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Bush gang leader is employee of the year



Ashleigh Harris is the 2016 GEO Employee of the Year.

An attempt to save the life of a tourist, multiple messages of praise from local community leaders and a dedication to his 'bush gangs' that has resulted in their work being praised throughout Gippsland.

That is just a snapshot of Ashleigh Harris, the 2016 GEO Employee of the Year.

An outstanding recipient of the coveted award, the quietly mannered correctional officer has been at Fulham Correctional Centre for three years after a 20-year career in building and construction.

His colleagues had already acknowledged his initiative, commitment and dedication by successfully nominating him for two GEO employee recognition awards during 2016.

The nominations highlight Ashleigh's ability to generate a wonderful team effort from his bush gangs and to get members enthused about the various challenges they face.

Each bush gang consists of six prisoners who undertake a variety of activities throughout the local community ranging from gardening and painting to bushfire risk mitigation and flood relief.

As one local council representative noted: "The guys certainly worked very hard (planting and staking trees) and interacted extremely well

with the three Latrobe City parks and gardens personnel present — to the extent that the Latrobe staff expressed the hope of working with the gang again in the future."

But it was in the historic gold mining township of Walhalla that Ashleigh and one of the gangs made news across Australia.

Once a buzzing community of 4000 during its 52-year gold rush period, the town now has a population of fewer than 20. Located in a heavily wooded section of the Great Dividing Range, mobile phone and internet connection with the outside world is haphazard at best.

Despite being more than an hour from Fulham the centre regularly sends bush gangs to work in the small community.

Last August a 91-year-old man on a day tour from a retirement village was found unconscious and convulsing in the town's public toilet block.

Two prisoners who had undertaken a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course at Fulham administered first aid while the others ran messages from paramedics giving instructions via a landline at the local store.

In the 80 minutes the ambulance took to reach them Ashleigh ensured that his team worked calmly and efficiently to keep the patient alive.

It all made for an interesting dinner conversation with partner Carlee and 11-year-old son Brady

that night — although five-month-old Sophia slept through the story.

A few days later Ashleigh received a letter of commendation from Corrections Victoria commissioner Jan Shuard praising his actions in managing a difficult situation.

"It's the variety and working in the bush that I love," Ashleigh said of his work.

"It's keeping active, thinking through the challenges of each task and working among the community.

"But colleagues make it. They have assisted me ever since I joined Fulham and they still are. I would not have won this award without their support.

"It's also working with the bush gangs and seeing the growth in individuals — especially, for example, when a prisoner so impresses a local builder while working on a project that he is offered a position upon release. Now that really makes the job worthwhile."

The 2016 GEO Employee of the Year award ceremony held in Sydney also recognised three other outstanding nominees out of more than 1600 employees. Classification supervisor Jennifer Shaw (June), correctional supervisor Shaun Dowd (Parklea) and training specialist Amber Beaton (Arthur Gorrie) won praise from GEO's executive management team for their efforts in 2016.



'Bush gangs' from Fulham have been working in the local community since the prison opened.

MD'S MESSAGE

Welcome to this edition of *GEO Insights*.

It is my pleasure to acknowledge our Employee of the Year for 2016, Ashleigh Harris from Fulham Correctional Centre.

Ashleigh joined Fulham three years ago and was nominated

for his outstanding work with prisoner work gangs — often referred to as 'bush gangs'.

I make a point of reading all of the letters of appreciation and local media coverage received by our centres and Fulham's bush gangs continue

to make an outstanding contribution to Victoria's Gippsland region.

Not only is the work they carry out highly valued by the community, but the conduct of the prisoners and the positive impact their participation has on their personal development are also widely lauded. Ashleigh's drive, energy and leadership have been central to this.

