

‘FAIR GO’
A HISTORY OF
PRISONERS AID (ACT)
1963 - 2020

Hugh Smith

Prisoners Aid (ACT) Inc.
Canberra 2020

Prisoners Aid (ACT) has the following objectives:

- a. provide and promote benevolent assistance in Canberra and district for prisoners, released prisoners, those in need in the criminal justice system, and for the families of such persons;
- b. provide support for prisoners at the Alexander Maconochie Centre and undertake visits to such prisoners;
- c. provide support for the families of prisoners and facilitate visits to prisoners by family members;
- d. provide support for prisoners on their release and assist in their return to the community;
- e. provide support for all persons involved in the justice system in the ACT courts;
- f. play an advocacy role for the interests of prisoners and their families;
- g. work for better community understanding of the needs of prisoners, released prisoners and their families; and
- h. promote research into the rehabilitation of offenders.

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‘Fair Go’: A History of Prisoners Aid (ACT) 1963 - 2020

ISBN 978-1-63625-673-3

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Preface

This is in some ways a personal history. I joined the Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee (as Prisoners Aid was then called) in 1971 and have remained a member ever since. Having served as Secretary, Treasurer, President, Vice-President and Public Officer, I have been involved in most of its major activities. As a result it is hard to avoid focusing on my own involvement. For the most part I use the third person but resort to the perpendicular pronoun for personal observations. Nevertheless, I trust that I have given due recognition to the many people who have made major contributions to our organisation over the years.

In preparing this history I have been assisted by numerous individuals, including Bill Aldcroft, Caroline Doyle, Geoff Potts, Glen Tibbitts, Brian Turner and Shobha Varkey. I also thank my partner, Gillian Gould, who helped turn a typescript into a book. In addition, I wish to record my appreciation for *Trove*, the Australian National Library resource that provided easy and convenient access to the historical contents of the *Canberra Times* and other newspapers.

The views and judgements expressed here are mine alone.

Hugh Smith
Canberra
September 2020

Introduction

Canberra-Monaro Civil Rehabilitation Committee [CMCRC] was founded in February 1963 with the aim of assisting prisoners on their release back to Canberra and also the families of prisoners. At that time all those sentenced in the Australian Capital Territory were held in New South Wales gaols. The Committee consisted of representatives from government and non-government organisations together with individual volunteers and worked in conjunction with corrections officials from NSW.

In the 57 years since 1963 some things have changed in Prisoners Aid.

- our name has changed – more than once:

Canberra-Monaro Civil Rehabilitation Committee [CMCRC] 1963-67
Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee [CCRC] 1967-91
Prisoners Aid Committee (ACT) [PAC] 1991-97
Prisoners Aid (ACT) [PA] 1997 - to date.

- we initially relied on volunteers alone but now employ one full-time, one part-time and two casual staff who together provide the bulk of assistance to ex-prisoners and other clients.
- after being ‘homeless’ for 25 years we opened an office in the ACT Supreme Court building (now the ACT Courts building) in 1988 which provided a point of contact for all clients and enabled us to help those in need in the court system. In 2009 we opened a second office in the Visitor Entry Area at the Alexander Maconochie Centre [AMC] that greatly increased our contact with prisoners’ families.
- our budget has grown from less than £200 p.a. in 1963 to over \$225,000 p.a. at present.

Some things, however, have not changed.

- we remain an independent ‘community organisation’ despite receiving most of our funding from the ACT government. As Frank Hayes observed, the strength of a non-government agency ‘lies in its capacity to be flexible, innovative and critical’.¹
- we are still an organisation that depends on volunteers to manage the increasingly complex affairs of Prisoners Aid. ‘Voluntarism’, Hayes

¹ F.D. Hayes, *Voluntary Welfare Work in Corrections*, prepared for The Prisoners’ Aid Association of New South Wales, Stanmore NSW, March 1991, p. 5. Frank Hayes was a senior NSW parole officer and participated in CMCRC in its early years.

suggests, ‘ ... is about the giving of time and effort, without any reward other than the satisfaction of helping’.²

- we are a non-judgemental and non-religious organisation. Whatever the backgrounds of our volunteers and staff we share the goal of securing a ‘fair go’ for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, and promoting the successful re-integration of offenders back into society. We believe this will in turn contribute to a reduction of crime in the community. We have maintained these goals and beliefs despite many disappointments and too few successes.

