

### *Good Behaviour Bonds*

Bonds may be imposed as a condition of a suspended sentence or as an alternative to a prison sentence. If the bond is breached, the offender has to appear before a court, and can face imprisonment. Attending rehabilitation programs and supervision by the parole service can be made a condition of good behaviour bonds.

Alternatives to imprisonment such as those described in this brochure are not 'soft' options. Offenders find them difficult and restrictive. The advantage of community based sentencing options lies not in lenience towards offenders but in the flexible possibilities offered to address the causes of criminal behaviour, both through formal programs, and by avoiding the social and personal costs of imprisonment.

Community based sentencing is particularly under-used in rural and remote parts of NSW, where there is a lack of facilities for home and periodic detention, often little opportunity for meaningful community work, and limited rehabilitation and supervision services.

## **Put Community Based Sentencing on the Agenda**

Law and order is a live political issue in NSW. Given the popularity of tough approaches to crime, community based sentencing is not a politically popular cause.

As a community, we need to take a long term approach to managing crime. We need to address the factors that cause crime, rather than simply increasing prisoner numbers.

We need to divert more offenders into alternatives that will address the disadvantage that causes criminal behaviour.

### **Find Out More:**

#### **Alternatives to prison**

- o Beyond Bars Alliance  
[www.beyondbars.org.au](http://www.beyondbars.org.au)
- o National Centre on Institutions and Alternatives  
[www.sentencing.org](http://www.sentencing.org)

#### **Indigenous People and Prisons**

- o Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee  
[www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ajac.nsf](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/ajac.nsf)
- o HREOC  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social\\_justice/](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/)

#### **Women and Prison**

- o Sisters Inside  
[www.sistersinside.com.au](http://www.sistersinside.com.au)

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON**



**Social Justice  
Committee  
Conference of  
Leaders of Religious  
Institutes NSW  
[www.clrinsw.org](http://www.clrinsw.org)  
The Need for Alternatives**

In the past 10 years, the prison population in NSW has increased by 50%: from 6000 to 9000 full time prisoners. This increase in full time imprisonment rates is not a response to higher crime rates. In fact, in Bob Carr recently announced that NSW's crime rates have *fallen* to the lowest in more than 20 years. More people are going to prison because of the Carr government's failure to consider alternatives to prison. High imprisonment rates have huge direct costs and consequences for offenders and the wider community.

### *Consequences for Offenders*

A term of imprisonment can worsen the problems of social isolation and disadvantage that lead to the commission of many crimes. Prisoners with children are in most cases separated from their children, and often have to leave them in the care of the state. Offenders are forced to leave their communities and to give up jobs and housing. When they leave prison, offenders have to start again. It can be difficult to find a job and a home with a criminal record, and to re-establish links with family and community. Such problems increase the risks of re-offending

### *Consequences for the Community*

NSW currently spends more than \$530 million a year to run prisons in the state. Prison sentences also create indirect costs by perpetuating cycles of crime and poverty within families and communities, separating families, creating unemployment and homelessness and damaging prisoners' mental and physical health.

## Characteristics of the Prison Population

The use of prison as a sanction against crime is often justified on the grounds that it serves to protect the general public from hardened criminals. However, prisons often hold the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community:

- 60% of inmates are functionally illiterate
- 44% are long term unemployed
- 64% have no stable family
- 13% have an intellectual disability
- 25% of male prisoners and 33% of female prisoners have had some sort of mental health problem
- 73% of women in prison have at some point been admitted to a psychiatric institution
- 80% of inmates are in prison for offences related to alcohol and other drugs
- 33% of men and 66% of women in prison are Hepatitis C positive

### *Indigenous Overrepresentation*

Indigenous people in prison are of particular concern – they are 27 times more likely to be in police custody and 15.8 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-indigenous people.

## Alternatives to Prison

In NSW, there are already a number of sentencing options that are considered for an offender before they are sentenced to a full time prison sentence. Most of these alternatives are community based, limiting offenders' contact with the prison system and allowing them to remain in their communities and families. Offenders can attend community based rehabilitation programs which may be more effective or culturally appropriate than those offered within prisons.

### *Home Detention*

Prisoners are confined to their home either full time or between specified hours using electronic monitoring. If people are found out of their home they are penalised.

### *Periodic Detention*

Offenders sentenced to periodic detention are required to go to prison for weekends to serve their sentence. They also have to perform community service and may have to attend counselling or other rehabilitation programs.

### *Community Service Orders*

Offenders can be ordered to perform up to 500 hours of community service work or to participate in a personal development program.

### *Drug Court*

Drug dependent offenders who are found to be eligible for the Drug Court are ordered into detoxification and counselling services instead of prison sentences. This approach recognises the links between drug dependence and crime, and avoids the destructive effects of prison.