

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.

To date, 12 men from the prison's Nalu minimum-security unit have graduated from the Cows Create Careers pilot program, run on site with modules completed on local dairy farms. Some of the participants have already secured employment.



Fulham Vocational Services Manager Rose Ljubicic (L), Gardiner Foundation CEO Allan Cameron, GippsDairy Board Member Sarah O'Brien, Corrections Minister Enver Erdogan, GippsDairy Regional Manager Karen McLennan and Extension Team Lead Veronica McLeod and Fulham General Manager Natalie Greenfield.



Participants learning about milking techniques at a local dairy farm.

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 under a new partnership between GEO, the Gardiner Foundation, GippsDairy and Jaydee Events, and funded by the

Gardiner Foundation and GippsDairy with support from local dairy farmers and dairy industry course facilitators.

On 6 August, the latest six graduates were presented with their certificates by Victorian Minister for Corrections Enver Erdogan and GippsDairy Extension Team Leader and Facilitator Veronica McLeod in front of GEO staff and key stakeholders.

They had just completed an intensive three-week course undertaking practical and theoretical topics on the dairy industry. These included 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 on site – 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.

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING MANAGING DIRECTOR



Over the past few months I have seen first-hand much of the outstanding work being undertaken by our staff to benefit the people in our care. It was great to visit Fulham Correctional

Centre with the Minister for Corrections for the graduation of participants from the latest Cows Create Careers pilot program at Fulham that has received extensive media coverage and has already provided men from Nalu with live-in employment opportunities on local dairy farms. Congratulations to everyone involved.

NAIDOC Week was celebrated across our sites with Ravenhall's activities including a range of events to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, prisoners and their family members, and key stakeholders.

I am pleased to see the progression of our organisation-wide project to identify psychosocial hazards and reduce their impact on staff. Thank you to the project team and our site Champions in driving

this important initiative to all GEO staff, recognising the challenging nature of our industry.

As we move closer to the transition of Junee I would like to thank everyone for continuing to deliver excellent levels of service to those in our care. I know its not easy, but your unwavering commitment during these difficult times is much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to recognise our GEO Healthcare staff from Dhurringile Prison, which is closing on 31 August. Thank you for your contributions to managing the healthcare of the men at this site and I wish you all the very best whether you remain with GEO or are moving on to something new.

Dr Frank Thorn
Acting Managing Director

NAIDOC Week efforts recognised

Ravenhall Correctional Centre staff and stakeholders have been recognised for their outstanding efforts to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, prisoners, and family and community members could mark and celebrate NAIDOC Week.

Held across the country from 7-14 July 2024, NAIDOC Week celebrates and recognises the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with this year's theme 'Keep the Fire Burning! Blak, Loud & Proud'.

GEO National Director, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Dr Fiona Murphy said she wanted to acknowledge the work undertaken by Ravenhall's Aboriginal Programs Team, including Manager Tiana Koehrer, Coordinator

Destiny Douglas, Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer Aunty Darleen Christensen and Aboriginal Key Workers Bryce Taylor and Ethan Aldridge in coordinating a fantastic NAIDOC Week at Ravenhall. Celebrations of Aboriginal culture included, food and traditional dance, music performances and guest speakers.

"It was a privilege to share in some of the celebrations held for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and the people in our care across the week," she said.

"Hopefully, we are all aware of the importance of connection to culture, community and country for Aboriginal people and acknowledge the impacts that colonisation and subsequent policies and practices have had on this.



"Therefore, a key part of our Continuum of Care® model is our work with the Aboriginal people in our care to support these connections as part of establishing a positive identity and supporting behavioural change and desistance from offending behaviour."

Aunty Darleen Christensen (above) addressed the men saying her role was to be the safe Aunt that encourages them to speak of their traumas, abuse and loss of family, and to reclaim their dignity as Aboriginal men.

She said: "From my Aboriginal heart to all of you...you will be successful in turning your lives around to have a future full of promise and prosperity."

One 'Role Model' spoke about his journey of behavioural change from addiction, which had been normalised within his life and community. This was a common experience among men at the centre and he was able to provide an inspirational and motivational message about the capacity for positive change.



Aboriginal Key Worker Bryce Taylor (L) performs with Aboriginal men during NAIDOC Week celebrations.

Focus on staff wellbeing



Staff at the conference: (back L), Anthony Watson, Sam Morrissy, Dr Fiona Murphy, Daisy Devitt, Elizabeth Nasir, Kayla-Marie Murphy, Tony Quinlan, (front L) Warren Davies, Lee-Ann Falkingham, Kate Fortuna.

A number of GEO staff attended the recent Flourish Dx Psych Health and Safety Conference. The event included a one-day Master class covering Psychosocial Hazards 101 and Creating a Psychosocial Risk Management Framework, plus presentations and case studies over the two days.

The event was a fantastic opportunity for our staff to increase their understanding of psychosocial hazards, as well as assessment and risk strategies for our organisation - and the benefits for employees' mental health and wellbeing were clear.

