

Jon Stanhope MLA

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MEMBER FOR GINNINDERRA

Mr Mike Fitzgerald
Chair, Community Coalition on Corrections
C/- ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS)
PO Box 849
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Dear Mr Fitzgerald

I refer to a letter dated 29 December 2008, sent by Mr Ley on behalf of the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections, outlining concerns regarding the operation of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). I apologise for the long delay in responding. Upon receipt of your letter in January 2009, a response was prepared but, due to an administrative error, did not reach my office. I have addressed the issues Mr Ley raised below.

A corrections board should be established with mental health expertise to be responsible for the prison's operational regime. At the very least this board should include the persons holding the positions of Director of Mental Health, ACT and Chief Psychiatrist, ACT and the Corrections Medical officer.

ACT Corrective Services (ACTCS) is aware of the degree to which mental illness affects prison populations, and has incorporated mental health considerations into the operational regime of the AMC. All prisoners are assessed by ACT Health and ACT Mental Health within 24 hours of admission. Mental health staff interview the prisoner, and complete an assessment instrument to give an initial indication of 'at risk' status. A copy of the completed instrument is made available to custodial staff who manage identified risks.

Case management is set in place to assist prisoners. The case management approach for each prisoner is reflected in a rehabilitation plan which provides support and addresses criminogenic needs. The objective of the plan is to ensure each day is a 'busy, active day' based on therapeutic programs, education and training, employment within the AMC and recreation activities.

Further, there are two mental health positions in place within ACTCS – the Crisis Support Unit (CSU) Manager and the Principal Psychologist – to further serve the mental health interests of all prisoners. Whilst the Principal Psychologist position is currently vacant, the CSU manager is acting in the position and recruitment action has commenced. ACTCS is satisfied with the extent to which mental health considerations have been incorporated into the operational regime of the AMC and

does not believe that a board with mental health expertise such as the one proposed will be necessary.

A comprehensive system of dynamic security should be introduced into the new prison involving:

- close interaction between custodial officers and detainees rather than relying on barriers; and*
- a focus on meeting the needs of detainees with activities, services and practices.*

ACTCS agrees with the notion of dynamic security. The Operating Model of the AMC is located on a continuum from indirect supervision to direct supervision. The major feature of the former is reliance on electronic surveillance – Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). The aim of RFID is to increase prisoner safety by allowing ACTCS staff to monitor and control the location of both vulnerable and volatile prisoners. This reduces the need for staff on the ground to watch prisoners' every move, and allows more time for close interaction between staff and prisoners. The direct supervision model of the AMC is based on extensive staff and prisoner contact (using staff as role models) and the development of positive relationships.

A variety of programs is offered to prisoners, based on close consultation with psychologists, education officers, and the prisoner's case manager. Once a prisoner's interests, work skills/experience, educational needs, recreation needs and life skills have been ascertained, custodial officers and probation and parole officers as case managers undertake case management roles and work closely with prisoners to meet the needs of individual rehabilitation plans. All prisoners have a case officer and case manager, and, as outlined above, rehabilitation plans take the form of a structured day comprised of meaningful work, programs, visits and recreation.

Addiction should be regarded as the mental health problem that it is and should be managed as such.

All prisoners are assessed by ACT Health and ACT Mental Health on admission, and if necessary, an appropriate treatment program for the prisoner is developed, depending on their individual needs.

Rather than giving top priority to making detainees drug free, priority should be given to people emerging from prison with the physical and mental capacity to take their place in society as responsible members who are capable of fulfilling their obligations both to those dependent on them and to the community at large.

ACTCS gives equal priority to making prisoners drug free and ensuring they have the physical and mental capacity to take their place as responsible members of society. As outlined above, the AMC is heavily focused on rehabilitating prisoners, and preparing them for release. The benefit of a structured day, incorporating programs, activities, and vocational/education training, provides experience valuable to prisoners in obtaining employment post-release, and allowing prisoners to become accustomed to a routine. By providing support and concentrating on criminogenic needs through rehabilitation plans, it is anticipated that prisoners will be more prepared for life upon release.

Both the Therapeutic Community and the Transitional Release Centre (TRC) at the AMC play an important part in preparing prisoners for release. In the Therapeutic Community, the community itself, through self-help and mutual support, promotes

personal change. Areas of treatment include socialisation in terms of developing attitudes and values of mainstream, pro-social lifestyle, and the development of drug-free networks. The TRC has a valuable place in the rehabilitation, reintegration and resettlement of prisoners. It provides opportunities for prisoners to establish or re-establish support systems in the community. It offers prisoners a community style of living where groups of prisoners share a unit, some living/recreational areas, budgeting and cooking. This expands the opportunities available to prisoners to exercise discretion and decision-making.

As a priority, all political parties should commit themselves to a corrections system that:

- *reduces recidivism in the ACT community*
- *rehabilitates those subject to it; and*
- *bases measures to achieve these outcomes on the best available evidence*

The ACT Government is committed to undertaking the task of providing a corrections system that reduces recidivism and rehabilitates, and bases measures to achieve these outcomes on the best available evidence. ACTCS intends to collect data on recidivism of those individuals serving sentences in the AMC, thereby forming a sound basis from which to evaluate rates of recidivism and rehabilitation.

There must be put in place standing arrangements to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the prison by reference to what occurs to people after and not just on their release.

As mentioned above, it is the intention of ACTCS to collect data on recidivism which will be used to evaluate rates of recidivism and rehabilitation. In addition, there are mechanisms established within government to monitor and review the AMC's operations against policy and operational objectives, as a part of normal audit and review processes. With respect to your suggestions concerning post-release surveys, I draw your attention to the proper limitations placed on ACTCS once a prisoner is no longer in its legal custody.

There should be whole of government planning to set in place a seamless set of measures in support of those detained to be taken within the prison and out into the community. These measures should include adequately resourced community services and, in particular, prearranged mental health support.

The ACT Government is aware of the importance of supporting prisoners in their transition from prison to the community. As such, a throughcare approach is implemented at the AMC. Throughcare seeks to maximise rehabilitative and reintegrative opportunities for ACT prisoners by maintaining an integrated relationship between life in custody and life in the community. It seeks to enable a stable and managed transition from custody back into the community. ACTCS works in consultation with community organisations to ensure that this process is as seamless as possible.

Four throughcare seminars have been delivered since 2008. These seminars focused on the involvement of community agencies in the provision of services to prisoners and their families during incarceration and post-release. A throughcare expo was also held in February 2010. Local organisations and agencies possess extensive expertise in a variety of subjects and play an important role in helping to meet offenders' needs. In many cases they are able to provide advice and help to offenders while they are still

in custody and, if necessary, to continue to provide it to the offender when he/she is released. In other cases they are only able to assist when the offender is released from custody. The help and advice offered to offenders by these agencies and organisations, forms an essential component of good throughcare work and their active involvement in the criminal justice system is encourage by ACTCS. A Community Reference Group has also been established as a medium to inform the community about the prison's operation and to receive community input, particularly in the areas of prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration.

To assist in the throughcare approach there are also multiple authorised and accredited visitors who regularly visit the AMC, talk to prisoners and/or staff and observe the day to day activities within the prison. Authorised visitors are generally members of community organisations.

In addition, every prisoners has a case manager assigned to them who is responsible for preparing post-release plans for the prisoners that will incorporate mental health support if required.

Thank you again for your continuing interest in and feedback regarding the AMC. I trust that I have adequately addressed your concerns.

Yours sincerely

[signature Jon Stanhope]
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Chief Minister
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