

Grahame Andrew Rogers

Goalburn Prison

Po Box 264 Goalburn 2580

If it is true that society requires dramatic examples to shake them out of their apathy, then we should all pray that the examples here are well learnt and never repeated.

Hello,

I wrote the attached letter to Ray Hadley last year after he spoke to me during a programme he was putting together about prisons. I never received a reply, so I don't know what he thought. I also sent a copy to Greg Smith the NSW Attorney General and Peter Sevrin the NSW Corrective Services Commissioner, however the way things have deteriorate since, it clearly had no impression.

I am writing again because no one seems to want to face or understand what are the real problems of the criminal justice system and I feel that I owe those who will suffer as a result of the scandal and ineptitude that is masquerading as "Corrective Services".

With the coming of the new Liberal government, I was hoping that fresh ideas and a proper sense of what is an acceptable outcome might have found breath. Sadly, I was mistaken and the same old ineffectual apathetic administration remains unshaken. It wouldn't matter, if it was just another few million dollars being washed down the drain, or squirreled into a polli's mates back pocket, but this is real and immanent and the danger is the distress we all feel when the results of a Corrective Services catastrophe is the carnage of our Wives, Mother's, and Children.

No one needs to go over and over the sorrow of Jill Meagher and the appalling attack of a young girl waiting for a bus after work on the North Shore, to recognise that our prison system is in crisis and we must find the solution.

Ofcourse the reckless and self-interested will call for longer prison terms and harsher treatment, without even considering that the individuals that are products of that call, and the system it is delivering, are precisely the offenders in these horrific cases.

A Snapshot of Corrective Services I know

Surely the 23 year sentence that Terence Leary (the mentally ill parolee and attacker of the girl at a bus stop on the North Shore) had just been release from screams volumes as to the ability of the Corrective Services to correct anything using their current approach and tick the box programmes.

Here in Goulburn, programmes that should be used to identify offending character flaws and other dangerous tendencies are being carried out, in most cases by observers that are way out of their depth and others that are simply on a public service drip and have lost the empathy to careless one way or the other. I don't blame them, as they are suffering exactly the same dreadful conditions and aloofly detached administration as the prisoners. This day I asked a couple of young officers what they considered was their job description, they were not sure so I asked them if they had ever been asked to offer an opinion on any inmates that they were in contact with. They said No. I asked if they were asked would they have an opinion, they said Yes. This is a stark example of why things are so bad. The staff who are in a position to set the examples and carry out first hand detailed observations are degraded to a position of a doorman and are simply opening and shutting gates. Goulburn has had a new Governor every year since I have been here, I have had contact with most of them, and in the main they are experienced, capable, and aware of the deficiencies that are producing these disturbing outcomes. However, even when they have the intention of facing the problem, they are moved on before they have the chance.

Overcrowding here in Goulburn is at critical and dangerous capacity, 400 inmates are divided into groups of 30 to 40 plus and stuffed in small yards with out even enough shelter let alone being seriously assessed as to their vulnerability, mental illness, danger, or anything else requiring more than a cursory glance.

Protection simply means a different yard, with exactly the same conditions and risk. In the yard that I am held we have men doing from a few weeks to Life, who will never be released, so you can imagine how petty and how horrific their offences can be. Despite what the ill-informed shout is a holiday camp, the truth is that it is simply a Zoo type whare house that is being run by indifference and what the short term thinkers express is the cheapest.

The classification system is shameful and wasting bundles of cash. Here in Goulburn maximum security, there are a numerous inmates, many with mental health issues that are doing very small sentences, in a some cases just a matter of weeks, and even more with just a couple of months. I have been in this area of Goulburn 10 years and I have seen these examples ad-nasueaum and the results are scandalous.

Surely the most pedestrian management understands that it cost more to imprison an inmate in maximum security. I know you will find that substancial waste is occurring by not properly maintaining the classification of inmates, add to that cost the damage it has on the rehabilitation for those inmates who should never have been here in the first place, and the price is damming. I know that the money wasted on this mismanagement is desperately needed elsewhere. The "E" classification for inmates that have tried or have escaped during the past 20 years, is again foolish, if you look at the way it is operated and the outcomes it delivers.

For example; some inmates can not be classified to a "C" classification because they are deemed a risk of escaping, (a criminal offence), however, they can be released that same day.

Yes it is ridiculous, and the resources it is wasting is typical of the rationale that delivers the horrific outcomes that we are all caused to suffer.

Parole Assessment; I saw Greg Smith on the news last night reporting that "he had no specific concerns" regarding the parole system and its analysis of who should be paroled.

I agree, the parole board can only decide their position on the information that is put before them, and as the professor said on 7-30 NSW last night, these individuals are hard to identify from the material they receive. If I were Greg Smith I would be very concerned by the quality of the reports that the Corrective Services are putting before the Parole Board to decide what we all regard as extremely important matters. In some cases life and death hangs in the balance.

Rehabilitation, The sad part of all of this is that there are many front line staff that have a good handle on who is who in this zoo but are so hogtied by the apathy and indifference of the administration that they are never asked the question and woe -be- tied their position if they rock the boat in even the most simple way.

As mentioned, check the yards and you will find inmates doing from a couple of weeks to never to be released, all housed in the same yard and under the same security status, sharing the same extremely limited rehabilitation programmes, covering a maximum of a couple of hours per week.

Seriously, how can anyone work out who is dangerous or otherwise when the picture is so complicated. It is not the low level property offender that you need to be concerned with, it is the offenders that necessitate maximum security that are the most dangerous, and require the most intense reprogramming.

It is obvious to any proper observer that once some categories of offenders (especially adding mental health issues into the mix) are exposed to the zoo like tick the box cost cutting that is the rehabilitation illusion, they can become even more erratic, unbalanced and cruelly disturbed.

I can show you multiple inmates who are currently in segregation units or similar that fit exactly that scenario and have become too difficult to place.

These individuals will be released to parole, or have completely finished their sentence and are getting out regardless.

The current system is fine for the insurance companies. If you steal any thing then you are put through rehabilitation programs, but if you are a risk to citizens that ostensibly don't have a monetary value, then for reasons known to those in authority, it is just all too hard, other than to warehouse the problem for as long as possible, then throw the dice.

I don't have the intellect to hold your attention long enough to report all of the sorrow that is obvious to all who really see the disasters that are coming from this catastrophe, but I wish someone would listen.

A Royal Commission; that is one way of getting their attention and might expose the mire of apathy and self-interest that is currently delivering the suffering that is so apparent.

I know that I might face retribution for speaking out from all sides, but I won't be complicit by turning yet another blind eye to this disgrace.

So there it is.

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Date