A key theme was that an organisation's focus must not just be on an individual level (i.e. how we address and focus upon changing the worker). Instead, we should prioritise consideration of roles and work environment factors (i.e. changing the work) to mitigate psychosocial risks.

Addressing psychosocial hazards

GEO's Executive Leadership Team firmly believes that addressing psychosocial hazards requires a proactive approach focussed on identification, assessment and management of any psychosocial risks. While this will result in a reduction in workplace injuries, most importantly it will promote good mental health and the wellbeing of our staff.

Psychosocial hazards are workplace factors that can negatively impact employees' psychological health and well-being and job performance - and encompass a wide range of factors.

These include stress, workload, workplace bullying, sexual harassment and more. Addressing psychosocial hazards is essential for maintaining a productive and positive workplace.

GEO has engaged FlourishDx to support the development and implementation of a Psychosocial Risk Framework to manage psychosocial hazards across its sites. Activities include an assessment survey, staff training, focus groups and other relevant risk mitigation strategies. Each GEO location has nominated 'Champions' to support the project and encourage staff to complete the survey, which aims to identify factors that may cause someone a psychosocial injury. They have also undertaken training to equip them and our staff to better identify and manage any hazards in the workplace.

GEO looks forward to the full implementation of this project and the development of the Framework that can assist with managing psychosocial risks across our sites to support the ongoing health and wellbeing of our employees.



Fulham 'Champions' - Warren Davies, Lee-Ann Falkingham and Anthony Watson.

New Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer welcomed

Jai Edmonds is a proud Palawa man from Tasmania who recently joined the GEO team as an Aboriginal Wellbeing Officer at Fulham Correctional Centre.

After a career in the public service as a cultural advisor and working in a family violence support service in Melbourne, Jai moved to Gippsland to support fellow First Nations men with their social and emotional wellbeing while they are in custody.

"I'd always wanted to move to the country," Jai said. "When I saw the role advertised, I know I had the right skills - compassion, and an ability to listen - to work with the men and to help improve their mental health and wellbeing. It's really important for the Aboriginal men to have another Aboriginal person in this role, someone more likely to understand them, what they're going through and their culture."



In his short time in the role, Jai has had the opportunity to participate in a few of the centre's activities that aim to help Aboriginal men maintain their connection to culture. This includes an arts program, men's groups and NAIDOC Week. He shares a caseload of around 40 men with the centre's Aboriginal Liaison Officer in a broad remit of responsibilities. Together they assist the men with obtaining legal support, art supplies, cultural activities and is always available for a chat. In the future, Jai hopes he might be able to establish a drop-in arrangement for the men to visit.

"I'm getting my head around the prison procedures, layout of the site, and the paperwork. I'm slowly ticking things off every day," Jai said.

He is also keen to see cultural awareness training continue among GEO staff, to keep breaking down the negative and incorrect stereotypes that exist regarding the history and perceptions of First Nations peoples.



Vivianne (left) with her daughter Georgia on graduation day.

Inspiring mother - daughter duo

Committed to providing the best possible support to men in custody, an inspiring mother and daughter who joined the corrections industry together have recently graduated with Undergraduate Certificates in Mental Health – both with high distinction.

At Fulham Correctional Centre, Aboriginal Liaison Officer Vivianne Everett and Correctional Manager Georgia Everett became the first

mother and daughter in Victoria to graduate from the same Correctional Officer Pre-Service course in 2016.

While working full-time and studying over many late nights during 2023, the Everetts have each attained an Undergraduate Certificate of Mental Health, from the faculty of Medicine Nursing and Health Sciences at Monash University. They graduated on 15 May.

The Commonwealth-funded course placements were offered to all custodial staff at Fulham Correctional Centre. The offer was embraced by the pair as a great opportunity to implement their learnings to better support the men while in custody, and to complement the existing work they are already undertaking in their respective roles.

Ravenhall hosts international delegates

Two international delegations have recently visited Ravenhall Correctional Centre to gain valuable insights into workings of one of Australia’s newest correctional centres.

Ravenhall was honoured to be visited and provide a tour to a delegation of forensic mental health staff from

Taiwan. Accompanied by GEO National Director, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Dr Fiona Murphy and National Healthcare Services Manager Justine Mizen, and Forensic Operations Manager Simone Lawrie.

The following month, GEO and Corrections Victoria staff hosted members of the Academy of Prisons and Correctional Administration, Tamil Nadu, India, who were on a study visit. During a tour of the correctional centre, the delegation was focused on aspects of security and design and said it was provided with a “comprehensive understanding of the intricate workings and operational methods” of Ravenhall.



Delegation from Taiwan with GEO and Forensic staff at Ravenhall Correctional Centre.

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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



Feeding time for the calves at Nalu.

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 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.”

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.”



Learning 'Cups On' at a local dairy farm.



GEO Acting Managing Director Dr Frank Thorn addresses the course graduates.