In telling the history of Prisoners Aid several themes emerge:

- the important role of volunteers in prisoner rehabilitation and the challenge of recruiting and training the right sort of volunteers;
- the changing balance between volunteers and paid staff;
- the never-ending task of securing adequate financial support;
- the complex relationship between a community organisation and government agencies in the corrections field;³ and
- how a community organisation might influence public opinion and government policy.

These are challenges, I suggest, that are similar to those faced by many community organisations. The history concludes with the unfamiliar challenge of Covid-19 and some reflections on the nature of Prisoners Aid itself.

But I begin with a little pre-history. As a convict settlement NSW had early experience of integrating offenders into a growing community. From the outset chaplains were appointed to minister to the spiritual needs of convicts and several religious and secular organisations began a tradition of concern in Australia for the fate of prisoners and their families. A certain Royal Navy Captain, Alexander Maconochie, also features in the story.

² Hayes, *Voluntary Welfare Work in Corrections*, p. 5.

³ ‘Cooperation between government and non-government agencies is important because each brings particular qualities to the task. Each party must respect and understand the role of the other, neither undermining nor denigrating the other. Both must avoid myths e.g. that official staff are never trusted by prisoners or that volunteers do not accept the need for security’. Hayes, *Voluntary Welfare Work in Corrections*, pp. 7-8.

1 FROM CONVICT COLONY TO CIVIL REHABILITATION

The first Australian colony, New South Wales, was founded as a penal settlement. Between 1788 and 1868 about 160,000 convicts were transported from England. Rather than keeping them locked up as prisoners, the colony needed to make the most of this supply of labour. The majority were assigned to settlers to work as labourers, domestic servants and the like. In most cases the settlers paid for the convicts' accommodation, food and clothing. Most of the convicts not allocated in this way were put on the government payroll. Some were engaged in manual labour, building roads, bridges and other public works, often in harsh conditions. Others were given relatively comfortable positions as clerks, messengers, artists or even constables.

Soon enough, however, the colony found that both convicts and free settlers could commit crimes and needed to be dealt with. Some were despatched by hanging but others were sentenced to imprisonment. The first gaols were built in Sydney in 1797 and in Parramatta in 1798. The most recalcitrant offenders and escapees were sent to Norfolk Island for more severe management.

If they were lucky, perhaps, they found themselves on Norfolk Island between 1840 and 1844 when the superintendent was a former Royal Navy Captain, Alexander Maconochie. Contrary to prevailing views, he believed that prison should serve to reform rather than punish criminals. The existing system, he argued, provided no incentive for prisoners to improve their situation and required 'only submission and endurance on the part of those subjected to it'.⁴ As superintendent, Maconochie applied a 'marks system' whereby prisoners could gain progressively improved conditions for good behaviour or be constantly downgraded for misbehaviour. This mechanistic approach to human responses, however, could lead to extreme cruelty towards those who would not or could not cooperate and Maconochie's system came in for criticism both at the time and on his return to England. He was dismissed as superintendent of Norfolk Island and also as a prison governor in the United Kingdom.⁵

On the mainland convicts who avoided committing further offences were generously treated. After a certain portion of their sentence had been served they were granted a 'ticket of leave', enabling them to work freely in a designated district. This could come after four years for those with a seven-year sentence, after six years with a 14-year sentence, and after eight years if transported for life. The ticket could be lost through misbehaviour but good conduct over a period of time would lead to a conditional pardon and freedom to work anywhere in the colony.

⁴ Captain Maconochie, RN, *On Reformatory Prison Discipline*, Charles Gilpin, London, 1851, p. 4.

⁵ J.M. Moore, 'Reformative rhetoric and the exercise of corporal power: Alexander Maconochie's regime at Birmingham prison, 1849-51', *Historical Research*, vol. 89 no. 245 (August 2016).

There was little, if any, provision for assisting convicts during or after their incarceration. A chaplain had been appointed to the First Fleet just before it set sail with 750 convicts, arriving in Sydney Cove on 26 January 1788. Chaplains were also appointed in the colony but most convicts saw them as representatives of the penal authority. In 1840 the *Prison Act* in NSW created a more coordinated prison system in which local clergy provided for the spiritual needs of prisoners on a part-time basis and were paid a minimal stipend for their efforts. Up to the 1850s they were the principal source of assistance for prisoners during their sentence and on their release.