I can think of no better way of highlighting Ashleigh's achievements than sharing an example of the regular feedback we receive on the Fulham bush gangs:

"Most appreciative again for work gangs. The guys worked like Trojans despite the cold and rain. In each case the guys not only put in enthusiastically but took an obvious pride in the work they were doing. They were clearly keen to ensure high quality results — which they certainly achieved. We wish to convey sincere

gratitude to you, the guys and to Fulham."

Last year there were extensive media reports of an elderly gentleman who was found unconscious by prisoners in a work gang who then provided life-saving first aid and coordinated a response by emergency services. That was Ashleigh and one of his bush gangs and I'm delighted that the actions of the prisoners and Ashleigh were widely recognised — including through a letter of commendation from Corrections Victoria commissioner Jan Shuard.

I would also like to acknowledge the other 2016 Employee of the Year finalists for their exceptional contributions to GEO — Jennifer Shaw from Junee, Shaun Dowd from Parklea and Amber Beaton from Arthur Gorrie. On behalf of the company I am deeply grateful for your efforts.

Pieter Bezuidenhout
Managing Director

Construction milestones marked

2 The GEO Group Australia has celebrated a number of construction milestones associated with the expansions of Junee and Parklea correctional centres and the new Ravenhall Correctional Centre in Melbourne.

The first major milestone in Parklea's expansion was marked with a native tree planting ceremony attended by New South Wales Minister for Corrections David Elliott, Corrective Services NSW commissioner Peter Severin and local Riverstone MP Kevin Conolly.

Parklea is undergoing two construction projects — one providing an additional 150 minimum-security beds and the other 500 maximum-security beds. The projects will take Parklea's total capacity to 1675.

The ceremony celebrated the completion of external precast walls, floors and roofs of accommodation and support buildings of the minimum-security facility. Perimeter fencing is almost complete and road works are well

underway with the project due for completion late this year.

Civil works and construction of internal and external fencing are also well advanced on the maximum-security project. It is due for completion in 2019.

At Junee, work has begun on a \$220 million expansion of the prison with Cootamundra MP Katrina Hodgkinson turning the first sod. Scheduled for completion late next year, the expansion will add 480 maximum-security beds, increasing the prison's population to 1355.

In July, Minister for Corrections Gayle Tierney and Corrections Victoria commissioner Jan Shuard inspected construction of Ravenhall Correctional Centre as the prison nears completion.

Building commissioning is now well advanced, site-wide testing has commenced and landscaping and fencing is progressing well.

The centre will add 1000 beds to the Victorian prison system when it opens at the end of the year.



Junee Correctional Centre general manager Scott Brideoake with TAFE NSW regional general manager Kerry Penton.

Committed to training

3 The GEO Group Australia and Junee Correctional Centre have again been acknowledged for a strong commitment to vocational education and training by TAFE NSW Riverina Institute.

GEO received the 'Industry/Community Partnership Award' at the 25th Annual TAFE NSW Riverina Regional Awards. The awards recognise the achievements of students across 19 campuses as well as employers and institute partners.

The award citation said: "The GEO Group has worked very closely with us to identify and provide training most likely to ensure inmates of employment options both inside the facility and outside.

"On average 45 students graduate each year from programs delivered through this partnership. This is an outstanding outcome, well above the state average and reflects the commitment of GEO to encouraging inmates to access training."

Currently 60 per cent of the centre's inmates are enrolled in 33 courses. The institute tailors the courses in consultation with GEO and industry to ensure inmates receive practical skills.



Ravenhall Correctional Centre will take its first prisoners late in 2017.



TAFE NSW instructor Richard Clark (left) works with an inmate on the Holden ute that will be raffled for charity.

Ute a boost for local charity

4 A group of Junee Correctional Centre inmates enrolled in TAFE NSW automotive trade courses are putting their heads and hands together to raise money for a worthy cause.

The inmates have taken on a challenging project to fully restore an early 1980s WB Holden coupe utility (ute) and raffle it to raise proceeds for Can Assist Junee — a charity that supports locals battling cancer. It is hoped the raffle prize will generate up to \$50,000.

