

BACKPACKS SPONSORSHIP IS SUPPORTING VULNERABLE MEN LEAVING PRISON



Gary Doohan with one of the new backpacks.



From left: Junee Correctional Centre Vocational Services Manager Donna Moulds, Industries Coordinator Maxine Foster, Fusion Walan Miya Group Director Lucas Scarpin and Junee Correctional Centre Education Coordinator Gary Doohan.

Junee Correctional Centre has launched a new initiative that will see some of the most vulnerable men being released from custody with a backpack of essential items as they travel to their next destination.

The backpacks initiative has received a \$5000 sponsorship from the Fusion Walan Miya Group – the prison’s training provider – with the first pack handed out on 19 July.

Centre Vocational Services Manager Donna Moulds said some men released from prison have no family support or a guarantee of permanent accommodation, and leave carrying their belongings in a plastic bag.

“Our backpacks project will provide around 50 men a year with the essentials they need on leaving prison, and a better chance of success as they start the process of reintegration into the community,” Ms Moulds said.

“We consulted with inmates who were very supportive of the idea - knowing

that even having the bag would reduce some of the stigma of being recognised as ‘fresh from the inside’. And we worked together on a list of contents.”

Inmates identified items that would be most helpful to newly-released men for their journey home or to emergency accommodation. These included a sleeping bag, change of clothes, rain coat, toiletries, first aid kit, water bottle, and snacks. Eligible men would also receive a pre-paid mobile phone. Also included in the backpacks are resources such as a train timetable, map, notepad and pen, and a laminated list of emergency contacts, including shelters, Centrelink, Medicare, job networks, and food banks.

Ms Moulds said: “Each backpack will cost around \$135 and we are grateful for the generous support of our training provider and to be able bring this project to life.”

Fusion Walan Miya Group Director Lucas Scarpin said: “Over the past few

years we have seen first-hand how motivated some of the men at Junee Correctional Centre are to improve their lives when they leave prison.

“Knowing some men are released with very few support structures in place, we wanted to support the centre’s initiative, to provide some measure of assistance for those most in need. Some of these men are attending our training courses and working hard to boost their skills and qualifications for future employment,” he said.

“If our support can assist a single man in their transition back into society, then this is money well spent.”

GEO Healthcare services underway

Service delivery is underway at Victoria’s men’s public prisons and a new Aboriginal Health Program has launched. **Read more on Page 2.**



MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGING DIRECTOR



This edition of *GEO Insights* highlights some of the great initiatives being introduced within our correctional centres to support the people in our care and the jurisdictions we serve.

Following last month's launch of Junee Correctional Centre's backpack project – established to support some of the most vulnerable men leaving prison – the first kit of essentials was provided to a newly-released man on 19 July. This initiative, supported by centre training provider Fusion Walan Miya Group, is a simple yet effective way to give men without any external support a better chance at success on their release.

Congratulations to everyone who was involved in the extensive NAIDOC Week activities held this year. Staff and prisoners at each centre undertook significant preparations to recognise and celebrate the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which is a key priority for our organisation.

GEO Healthcare is now fully operational and on 1 July began delivering primary healthcare services at 13 men's public prison sites in Victoria. I would like to acknowledge all of the hard work and commitment of General Manager David Grace and his team for ensuring a successful transition of services.

Finally, it is with much sadness that we pay tribute to the former Operational Manager at Fulham Correctional Centre, Phil Munnings, who passed away suddenly in May. Phil was a valued member of GEO's staff for more than 25 years and we send our sincere condolences to Phil's family, friends and colleagues.

Pieter Bezuidenhout
Managing Director

GEO Healthcare launches Aboriginal Health program

On 1 July, GEO Healthcare began delivering primary healthcare services to Victoria's men's public prisons, under a new contract that has included the launch of a new Aboriginal Health program being delivered by GEO Healthcare's Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners.

General Manager, David Grace PSM, said: "It was very befitting to launch the new Aboriginal Health program at the beginning of July 2023, which happened to coincide with NAIDOC week to celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

GEO Healthcare has recruited eight Aboriginal Health Workers or Practitioners and is at various stages of recruiting another four.

The program strategy will result in at least one Aboriginal Health Worker or Practitioner being at every Victorian men's public prison site. Some of the larger sites and reception prisons will have two. They will offer all Aboriginal people an Aboriginal Health Check within 10 business days of reception, using a culturally appropriate assessment tool that is nationally recognised and endorsed by Justice Health.

GEO Healthcare's Manager, Aboriginal Health, Malcolm Timbery, said: "An Aboriginal Health Assessment undertaken by an Aboriginal Health Worker or Practitioner creates a culturally safe environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel comfortable with discussing their health issues earlier rather than leaving it to when their health issues become more acute.



