

**INQUIRY INTO PARKLEA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE AND
OTHER OPERATIONAL ISSUES**

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

People working within prison environments are of increased risk of work-related stress and vicarious trauma, which can impair their wellbeing and job performance. There are a range of working conditions that are stressful such as; extraordinary demands, intense workloads, time pressures, lack of adequate resources, poor feedback, a challenging organisational structure, and inadequate physical work environments. In addition working with inmates is extremely emotionally demanding, not only because of aggressive behaviour and threats, but also from listening to histories of their extreme, chronic, and intergenerational violence and sexual abuse. It must also be considered that some staff have their own histories of violence experienced in the custodial setting. This can include being bullied or sexually harassed by other staff or managers, witnessing staff and/or inmate assaults, being threatened or assaulted by inmates, responding to inmate disturbances, or inmate suicides and/or murders. It is obvious that these issues impact not only on work place performance, but also on sick leave and burnout.

The Benchmarking process has confounded the stress experienced by front line workers. Assistant Superintendents (AS) / Chiefs in Correctional Centres feel that they have essentially been told that they are not 'good enough' to remain a part of the prisons' management team. However, the rank chosen to be discarded by Corrective Services, as a cost saving measure seems to be only happening on the front-line. Interestingly enough, the rank remains at John Morony CC (after market testing), Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy, Security and Investigations, and Henry Dean Building (Head Office).

Individuals have been told if they are not "*lucky enough*" to get a position of Senior Assistant Superintendent (as they are not automatically rolled up), they "*might*" get a Voluntary Redundancy package, they can choose to 'drop rank' (which means returning to shift work), or "*maybe*" a non-custodial role (which is significantly less salary and they have to apply). At the same time as the AS/Chief role is deleted CSNSW are creating '*case planning positions*' which may be over-all more costly than the AS/Chief roles are, and cannot provide the dual role that the AS/Chief could, of both custodial operations and case planning. There seems to be a lot of role ambiguity, and more on the horizon, that will create further job dissatisfaction.

Prison officers are already at risk of health problems related to shift work, and some of the proposals create the need for staff such as AS's returning to shift work (most people in this rank are over 40 years of age), or staff doing longer shifts, i.e. 8 hours to 12 hours. This poses the potential for fatigue-induced errors and accidents, and family problems that ultimately affect the person's stability, well-being and life-expectancy.

The position for some Assistant Superintendents is that they have no opportunity to even apply for an SAS role in the centre they work in, as there simply won't be one. They have not been able to apply for vacancies in other places because of the 'Ring-fencing', which has been ad-hoc, and there has been no 'freeze' on positions in Head Office or the Academy to increase the opportunities for displaced officers to retain their current rank and wage. For many months these people have been left with no clear opportunities, or time frames, yet have been expected to participate in the Benchmarking process whilst facing potentially the end of their career. To their credit they have turned up to meetings, offered suggestions and are genuinely participating. While secretly they get in their cars and drive home at the end of the day, miserable, overwhelmed, obviously depressed,

and unfortunately some have at times contemplated suicide. Their families are left in limbo, confused by the lack of direction and information, and worried about how they will make ends meet.

The cohort of AS/Chiefs, have many years of experience that is essential to the safety and security of correctional centres. These are the people who understand inmate behaviour and have a wide range of knowledge and skills, these are the people who notice unethical behaviour and report it. This set of skills is not easily transferable and certainly is not learnt quickly. These are the positions that often work closely with non-custodial staff for the dynamic security of the correctional centres. In sum, hundreds of years of corporate and custodial knowledge are leaving the gates, while recruitment for casual staff continues. It is impossible to understand how the deletion of AS/Chief's is helping "*cut the fat*" as Minister Elliot has stated, when these are essentially front-line workers. CSNSW is becoming more top-heavy with less staff on the bottom ground where it is needed the most.

Although 'Benchmarking' was essentially packaged as a custodial reform it has permeated into non-custodial services also, an area of CSNSW that had supposedly already been reformed years ago. There are now further cuts to Offender Service and Program positions. *Note: For years a number of these positions were not filled as staff and front line managers were told there was a "recruitment freeze". Just because they are not filled does not mean they are not needed!*

Offender service staff are now '*clustered*', geographically across correctional centres and community service offices. For example, Psychologists work in clusters that can be demographically or geographically large, such as regional NSW. Like, Service and Program Officers, a Psychologist's time is divided, 70% of their time working with inmates in custody, and 30% of their time working with offenders in the community (called the 70/30 split). Whilst juggling competing demands of time dependent priorities (mandatory reports, e.g. pre-sentence and post-release reports), consulting with other staff regarding the management of inmates in custody, and the community, and completing onerous administrative tasks such as appointment lines, case notes, progress notes and record management. Roles, such as Senior Psychologists have also changed to include additional management and supervision of staff. The 70/30 split requires specialised training and experiential practice for working with sexual and violent offenders by all Psychologists. It also requires the individual to gain access to a number of different offices, be integrated and network amongst many different staff, all at the same time as working in a 'cluster' model for different correctional centres, housing different profiles of inmates such as male/female, remand/sentenced, minimum/maximum, and knowing the varied, but also specific needs of all these inmate populations.

Psychologists are expected to cover 'broad' areas of work that actually require *specific* training and understanding. For example; specialist skills are required for assessment/intervention, self-harm/suicide, mental health, aggression/violence, clinical/functional assessments, assessment of cognitive functioning/impairment, drug/alcohol and gambling addictions.

In addition, Psychologists must comply with continuing development of professional standards as set by Psychology Board of Australia (PBA), including regular professional supervision. Yet '*supervision*' is being heavily weighted by administrative tasks and work related policy and procedures, therefore pushing professional development down the list. This means that there is no room for supervision to focus on self-care of Psychologists who are exposed to a great amount of vicarious trauma by the nature of the work.

It has been largely unclear how the OSP services are to fit with the KPIs, included in Benchmarking, and there are a number of models proposed that do not marry up. Service and Program Officers also have to work in the 70/30 cluster model, and additionally, outside of business hours and are placed at risk by running groups with offenders in the community at night. There is no supervision of these staff, it relies solely on the two individual's facilitating the group to have the experience, and savvy to recognise any threats, and thwart them before they escalate.

There is always room for improvement, and most staff are amenable to that. However, the Benchmarking process, and how this fits in with a number of other organisational changes has not been well managed or communicated to the staff being impacted. There are different ways for cost savings to be achieved without deleting important front line positions, costing jobs for those already employed, and impacting upon the safety and security of others. It is essential to effectiveness and efficiency that this organisation considers how work-related stress is impacting on staff, and takes steps to minimise it. Instead, the Benchmarking process has contributed greatly to the tension and job dissatisfaction of CSNSW staff.