Research and News

Justice Reinvestment Forum

Australia’s prison system suffers from massive overcrowding. There has been a steady growth in the prison population with a continued high representation of Indigenous Australians, mostly juveniles. Incarceration has a heavy social and economic impact on all Australians, not least in terms of the health burden carried by the prison population. That impact is not confined to individual prisoners or the prison gates, but seriously affects families and communities across regions and jurisdictions. Alarming statistics indicate that current policies are not reducing incarceration levels. Innovative approaches are therefore required.

On Thursday 2 August 2012, Jill Guthrie convened a Forum entitled, Is Justice Reinvestment needed in Australia?

Justice Reinvestment is a localised criminal justice policy approach that first emerged in the United States. Under this approach, a portion of the public funds that would have been spent on covering the costs of imprisonment are diverted to local communities that have a high concentration of offenders. The money is invested in community programs, services and activities that are aimed at addressing the underlying causes of crime in those communities.

Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, March 2010

The event brought together national and international expertise on Justice Reinvestment and criminal justice issues to explore application of Justice Reinvestment methodologies in the United States and United Kingdom with a view to how they might be adopted or adapted as policy options in Australia.

The Forum followed a successful workshop held at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in November 2011 (convened by Dr Jill Guthrie) which was a first step to exploring the feasibility of Justice Reinvestment in the Australian Capital Territory. A research working group comprising NCIS, ACT Human Rights Commission, the local Indigenous Elected Body, ACT Chief Minister’s Department, ACT Department of Community Justice has met several times to develop an Australian Research Council research application to undertake an ACT-based research project. The NCIS Justice Reinvestment Forum on 2 August was part of that developmental work.

The aim of the Forum was for all participants to learn more about Justice Reinvestment and gain some shared understandings of its implementation in other countries. Professor Michael Levy (Director of Justice Health Service in the ACT and IOHR-CBG member) facilitated. Speakers included Professor Tony Butler (Head, Justice Health Research Program, Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales and IOHR-CBG member) who provided a description of Australia’s incarceration profile; Dr Tom Calma (former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) who spoke on the Justice Reinvestment movement in Australia; Professor Mick Dodson (Director NCIS and IOHR-CBG member) who
spoke about the 20 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; Professor Andrew Coyle and Professor Baroness Vivien Coyle who both spoke on how Justice Reinvestment has been implemented in the United Kingdom; Professor Todd Clear who spoke on the promise and perils of Justice Reinvestment. The forum was co-funded by NCIS, the Indigenous Offender Health Research Capacity Building Group (IOHR-CBG) and Crawford School of Public Policy.

NCIS Postgraduate Student Retreat

From the 3rd to 5th of August the NCIS held a 2-day conference for ANU Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates who are Indigenous to Australia, or are undertaking research into indigenous topics. This year’s retreat was at the Rydges Eagle-Hawke Resort, just outside Canberra convened by Dr Bill Fogarty. The main aims of the retreat were to provide a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in which to show case research in Indigenous studies both within NCIS and across the ANU. The retreat was also meant to be an opportunity for HDR candidates to get to know each other and to gain experience in presenting their work in a conference setting. The event was attended by 58 people and covered an amazing range of academic and social issues of pertinence to Indigenous studies at the ANU and beyond. Program highlights included an opening address by Professor Frank Brennan and an after dinner speech by Professor Megan Davis. As some of the evaluation comments from HDR candidates (see below) show, the consensus was that the 2012 retreat was a resounding success. The NCIS would like to thank all the HDR candidates who attended and gave such great papers.

> It provided an opportunity to support Indigenous research and researchers - the chance to meet other HDRs was great, as was the chance to hear about their research. There was an atmosphere of collegiality and it was relaxed.

> It was a wonderful opportunity to meet with people, network and hear about the diversity of research projects.

> The fact that it was catered for a range of discipline areas was a huge benefit for me; it was a great opportunity to hear other perspectives and learn about issues outside of my immediate field. I truly enjoyed the opportunity to learn about such unique topics.

Serving our country: a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the defence of Australia

A major new research project entitled Serving our country: a history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the defence of Australia has been awarded more than $1 million as part of the Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects funding. The project will be led by Professor Ann McGrath from the Australian Centre for Indigenous History in the ANU College of Arts and Social Sciences and Professor Mick Dodson from NCIS. Partnership organisations are the Department of Defence, the National Archives of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.
The project will trace the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the defence of Australia, and provides authoritative accounts of their contributions to the nation. It follows on from a 12-month pilot project – Defence Service History Project – which concluded in February 2012.

2012 Annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture

6pm, 26 November

2012 Annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture

Fifty Shades of Brown

Alison Page

NCIS together with the ANU College of Law, Reconciliation and Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive will present the 9th Annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture on Monday 26 November at 6pm in the Arc Cinema, National Film and Sound Archive, McCoy Circuit, Acton.

This year we are delighted to have Ms Alison Page, award-winning Aboriginal designer, cultural planner and Manager of the Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance on the NSW mid-north coast. Alison was also a member of the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which handed its report to the Federal Government on 19 January 2012.