At Dhurringile Prison (from left) – Aboriginal Health Practitioner Khole Bolton, Health Service Manager Kathryn Gelsi and GEO Healthcare Manager, Aboriginal Health Malcolm Timbery.

"By providing a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal people to talk about their health, we have a better chance of providing preventative healthcare rather than only intervening after a health crisis," he said.

Following their health check, all Aboriginal people in the men's public prisons participate in the development of their Integrated Care Plan. The plan is normally completed within 29 calendar days from reception by the Aboriginal Health Worker or Practitioner in consultation with the broader healthcare team. It takes into consideration the patient's health check and focuses on health outcomes, for example, associated with dental, allied health, AOD interventions, health literacy and personal agency, cultural, social, and wellbeing goals and needs.

New program well received

According to GEO Healthcare Director Clinical Services, Rory Maguire, GEO's new Aboriginal Health Program has been very well received by Aboriginal people in prison.

Dhurringile Correctional Centre Health

Service Manager, Kathryn Gelsi, said the addition of the Aboriginal Health program was a significant enhancement to the health services.

"We were a little unsure how well the Aboriginal Health Practitioner role would work at Dhurringile before the commencement of services, Ms Gelsi said.

"We were all pleasantly surprised at how well, Khole Bolton, our Aboriginal Health Practitioner, fitted into the team and her level of experience with addressing the healthcare needs of Aboriginal people. She is both innovative and passionate about what she does. Our Aboriginal patients now self-present to the Health Service seeking Khole's assistance for their health concerns."

The program complements and contributes to The GEO Group Australia's *Aboriginal Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2024*, which reaffirms GEO's commitment to addressing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991.

Centres celebrate First Nations' history and culture during NAIDOC Week

Staff and prisoners at each of our correctional centres enjoyed a range of activities to mark this year's National NAIDOC Week – an event designed to celebrate and recognise the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This year's theme was 'For Our Elders'.

T-shirt design competition



Winning entry of the T-shirt design competition.

Festivities at Fulham Correctional Centre ran from 10-14 July, and began with an opening ceremony attended by staff, prisoners and respected Elder Uncle Allan Coe. Following a Welcome to Country, smoking ceremony and raising of flags, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners were offered a morning tea of cultural foods, including kangaroo and shark bites.

Other activities including a football match, Men's Group, movie day and a NAIDOC Family Day, where family members and community Elders were invited to join a cultural lunch.

Several men entered original artwork into a design competition, with the winning entry printed on a T-shirt and distributed to all the First Nations men for NAIDOC Week.

Football part of Ravenhall's activities



Men participating in football game.

Around 165 Aboriginal men participated in NAIDOC Week activities at Ravenhall Correctional Centre, which included and Elders' Breakfast, Yarning Circle, a Handprint Mural, football match attended by two Indigenous Western Bulldog players, and an Art Day.

One of the highlights was a Clothing the Gaps Foundation Fun Run in which

27 men completed 28 laps of the oval, covering 9.8 kilometres each. And 40 family members attended the centre for Family Day.

Dances reflect history and culture First Nations centre population

At Junee Correctional Centre, Aboriginal Liaison Officers also planned a series of events to mark NAIDOC Week. This included developing a wall of posters which represented NAIDOC Week from its inception, showing the evolution of attitudes and language over the years.

Inmate performers worked together for weeks to develop and perfect three dances – a Welcome Dance, Creation Dance and War Dance – performed to the accompaniment of a highly talented didgeridoo player, which were performed for the everyone within the First Nations centre population.

Other activities included a NAIDOC Morning Tea for staff and visitors from Cobham and Riverina Youth Justice Centres.



Junee Correctional Centre: Inmate dancers performing for NAIDOC Week.

Tribute to a valued Fulham staff member

On the evening of 8 May, Fulham Correctional Centre Operational Manager Phillip Munnings passed away suddenly at home surrounded by family. Phil was a much loved and valued member of Fulham, having been part of the team since it opened.

Phil's funeral was held on 26 May at the Sale Baptist Church and was attended by hundreds of family members, friends, GEO Directors, General Managers and staff members, representatives of Corrections Victoria

and Victorian Police, as well as GEO Australia Directors and General Managers.

GEO staff past and present accounted for around half of the funeral attendance. At the conclusion of the service all staff past and present lined the drive for a Guard of Honour.

Representatives from GEO's Employee Assistance Provider attended the centre to provide valuable support services to staff before and after Phil's funeral.



