

Media Release

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Intensive dairy industry training a first for men leaving prison

In an Australian first, men at Fulham Correctional Centre nearing the end of their sentences are undertaking intensive dairy industry training in a pilot program offering live-in employment opportunities post-release.

Today, six prisoners from the Nalu minimum-security unit graduated from the second of four Cows Create Careers programs to be held at the correctional centre. This follows the inaugural course held in April this year, with three of the first participants already securing work.

This is the first time the Cows Create Careers program – developed in South Gippsland by the Lions Club of Strezlecki and running in schools nationally since 2004 – has been delivered directly to prisoners to train future dairy industry employees.

The initiative is being facilitated at the privately managed correctional centre under a new partnership between GEO, the Gardiner Foundation, GippsDairy and Jaydee Events.

The program is funded by the Gardiner Foundation and GippsDairy with support from local dairy farmers and dairy industry course facilitators.

Throughout the intensive three-week course participants undertake practical and theoretical topics on the dairy industry. These include biosecurity, rearing healthy calves, farm safety, farm technology, and career options.

At Nalu, the men learn how to care for three-week-old calves brought onsite – gaining skills on how to feed, clean, weigh and walk them, as well as completing a health checklist and general maintenance of pens and equipment. Through external site visits, the men learn milking and see first-hand working dairy farms.

Minister for Corrections Enver Erdogan said: “This program offers men in custody a practical opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge of the dairy industry.

“It’s fantastic that men will leave prison with this enriching experience that can boost their employment opportunities and help reduce their risk of returning to prison,” he said.

GEO’s Acting Managing Director, Dr Frank Thorn, said: “Providing the men in our care with tangible skills that will support their employment post-release is a critical part of our role in delivering correctional services.

“The more we can do to support the men in our care towards meaningful employment and accommodation when they leave custody and develop a sense of purpose, the less likely they are to reoffend,” he said. “The enormous effort of our staff at Fulham Correctional Centre, GippsDairy and all of the people involved in bringing this program to life within a prison setting is to be commended.”

Fulham Correctional Centre General Manager Natalie Greenfield said: “We are excited to have been the first correctional centre in Australia to integrate the Cows Create Careers into our vocational education and services curriculum.

“With one man already living and working on a farm, and two preparing for their release with jobs already secured, this program is already demonstrating its benefits.”

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GippsDairy's Regional Manager, Karen McLennan, said: "It's been great seeing how engaged and motivated the participants are to learn skills in dairy. This program has the benefit of not only supporting these men to find meaningful, long-term employment, but also supporting our farmers by offering a new way of attracting workers to the industry."

Gardiner Foundation CEO Allan Cameron said: "We are proud to support the Cows Create Careers initiative at Fulham Correctional Centre. This program provides valuable opportunities for post-release individuals by fostering new skills and career pathways. Our goal is to support brighter futures and instill renewed hope in the lives of its participants."

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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.