

International Women's Day: Female leadership in corrections

Staff at Fulham Correctional Centre will mark this year's International Women's Day, on Monday 8 March, by recognising women in leadership in a world impacted by COVID-19.

The Centre's staff Training Specialist, Jenna O'Connor, 35, began her career with GEO Australia in 2015 as a Correctional Officer after moving from rural NSW to Gippsland. She is one of 390 staff at Fulham of which 44 per cent are female.

Ms O'Connor said she has been inspired by many female leaders throughout her life — each with skills and qualities she nurtures in herself to be the type of leader she would like to be.

"Being a mother to two daughters encourages me to contribute to a more positive world for them, and to actively contribute to equality for women," Ms O'Connor said.

"It's important to demonstrate the possibilities open to younger generations, so they can feel confident in their ability to achieve anything.

"I am also a strong believer that women as a whole benefit most when we lift other women around us. Whatever my role is, I try to use the opportunity to lift and encourage other women to reach their potential.

"In an industry like Corrections, women can contribute so many valuable skills and positive change, and it's inspiring to see the culture changing for the better."

The impacts of COVID-19 significantly changed operations Fulham Correctional Centre, on top of the impacts to staff in their personal lives with state-wide lockdowns and home-schooling.

"So many women have been impacted by the pandemic, having to change their life or career. In some areas it has been a real step backwards in equality," Ms O'Connor said. "The impact on mental health has been enormous and women have so much to contribute to improving this.

"Working in this environment can be stressful, so we have a strong focus on caring for mental health," she said.

Jenna was part of the Centre's 2020 R U OK Day? Committee, which provided resources and other support to staff, to encourage conversations about people's mental health and wellbeing and to increase positive interactions between staff.

"Ensuring our staff have the appropriate training and support to work in this environment, especially with coronavirus added to the mix, means they feel more confident in their day-to-day duties, and it improves the health and safety of everyone on site."

- *The GEO Group Australia is Australia's largest provider of private correctional services. Our focus is on rehabilitating prisoners and giving them the support and growth to become positive and productive contributors to our society.*
- *GEO Australia manages Fulham Correctional Centre on behalf of Corrections Victoria, with 390 staff and a capacity for over 1000 prisoners. Find out more at: geogroup.com.au*