Phillip Munnings served Fulham Correctional Centre for more than 25 years.

IN BRIEF

Dreaming Inside on NITV



Volume 11 of *Dreaming Inside* being launched in Wollongong.

In May, an NITV film crew attended Junee Correctional Centre to develop a feature story on the long-running writing program for First Nations inmates - the Ngana Barangarai Project by Wadi Wadi Elder Auntie Barbara Nicholson.

Each year, Auntie Barbara facilitates a series of workshops where Indigenous inmates, supported by members of the Black Wallaby Writers from the South Coast Writers Centre, are encouraged to share their personal stories through narrative, poetry and songs. These are later published in an anthology of works titled *Dreaming Inside: Voices from Junee Correctional Centre*.

This year's workshops commenced with a reading to launch the 11th edition of the book, ahead of its official release at the Wollongong Art Gallery on 25 May.

Interviews were conducted with Auntie Barbara, GEO staff and some of the workshop participants to showcase the value of the program. The initiative is designed to help inmates understand their feelings, enhance their self-esteem and improve their literacy skills, while offering an important avenue for them to connect with and promote their Country and culture. The final story was broadcast on NITV and SBS World News.

'Yoga on the Inside'

In June, Fulham Correctional Centre became the first Victorian prison to launch 'Yoga on the Inside' – an affiliate partner of the US Prison Yoga project.

Yoga and embodied mindfulness have been shown to provide a broad range of benefits for prisoners that align with the desired outcomes of rehabilitative programming, so the centre has introduced a 10-week pilot program, with further programs planned.

Feedback from participants at the first session was overwhelmingly positive.

Yoga on the Inside's Trauma-Informed yoga practice gives individuals skills to increase overall self-control and emotional stability and to assist in reducing stress, anxiety, aggression, hostility, and symptoms related to issues of unresolved trauma.

Fulham's new LGBTQIA+ Committee

A dedicated committee to further support staff and prisoners who identify in the LGBTQIA+ community was established at Fulham Correctional Centre in June.

To assist with the planning and implementation processes, Ravenhall Correctional Centre Pride Committee members attended the centre to provide support to the committee's members and Nicholas Gee, A/Team Leader, Reintegration, presented to staff on LGBTQIA+ culture, educating staff, and facilitated questions.

Both centre's committees also met with the Peer Educator/Mentors to hear how prisoners can be further supported in fostering a culture of inclusivity at Fulham.

Recycling to support the community



An inmate works on the can recycling initiative.

Inmates at Junee Correctional Centre are engaged in a recycling initiative that is supporting a range of local organisations, including the Eugowra Flood appeal.

Men employed as Recycling Champions are collecting and sorting cans from across the centre, with their collection assisted by the Coolamon Lions Club, which runs a Return and Earn deposit point.

Centre Vocational Services Manager Donna Moulds said recycling the cans helps give inmates purpose.

"Having meaningful employment is very good for their wellbeing. It assists them to rehabilitate and develop employability skills ahead of release," she said. "Being able to give back to the community means a lot to many of the men."

While the initial idea to recycle came from a desire to reduce the centre's environmental impact and create employment, the initiative also raises money for the inmates to donate to worthy causes.

The Lions Club was previously receiving 25,000 to 35,000 empty containers per month, but thanks to the correctional centre's efforts it is now more than 50,000.

Pride Month at Ravenhall



From left: A/Team Leader Reintegration Nicholas Gee and General Manager Col Caskie present a cheque to The Equality Project's Digital & Training Manager Adrian Tuazon-McCheyne.

On 1 June, the GEO progress Pride flag was raised at the front of the centre, with members of Ravenhall Correctional Centre's Pride Committee – comprising GEO staff and Alliance Partners – in attendance. This is the second year in a row that Ravenhall has shown its support publicly, and was the first prison globally to raise the Pride flag for the entirety of Pride month.

During the monthly town hall meeting of all staff, an external speaker from The Equality Project presented on the importance of promotion and training of LGBTQIA+ issues, and how to support staff and prisoners. GEO made a donation of \$600 to the organisation to provide training opportunities for people to develop inclusion skills and take them back to their work environments.

Other activities included a staff decorating competition to promote the values of inclusion and history of the LGBTQIA+ community. Multiple external speakers also attended the centre to facilitate LGBTQIA+ prisoner support groups and provide safe spaces for individuals to express their identity. These support groups were well attended and explored the issues people face inside prison, and support services available upon their release.

Ravenhall is proud to support and promote respect and inclusivity for all staff and those within its care and staff will continue to provide transparency to the Victorian community around its efforts to respect diversity and create a safe and inclusive workplace for all.

