



Crime Prevention (Proof)

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 20 October 2015 (Proof).

Speakers [Hodgkinson Ms Katrina](#)

Business Private Members Statements, PRIV

CRIME PREVENTION

Page: 91

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Cootamundra—Parliamentary Secretary) [9.44 p.m.]: Since December 2012 the National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University [ANU], led by Dr Jill Guthrie, has been conducting a research project exploring the concept of justice reinvestment as an alternative to incarceration. The groundbreaking project, funded by a three-year Australian Research Council grant, entitled "Reducing incarceration using Justice Reinvestment: an exploratory case study" is based in Cowra in my electorate. The study's aim is to evaluate the theory, methodology and potential use of a justice reinvestment approach to addressing crime and particularly the imprisonment of the town's young people.

About 6.5 per cent of Cowra's population of around 10,000 identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Cowra was chosen as an ideal study site due to its stable population and middle range crime profile, the fact that it does not have a prison that is an economic base for the town, and because the research team has good links with the community. The study focuses on issues of incarceration of all young people from Cowra, not just the Indigenous population.

Justice reinvestment [JR] looks beyond offenders to the needs of victims of crime and communities. It is a crime prevention strategy that can help create safer communities. JR is a framework for rethinking the criminal justice system so large sums of taxpayer money are not spent on imprisoning people for low-level criminal activity such as traffic offences, public order offences and justice procedure offences. It diverts a portion of funds that would have been used for imprisonment of the offender back into local communities through early intervention, crime prevention and diversionary programs. The money that would have been spent on imprisonment is reinvested into health and social welfare services that address the underlying causes of crime in these communities. Justice reinvestment retains detention as a measure of last resort.

Justice reinvestment involves all three levels of government as well as non-government organisations, the business sector, service providers, the education sector, the health sector and the judiciary. It was developed in the United States around 10 years ago and has had terrific results in more than 30 states and more than 18 counties. In Australia there are many supporters of justice reinvestment at a national level as well as grassroots supporters from all walks of life. In an article entitled "Rethinking the justice system" the *Cowra Guardian* quotes Dr Jill Guthrie as saying:

This study is a conversation with the town to explore what are the conditions, the understandings, the agreements that would need to be in place in order to return those juveniles who are incarcerated in detention centres away from the town, back to the town, and to keep those juveniles who are at risk of incarceration from coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

The ANU research team has met with senior students from Cowra's high schools, local business leaders, Cowra Shire Council and the community as a whole, and has held forums and conducted fieldwork trips, gaining firsthand evidence through talking to key community members and discussing measures to prevent Cowra's youth from getting into trouble. Organisations such as the Cowra Information and Neighbourhood Centre, Cowra Youth Council, Cowra Police Citizens Youth Club, Cowra Aboriginal Land Council, Headspace and the local mental health service have all enthusiastically participated in this project. The research will continue into 2016, but already common themes are emerging.

This investigation will identify and explore effective alternatives to prison that should be invested in, such as better, more integrated services and holistic and long-term initiatives that address the underlying reasons why a young person may get into trouble in the first place. Dr Guthrie and her research team are keen to talk to as many people as possible, especially young people, and welcome inquiries from anyone interested in the research. Many young people need to be given a second chance when they make mistakes or take unwise decisions, and these decisions should not necessarily haunt them for the rest of their lives. Keeping young people out of jail is a worthy goal. The concept of justice reinvestment and the exploratory research by the ANU and Dr Jill Guthrie in Cowra are opening the eyes of the community to a worthwhile alternative to jail. I commend Dr Guthrie, her team and the town of Cowra for their participation and research to date and support them in their efforts. I look forward to meeting Dr Guthrie and discussing this matter further with her when she comes to Cowra in December.