

Submission 22. Central Desert Regional Council

In the Central Desert Region, Council works collaboratively with Alice Springs Correctional Centre (ASCC) and has an MoU where we provide prisoners who fit a set criterion an opportunity to work with Council under a community work order. This initiative has resulted in over a 1200 hours worked and assisted in the reintegration of offenders into their home communities.

The Time to Work Employment Service (TWES) is working well within our region with further collaboration with ASCC where we are currently collaborating with our Community Development Program to identify current workforce needs for our region in particular Yuendumu as a trial community we have scoped the jobs available and identified the workforce gaps and identified skills needed, training requirements and ticketing to prepare and support prisoners who are being released so they can find employment post release - we are currently working with 3 individuals and this involves identifying jobs that we have available as council and getting them ready for those jobs.

The success of the program relies on a collaborative approach by employers, residents and the prison system to ensure lasting outcomes - There is a need for funding of mentorship positions within Councils/employers funded position through this program to assist in the reintegration and support role for individuals - This role I see as different from the roles within correctional services but as a role that may be a cultural mentor or a specialist role in social services or similar to reduce the risk of recidivism but most importantly reintegration into the workforce or community.

Another positive of the program is that remote councils experience skills shortages particularly in certain trades and skills that range from Municipal workers - grader operators, truck drivers, Aged Care workers, Childcare workers, Planners and Engineers. We acknowledge this shortage is faced nationally across the local government sector however in remote it is exacerbated by the lack of willingness of people to work remote and more often than not there are no incentives available for people to take up employment with regional/remote councils and the salaries are less than those offered in metropolitan centres - the TWES allows a workforce to be built with prisoners on their release.

Some challenges that arise however are the reintegration of prisoners into the community particularly with respect to:

- prisoners being accepted back to into the community due to cultural reasons
- prisoners not feeling connected to their home communities and preferring to be released into eg Alice Springs and this may be due to other factors such as not knowing if family is still in the community, nowhere to stay etc - we have observed some of these challenges being addressed by the Elders Visitor Program which allows prisoners to be visited by community elders who share community and cultural news that keeps the prisoner connected to the community. Broader funding for the Elder Visitor program is encouraged as it also provides prisoners with the cultural mentorship that is crucial to their reintegration into community and potentially reduces the risk of recidivism.

Other points that are barriers include:

- Creation of industry in remote communities e.g. there are currently a limited number of jobs available in remote and Council is by far the largest employer. Creation of hubs or community precincts is critical to developing a local workforce where residents (including prisoners released) have a broad spectrum of jobs to choose from – this could be as simple as investment incentives

for big corporations such as Woolworth, Coles, Kmart or similar to open shops in bigger communities (which are hubs for surrounding communities) and this will reduce urban drift as residents travel to Alice Springs to buy goods cheaper and to have a larger variety for their family members and potentially reduce the risk of recidivism.

- Invest in the development of regional precincts specific to remote funding for Central Australia which can see the construction of movie centres, aquatic centres/water parks and other recreational facilities and sporting precincts so as to entertain families and youth who move or leave remote communities so as to give their families access to a better lifestyle and break the cycle for families where in some instances there are two or three generations of the same family in incarceration – this would create a local economy while building a remote workforce if families do not migrate to urban centres.

In addition to the above there is also lack of sufficient housing stock available for young families and there is significant overcrowding in remote Central Australia where in some instances a house may have up to 14 persons staying in it with 3-4 family generations. Federal Government could increase funding in housing for regional and remote (through its National Partnership Agreement with the Territory Government) as there is a large number of people on public housing waitlists and the rate at which new housing or room-to-breath is completed is slower than the rate the waitlist grows – there are families that have been on the waitlist for over 5 years. Also increase homelands funding – Council is appreciative of the Federal Government's \$100m commitment to homelands in the Territory but this is nowhere enough as there are over 600 homelands and these residents move into community housing with family (contributing to the overcrowding) because their homelands are not fit for purpose, unliveable and do not have access to basic amenities such as power or drinking water.

Justice reinvestment is a step in the right direction and could be a solution to alternative funding and establishment of structures that support persons in incarceration to not get into the system by proactively designing or improving the liveability of remote communities and increasing income earning potential by upskilling people before they get into the system.