

Paying It Back: Does Community Service Activities Promote Desistance In Prisoners?

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Definitions & Acronyms

CSA	Community service activities
GLM	Good Lives Model is a form of rehabilitation used in prisons
IOM	Integrated Offender Management
LSCMI	The Level of Service Case Management Inventory is an assessment tool for Corrections to measure risk and needs of prisoners and probationers
NGO	Non-government organisation
RBMSPP	Ron Barwick Minimum Security Prison
RNR	Risk-Need-Responsivity model is a model and theory of offender rehabilitation and assessment used in prisons and community corrections in Tasmania
ROGS	Report on Government Services
RVNC	Risdon Vale Neighbourhood Centre
S42	Section 42 day leave for prisoners from prison which is part of the Tasmanian <i>Corrections Act 1997</i> legislation
TPS	Tasmania Prison Service

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Abstract

The prison as an institution in society is a complex and multi layered set of social relations confined to specific geographical places. Working with prisoners in these circumstances is a necessary and important task as they are nearly all released back into society. This highlights not only issues of the causes of crime and the nature of punishment, but also the importance of understanding and supporting the processes of desistance (of ceasing offending), pro-social change and community reintegration in that setting. The task of corrections is to maintain the safe order and security of the prison, reduce risk and recidivism, and support pro-social change in prisoners. It is the latter part which is difficult as corrections broadly applies mechanisms of security, but often fails to identify suitable individual solutions.

The research explores the use and impact of community service activities as a means of assisting desistance from crime for both minimum enclosed and minimum open prisoners in the custody of Tasmania Prison Service. In the past, community service has been used in many jurisdictions as a low level reintegration mechanism, seeing it as meeting the public or local community needs. This research examines the impact and benefits to individual prisoners, the agencies and stakeholders they are assisting, and assesses the efficacy of community service activities to promote desistance and reintegration. Fourteen different prisoner community service activities are considered here – for the first time in the public domain.

The findings of this study show that community service activities have a positive impact at a number of levels: on the staff and volunteers in the agencies, the communities who are recipients and beneficiaries of community service activities and, ultimately, the prisoners who develop their social capital, showcase their existing human capital and access real opportunities and supports for reintegration. This framework is developed in the context of Tasmania, and yet has relevance and utility to be tailored for other jurisdictions.