In the early 19th century several religious orders had been created to support female prisoners, including the Sisters of Charity at Parramatta, Darlinghurst and Long Bay gaols, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan at Biloela gaol, and the Sisters of Mercy at Goulburn gaol. Some continued in their work into the 1980s. Their efforts focused on both the spiritual welfare and the material needs of prisoners.

The second half of the 19th century saw other religious groups take up the cause of providing support for prisoners and released prisoners. The Society of St Vincent de Paul established its first 'conference' in Australia in 1854 with the mission of promoting social justice by helping those at the margins of society. The Society focused on the practical needs of prisoners regardless of their religious beliefs – or lack of them. The provision of support was facilitated by the network of conferences found in most Catholic parishes. Assistance was also given to the families of prisoners. After 1906 several conferences cooperated to set up a visiting program at Parramatta and Long Bay gaols.

The Salvation Army was established in Australia in 1881-82 and immediately began to focus its efforts on prisons. Religious gatherings for prisoners were held but the main concern was to provide for the material needs of prisoners when they came out of gaol. Members of the 'Prison Gate Brigade' would meet prisoners on release and offer accommodation, clothing, support and friendship. Houses were set up to accommodate male and subsequently female ex-prisoners in the hope that this would enable them to start a new life. The Salvation Army also provided chaplains in some courts.

New South Wales

Apart from the churches the first community group set up to assist released prisoners was the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society founded in Sydney in 1874.⁶ The instigator, Justice (later Sir) William Windeyer of the NSW Supreme Court, believed in harsh punishment when deserved but also in the possibility of released prisoners returning to what the Society called 'a virtuous and honest mode of living'. This would benefit both the offender and society through a reduction in

⁶ The Victorian Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society was set up by a community meeting in Melbourne in 1872 in the wake of the 1871 *Royal Commission into the Penal Establishments and Gaols* which urged the creation of a body to assist discharged prisoners, similar to those existing in England and the USA. *The Highest Attribute: A Brief History of the Prisoners' Aid Society and VACRO 1872-1997*, ed. Sylvia E. Morrissey, Melbourne, 1997, p. 1. In 1976 the Society became the Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO).

crime. In the 1890s, however, the Society's efforts dwindled, especially after the death of Windeyer in 1897.

Nonetheless, two active reformers – Captain F.W. Neitenstein, Comptroller-General of Prisons in NSW from 1895 and Miss Rose Scott who had taken a personal interest in women prisoners in Darlinghurst gaol – succeeded in their campaign for a new organisation to meet the needs of released prisoners. In December 1901 the NSW Association for Assisting Discharged Prisoners was established with the strong support of Chief Justice Sir Frederick Darley and Attorney-General B.R. Wise. The association continued the work of the defunct Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society and inherited its funds of £200.

The NSW Association constituted the first systematic effort to assist released prisoners across the state and to actively seek community support. One peculiarity was that officers of this voluntary organisation were full-time staff of the NSW Public Service. This was no doubt to ensure some coordination of activities – often difficult with volunteer groups – as well as to allow the government to exercise a degree of control. Despite some conflicts of loyalty because of this arrangement, the Association flourished for the next two decades. In its first four years 900 prisoners were assisted with employment, accommodation, food, clothing and tools of trade. The Association's 1905 Report stated that of these 'only 106 have returned to gaol'.⁷

Early on, the Association extended its activities to providing support for those appearing in court for the first time. This led to a change of name to NSW Prisoners' Aid Association. In addition, the Association had established a 'ladies sub-committee' around 1903 to assist female prisoners and by 1905 reported a 95% success rate in preventing women returning to prison.

One useful role for the Association was to pay the gratuity due to a released prisoner who had served six months or more. The previous practice of handing it to prisoners prior to discharge often meant that they were relieved of their money by other prisoners before they reached the prison gate. The Association also argued for the gradual release of prisoners from institutional life into the community. The policy was adopted in 1908 and the Association played a part in supervising those released.

Evidence of the early vitality of the Association was the creation of branches in Goulburn, Bathurst and Dubbo in 1903 followed by other centres, usually those with a local prison, such as Albury, Armidale, Young, Grafton and Lismore followed by Newcastle and Wollongong – a total of 20 by 1923. A weakness of the organisation, however, was that its councils generally consisted of important local personages rather than people drawn from the community at large who were prepared to work at grass roots level.⁸ The activities of the Association were further diminished in the 1930s by the Great Depression and then by WW II when the nation had more pressing concerns. Nonetheless, the Association continued in

⁷ Hayes, *Voluntary Welfare Work in Corrections*, p. 16.