The project was made possible through a partnership between TAFE NSW and The GEO Group Australia.

GEO has donated the ute and TAFE NSW instructors who teach spray painting, automotive

restoration, panel beating and mechanical engineering are assisting inmates.

Junee Correctional Centre's offender services manager Trevor Coles said the project provided the inmates with many benefits beyond learning skills that could help them gain employment.

"Projects such as this teach the value of working as part of a team and gives prisoners a great sense of pride which builds self-esteem," said Coles.

Once restored the car is expected to travel to the Deni Ute Muster held in Deniliquin in September and the Bathurst 1000 touring car race in October.

Strong community support

5 Junee Correctional Centre has continued its strong support for the local community in recent months with a number of projects and sponsorships.

On the sponsorship front GEO has again supported the Junee Junior Netball Association with a contribution of \$2500 helping to cover player registrations and uniforms.

It has also supported local resident Kelly Lawson who is raising funds for Make a Wish Australia by participating in Run Melbourne. She has raised more than \$3000 with \$1000 donated by GEO.

Staff and inmates at the prison also got behind a campaign to support 22-year-old local Sebastian McInerney as he recovers from meningococcal septicaemia. A cricket competition and shaved-head sponsorships were among activities that raised more than \$3000 for the Keep Fighting Seb Fund.

The long-running GEO breakfast program at Junee High School continues to be delivered each term with prison staff cooking and serving a

hearty breakfast of bacon, eggs and sausages to hungry students.

The correctional centre is a long-time supporter of the Wagga Wagga Eisteddfod Society and recently a small group of inmates were assigned to construct a stage and help set up the venue for an annual dance festival.

Teams of prisoners have also undertaken more than 900 hours of maintenance work at Illabo Motorsport Park.



Junee Correctional Centre's Trevor Coles with Kelly Lawson who is raising funds for Make a Wish Australia. Photo courtesy Nicolas Jungfer and Southern Cross newspaper.

BARK focuses on rehabilitation

6 A successful partnership between Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) has entered its fifth year with ongoing benefits for both parties.

The partnership is centred on the RSPCA's Bars and Rehabilitation Kanine (BARK) foster care program that sees prisoners caring for dogs that need extra attention prior to them being adopted by members of the community.

The animals are either too young for immediate adoption or may be injured, sick or have a behavioural issue that needs addressing.

Eleven prisoners are currently involved in the program. The handlers undergo the RSPCA Foster Care Training Program, are taught animal training methods and are provided with specific goals for each dog.



Tip with his handler — Arthur Gorrie has cared for 65 dogs during its four-year relationship with the RSPCA.

Inmate Peter* said he enjoyed the RSPCA course and was pleased to have the opportunity to care for 'Tip', a six-year-old Kelpie.

"I am really enjoying caring for Tip," he said. "This program provides me with a sense of responsibility and a purpose each day."

In just over four years Arthur Gorrie has cared for 65 dogs and general manager Troy Ittensohn said the relationship with the RSPCA was strong.

"Developing good relationships and meaningful programs with community organisations is very important for the centre," he said.

"This program rewards well-behaved inmates, gives them responsibility and plays a role in their rehabilitation.

"By helping the RSPCA to prepare an animal for placement with a family the prisoners are also making a positive contribution to society.

"With each successful adoption the rewards for the RSPCA, the prisoner and the family are beyond measure."

* The inmate's name has been changed for this article.



Chontel and Gypsy with their trophies in 2013.

Gypsy a canine hero

Gypsy, a former passive alert drug detection dog at Junee Correctional Centre, has won a prestigious award at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

The 14-year-old border collie was named a ‘Royal Canine Hero’ — a service dog award presented by the Australian Animal Registry.

The award is bestowed upon dogs that displayed bravery or transform human lives through their training and dedication.

Gypsy, who retired in 2013, spent nine years working at Junee Correctional Centre with handler Chontel Flaws. Her role included searching cells, vehicles, inmates and visitors for drugs and other contraband.

