said the children affected by the halting of the program would be most disadvantaged.

“The real victims are the children,” she said.