⁸ Hayes, *Voluntary Welfare Work in Corrections*, p. 18.

existence into the 1980s and did valuable work both in the courts and in providing material aid to offenders.

Civil Rehabilitation Committees

By 1951, however, the NSW government had decided to try a fresh approach and in November set up a new organisation in Sydney to provide prison aftercare with the title of Civil Rehabilitation Committee [CRC]. To fully reflect community interests an initial meeting included representatives from the Chamber of Manufactures, Trades and Labor Council, Returned and Services League, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, Howard Prison Reform League and the NSW Prisoners' Aid Association itself.

Two parole officers were a key part of the organisation. Their role was to visit places of detention and about three months before their release identify those prisoners who could be expected to do well on their return to society. Their individual needs were assessed and with the agreement of the prisoner the case would be referred to a monthly meeting of the CRC. Members of the committee in conjunction with the parole officers would organise assistance such as employment or accommodation and arrange for ongoing contact with the ex-prisoner.

Within its limits the CRC worked well in Sydney and a second CRC was soon established in Newcastle. Again, two parole officers would attend meetings and present cases of prisoners about to be released in the area. Similar CRCs followed in regional towns such as Wollongong, Bathurst, Cooma and Dubbo as well as several suburban locations in Sydney.

The success of this approach can be put down to the belief that material assistance for released prisoners was necessary but not sufficient. Personal contact and friendship, ideally begun even before release, could make all the difference. Also important was the view that assistance to the families of prisoners not only met their immediate needs but also provided reassurance to the prisoner. The task of CRCs was certainly helped by the fact that the prisoners they were dealing with had already been identified as willing to get back to normal life on release.

The CRCs, however, had two significant limitations. First, they did not assist female prisoners and did not accept likely repeat offenders. These were left to the care of the Prisoners' Aid Association, the Salvation Army, chaplains or other organisations. Second, much depended on the attitude of parole officers and other officials in the correctional system. Some felt that volunteers lacked expertise and could not be relied on. Other officials were enthusiastic for the new committees, recognising that volunteers could make useful contributions and could work in ways not possible for government officers.

2 CANBERRA: 1963 - 1975

When the Australian Capital Territory was created in 1911 it inherited the laws of NSW and legal proceedings were handled by courts in Queanbeyan, Goulburn and Cooma. This proved time-consuming and cumbersome, especially as the number of cases grew with the population of Canberra. Relief came with the establishment of the Territory's first court – a Court of Petty Sessions – in 1930 located in Acton House. Magistrates visited from NSW and it was not until 1949 that the first resident ACT magistrate was appointed. ACT offenders sentenced to terms of more than five days were sent into the NSW prison system along with those on remand – for which the Commonwealth government paid an agreed amount. Periods up to five days were spent in the lock-up at the police station in Civic which could only accommodate three detainees with any above that transferred to the Queanbeyan lock-up.⁹

Prisoners released into Canberra on parole were formally monitored by two NSW parole officers who visited Canberra once a month. At that time – long before mobile phones – it was often difficult to contact parolees and organise appointments with the parole officers. It was also difficult to change appointment times, and meetings with parole officers were often missed. There were no arrangements at all for released prisoners not on parole.

Against this background a meeting was held on 9 October 1962 to discuss how the needs of prisoners released into the ACT could be better met. Representatives of various interested organisations attended. Among those who spoke were Ken Lukes, a Parole Officer in the NSW Prison Field Service, and the Reverend Dennis Johnson, the Anglican chaplain at the Royal Military College Duntroon who had served as president of Sydney CRC and as a court chaplain in Sydney for over two years.¹⁰ A sub-committee was set up consisting of Dennis Johnson, Chapman (Chappie) Dyson representing St Vincent de Paul, and Captain Elwyn Hopper of the Salvation Army.

The work of this group led to the formal establishment of the Canberra-Monaro Civil Rehabilitation Committee [CMCRC] on 7 February 1963 at a public meeting in the theatre of the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra. Attendees included representatives of the Minister of the Interior¹¹ and of the NSW Minister of Justice; Judge A.E. Rainbow as president of the Australian Prison After-Care Council; and members of local organisations and churches. The newly-elected president, Dennis Johnson, believed in the importance of engaging the churches in

⁹ This prompted one ACT Police Commissioner to suggest putting a notice in the local paper advising that no more than three persons were allowed to get drunk on the same day. *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 15 May 1929.