“She not only made our workplace safer, but she saved many lives by locating drugs that people were attempting to smuggle into the jail,” said Chontel.

In 2013 Chontel and Gypsy won the detection section at the Australian Service Dog Trials competing against 40 other teams from law enforcement, emergency and military agencies.

Fulham celebrates 20 years

Fulham Correctional Centre is celebrating its 20th anniversary throughout 2017 with a number of events already staged and a special dinner planned for mid-August.

The senior management team at the centre prepared and served a barbecue lunch for all staff at the centre on 7 April to mark the date that the first cohort of prisoners arrived at the centre.

Later that month a group of 27 staff who commenced employment in February and March 1997 were acknowledged for 20 years of service and presented with special commemorative medallions.

Victoria’s largest regional correctional centre, Fulham has been continually managed by GEO on behalf of Corrections Victoria since it opened.

Volunteers highly valued

National Volunteer Week was celebrated in May with the theme ‘Give Happy, Live Happy’.

Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre took the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution that community agencies, external providers and individual volunteers make to the centre with a ‘thank you’ morning tea.

More than 30 volunteers attended the event and they were praised for the services and support they provide to prisoners.

The morning included singing performances from staff member Rangimarie King, members of external service provider My Story 61 and a group of nine prisoners known as the Gorrie Singers.

Hitting the road for charity

Two employees at Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre participated in the Heritage Bank Ipswich 100 cycling event recently to raise funds for local not-for-profit organisations, charities and Lions clubs.

The event comprises a number of courses covering distances ranging from five kilometres to a challenging 170 kilometre route. About 700 riders participated.

Work health and safety rehabilitation specialist John Murray and acting intelligence manager James Wedmaier tackled the 50 kilometre course. The pair participated in the event adorned in GEO colours.

“GEO was very pleased to support John and James in this endeavour,” said Arthur Gorrie general manager Troy Ittensohn.

“Their participation provided another opportunity to highlight the role that GEO plays in helping make our communities safer.”

This year marked the 18th time the Heritage Bank Ipswich 100 has been held and since 2000 it has raised more than \$1 million for local charities and not-for-profit organisations.



From left: Arthur Gorrie employees James Wedmaier and John Murray at the Heritage Bank Ipswich 100.

A message to GEO employees

*by Pieter Bezuidenhout
Managing Director*

Recent events at Parklea Correctional Centre have reminded us that our work remains of intense public interest. Rightly, our customers and the public expect that the prisons we manage are safe, secure and humane and they are entitled to be concerned if our services fall short.

All our centres have responded magnificently to requests from state governments to help them manage an increase in prisoner numbers. We have taken more prisoners, accommodated different prisoner classifications and taken on roles we previously were not asked to do.

Every day we manage thousands of prisoners safely and securely and play an important role in their rehabilitation and reintegration.



Staff at GEO have a history of stepping-up to challenges.

I understand any frustration you may feel when interest in our work often only occurs when we don’t get things right. But this is the profession we have chosen. It is not easy or glamorous and it is the nature of corrections that any bad news is widely reported while your immense efforts on a daily basis go largely unacknowledged.

What you need to know is the GEO leadership team is very proud of your efforts and is here to support you. It is also important to understand that when we do fall short of expectations we will do whatever is necessary and commit the resources needed to put things right.

The situation at Parklea highlights how critically important it is to follow procedures. We talk a lot about compliance and that is not a tick-the-box exercise done to meet obscure contract requirements, rather it is the essence of our profession.

In a high-risk environment our operating procedures are designed to protect you and others as you perform your duties. When these procedures are followed precisely we deliver excellence and can work safe in the knowledge that we are protected — operationally, legally and professionally.

I know the strong character of our staff and have witnessed first-hand the way you step-up to challenges. Be proud of the work you do protecting Australia as corrections professionals.