Designer and daughter of an Aboriginal man and a ten pound pom talks about her own identity and family, which is not defined by black, white, brown, or any colour. She talks about pride where there once wasn’t any. Passionate about the living definition of culture, Alison unpacks the values at the heart of Aboriginal culture and the many languages that are used through storytelling to express them. Connecting this with the broader process of reconciliation, she argues why we need to embrace Aboriginal culture and its values as central to our national identity.

Student Workshop with Professor Robert A. Williams Jr

Research students at the NCIS participated in a workshop with a leading international indigenous rights scholar in July, to discuss the role critical race scholarship could play in their research projects. Professor Robert A. Williams Jr is Professor of Law and American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona, a member of the Lumbee Indian Tribe of North Carolina, and the author of numerous books on indigenous human rights. In the workshop, he introduced research students to the rich scholarship of critical race theory and engaged with the students in a dialogue about their own research projects.

Topics of discussion in the workshop ranged from the themes of critical race theory to descriptions of the students’ research. Professor Williams spoke about the challenges of extending theory and scholarship into practice and shared practical tips and strategies.
Students were challenged and inspired at both a conceptual and practical level. Each student came away from the workshop affirmed in the value of their own research project and inspired to pursue their own scholarship as transformative politics. The students remain very grateful for this privilege.

Diana Anderssen, NCIS PhD Candidate

From Rio to Rome

In the past few months, I have had the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of Indigenous issues, both through personal contact with Indigenous peoples and with archival and academic research.

In June I went to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil as part of the ANU student delegation to the United Nations Rio+20 conference on Sustainable Development, where I had the possibility to have personal contact with Indigenous representatives from around the world.

Rio+20 was held 20 years after the original Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and brought together 192 countries focused on environmental and social issues. The main conference venue was an hour and a half bus ride from central Rio. At the same time, a Peoples Summit was held in the centre, along the water front where hundreds of NGOs and grass roots organisations had information stalls. It was also the site for the Indigenous People’s Summit where Indigenous groups from around the world, mainly from the Brazilian Amazon and South America held performances, markets and public conferences.

Rio+20 offered a valuable opportunity to hear international perspectives on Indigenous and ecological issues outside the Australian framework and to witness an exchange of ideas and experiences. The idea of ‘Buen Vivir’ or Living Well was prominent in discussions. Bolivia, with a 60% Indigenous population, handed out their Proposal for a Law of Mother Earth which has been ratified in the law of the country. Other South American countries like Ecuador also spoke in this rhetoric with wide support, and put forward a case for maintaining the Amazon as a food and medicine source as well as being the lungs of the planet for future generations.

In September/October 2012, I have the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of Indigenous issues with archival and academic research. I was awarded the inaugural International Exchange Programme 2012 with the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Italian partner organisation, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Italy.

The aim of my research project is to expand on the study already initiated with the Australian Indigenous collection in the Vatican Ethnological Museum to offer a wider picture of Australia’s presence in Italian museums. Through missionary orders in Italy and private collections, donations and institutional exchanges, many Australian Indigenous artifacts travelled to Italy and the Vatican in the last 150 years. The goal, already started, is to re-connect these objects with the communities. Through comprehensive study I will specifically be looking at the history behind the collections - the context of the contact and how the collections can further reveal information about those communities today and any influence they have had on Italian culture or vice versa. This incorporates Cultural History and Religion and the History of Ideas and potentially how spiritual/religious ideas have cross-fertilised each other.

Research has already been initiated and the outcome of this research will be a publication.

Katherine Aigner, NCIS MPhil Candidate
New NCIS website

NCIS launched its new website (ncis.anu.edu.au) in mid-July, and has had over 1600 first-time visitors since then. NCIS would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Centre’s Administrative Officer and Webmaster, Costanza Maffi, on her great work in building and maintaining the new site.

NCIS Congratulates . . .

Myles Mitchell (MPhil candidate) on the arrival of Eliza Earling Mitchell on 20 August 2012. Our best wishes to Myles and Jennifer.

Upcoming Events

8 November – 16 December
Likan’mirri II: Art from the AIATSIS Collection
Official opening by Mr Russell Taylor, Principal, AIATSIS:
Thursday 8 November at 6pm
ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Kingsley Street, Acton

26 November at 6pm
2012 Annual ANU Reconciliation Lecture:
Fifty Shades of Brown
by Ms Alison Page, Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance
Arc Cinema, National Film and Sound Archive,
McCoy Circuit, Acton

Farewell to NCIS Executive Officer

NCIS Executive Officer, Anna Damiano will be leaving the University on 8 November 2012 after 18 years of dedicated service to the ANU. Anna worked in the International Education Office and the Public Affairs Division (now Marketing and Communications Office) before joining NCIS in February 2003. Anna played a pivotal role in setting up the Centre and has worked tirelessly in helping make the Centre the success it is today. Anna will be very much missed and we wish her all the very best in her pursuit of new interests.

Image: Peter Tjuyuyja Taylor, Standley Chasm Ukelele, medium size. AIATSIS Collection of Art (ATS 646a)