¹⁰ An infantryman in WW II, Dennis Johnson saw active service in the Middle East, Tobruk, El Alamein and New Guinea. After discharge in 1945 he trained for the ministry and later became a chaplain in the Australian Army. On posting to Duntroon in 1962 he was one of three chaplains instrumental in the construction of the Royal Military College chapel.

¹¹ The Department of the Interior was responsible for the ACT up to 1972 when it was succeeded by the Department of the Capital Territory.

the work of the CMCRC and was strongly supported in this by the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, Kenneth Clements.

The Committee's principal objectives were to:

- provide for released prisoners, the opportunity of personal rehabilitation through material help and counselling;
- work for better community understanding of the problems associated with the rehabilitation of prisoners; and
- assist the dependants of prisoners through material help and advice.¹²

Early membership of the Committee included representatives from St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Anglican Church, Baptist Church, Greek Orthodox Church, Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Rotary, Apex, Legacy, Department of Labour & National Service, ACT Police and a number of private individuals. The idea was that the various government and non-government agencies would collectively be able to provide support, including accommodation and employment, for prisoners released to the ACT.

As with CRCs in NSW the Canberra committee was supported by a parole officer from the NSW Department of Prisons who travelled to Canberra each month to meet with committee members. The officer would provide briefings on prisoners about to return to the ACT with good prospects of rehabilitation and discussion would take place on the support required.

Though not formally a member of the Association of Civil Rehabilitation Committees of NSW, CMCRC worked closely with this body which was based in Sydney. CMCRC paid an affiliation fee of £2 a year and in return received financial and practical help from time to time. It also sent representatives to the Council of Committee Presidents that met once or twice a year, usually in Sydney, a relationship that continued into the late 1970s.

There is little information about the first Annual General Meeting held on 2 April 1964 other than a report in the *Canberra Times*. Those present heard a talk by Gordon Hawkins, a senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Sydney, who discussed recent crime statistics in NSW and the ACT. One conclusion, according to the speaker, was that – compared with the United Kingdom and the United States – ‘Australia had no juvenile delinquency problem’.¹³

In the second Annual Report covering the 1964 calendar year the President, Dennis Johnson, observed that parole officers had referred 25 released prisoners with a further six coming from other sources such as CRCs in NSW. While there were some successes, the President acknowledged that a number of individuals were already back in prison, but hoped that the Committee's support had laid the groundwork for progress at the second and subsequent attempts at rehabilitation.

¹² CMCRC, *Annual Report* (1965).

¹³ *Canberra Times*, 3 April 1964.

The President also observed that the work of the Committee was little known and emphasised the need to change community attitudes which tended to either ignore the problems of prisons and prisoners or demand a punitive approach to offenders. At the same time, relations with the Social Welfare Branch of the Commonwealth Department of the Interior and other government agencies had been excellent.



**DENNIS JOHNSON (right) RECEIVING A CHEQUE FOR £50 FROM
HAROLD FORREST, PRESIDENT OF CANBERRA LIONS CLUB**
Canberra Times, 9 April 1964

The funds available to the Committee in its first two years depended entirely on voluntary donations. In the first half of 1964, for example, CMCRC received a total of £137 from three Lions Clubs, Apex, Rotary, All Saints Church and six individuals. Total expenditure on 12 cases amounted to about £99 with

administrative costs of about £16. The Committee's monthly meetings initially took place in the Library of the Institute of Anatomy and moved to the auditorium of the Monaro Shopping Mall in Civic in 1964.

The names of those receiving assistance, including prisoners' families, were not recorded. Privacy was important and a numbering system was devised by the Case Record Secretary, Jean Moran, who joined the Committee in the early days through the YWCA. Jean's knowledge of welfare groups in Canberra was invaluable and in 1966 she oversaw the production of a booklet for the ACT Council of Social Service containing details of 150 organisations in Canberra concerned with social welfare. Jean remained an active member of Prisoners Aid until 2004 when she was granted Life Membership.

