

# Achieving and maintaining prison officer-prisoner relationships: Tasmanian perspectives from a time of culture change.

Submitted by John Cianchi in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters in Criminology and Corrections in the School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania

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## Abstract

Prison officer-prisoner relationships are at the heart of prison life. This thesis seeks to understand what, from the perspective of the prison officer, is an effective officer-prisoner relationship. Secondly it asks how a prison that overtly places the prison officer-prisoner relationship as the central mechanism through which organisational and operational policies are understood and implemented might differ from a more traditional way of managing the prison.

Effective staff-inmate relationships enable staff to maintain a peaceful prison environment in which staff and inmates are able to meet their needs. They are characterised by mutual respect, trust, humanity, good communication and a clear understanding of the correctional officer role. Effective relationships are important because they contribute to a safe prison environment and greater inmate compliance. They are also necessary before officers can work with inmates to address their problems and reasons why they are in prison.

The basis for effective relationships seems to lie in the prison officers' attitudes and beliefs about inmates. The prison officers interviewed in this study view the inmates as autonomous human beings who have individual differences and who are entitled to humane treatment. They hold values about relationships that include notions such as respect, honesty, empathy, compassion, humanity, fairness and a belief that inmates can change. Importantly the officers are able to balance the security and welfare dimensions of their role.

A prison that places the prison officer-prisoner relationship at the centre of prison management would respond to prisoner misconduct and disorder by first examining the status of prison officer-prisoner relationships and monitoring efforts to improve their effectiveness. It would endeavour to broaden the prison's imaginative circumference to incorporate a rich correctional landscape that extends beyond simply warehousing criminals, to encompass a role that is concerned with the human rights and dignity of the prisoner, a belief in their capacity to grow and a desire to play an active part in this process.

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