In the 1966 Annual Report (covering calendar year 1965) the President, Dennis Johnson, noted that several members of Canberra-Monaro CRC were voluntarily supervising prisoners released on licence by the NSW Prisons Department. This pointed up the lack of any parole or probation officers in the ACT, and indeed of any full-time worker dedicated to prisoner rehabilitation. He proposed that the federal government should fund the appointment of a chaplain for ACT prisoners in NSW gaols. The attempt to secure a full-time worker in this field – whether employed by a church, by government or by a non-government agency – was to continue for a good many years.

In March 1965 some help came from the Department of the Interior in the form of a grant of £20 approved by the Minister, Doug Anthony. This was followed by £50 in January 1966 that went towards a total income of about £130 for the year, with the balance coming from a grant of £30 by the Association of CRCs and two individual donations. In 1965 some 18 cases were assisted at a total cost of about £160. Membership remained strong with the 1966 Report listing over three dozen members including two NSW parole officers.

One of the founding members of CMCRC, Noel King of the Salvation Army, was elected President in 1966 but left on transfer to Melbourne in December and was replaced by Dennis Johnson. Membership was now around 30. In his 1967 Report (covering calendar year 1966) the new President noted how CMCRC volunteers could complement government social workers when the latter had reached the limits of assistance that regulations allowed. The report also recorded that the Committee had helped 44 new clients plus several carried over from the previous year.

Importantly, the Committee's financial position improved thanks to a new source of funding. The Totalizator Agency Board (TAB), a government body that managed betting on horse races, made a grant of \$400 to CMCRC. The Department of the Interior contributed \$100, Sydney CRC provided \$200 and private donations totalled \$121. Assistance to clients amounted to about \$520. Accounts were first audited in 1966 by a local firm on an honorary basis. In the same year committee meetings migrated to a room with tea-making facilities at the Australian National University – thanks to a member who worked there.

The Fifth Annual Report presented in July 1968 marked the adoption of the financial year rather than the calendar year, and covered the 18-month period from January 1967 to June 1968. This was also the first Report to drop the word 'Monaro' from the title of the Committee. By agreement with the NSW organisation Canberra-Monaro CRC had been responsible for the area bounded by Goulburn, Braidwood, Cooma and Yass, with some members supporting clients well outside the ACT. When a CRC was formed in Cooma, it requested the Canberra Committee to drop 'Monaro' from its title. This was readily accepted. At this time Berrima already had its own CRC and a gaol dating back to 1839.¹⁴

The President's Report by Chappie Dyson – Dennis Johnson having been 'posted' out of Canberra – noted a growing level of support for the families of prisoners amounting to about 42% of total expenditure, especially for the wives of prisoners who often lacked any income. Such women were entitled to a 'widow's pension' but, unlike widows themselves, only qualified after a period of six months. Canberra CRC made several representations to federal ministers on this matter over time – as did other groups around the country – but no progress was made until many years later.

In the late 1960s membership numbers declined somewhat but several influential new members joined, including Ray Whitrod (Senior Vice-President of CCRC),¹⁵ John Haslem (later federal MP for Canberra 1975-80), and Tony Ayers who was Director of Welfare in the Department of the Interior (1967-69) and who had worked as an education officer at Pentridge Prison in Melbourne and later served as Secretary of the Department of Defence. Also joining at this time was Ken Woods who became an active and energetic President of CCRC.

The 1968 Annual Report presented for the first time a statistical breakdown of cases prepared by Jean Moran. In the 18-month period 59 new cases had been supported together with over 30 continuing cases. The table also included details of all 174 cases assisted between 1963 and June 1968:

- 170 males, 4 females
- 109 single, 55 married, 10 not known
- 32 skilled, 105 unskilled, 37 not known
- 40 New Australian
- 42 Church of England, 46 Catholic, 86 other or not known
- 63 aged 21-25 (the most represented age bracket)
- 48 had no previous offence, 38 one previous offence, 17 two previous offences, and 39 more than two. Others were unknown.

As far as could be judged, the outcomes were reported as satisfactory for 40 of the offenders assisted while 39 left the ACT and 26 re-offended or otherwise proved 'unsatisfactory'. Recording the fate of released prisoners has never been easy.

¹⁴ Cooma gaol dated from 1873 and Goulburn gaol from 1947.

¹⁵ At the time Ray Whitrod was the first Commissioner of the Commonwealth Police Force (1960-69). He left Canberra to become Police Commissioner in Papua New Guinea (1969-70) and then Police Commissioner in Queensland (1970-76). Resigning that post on principle, he returned to Canberra as a Visiting Fellow at the ANU (1977-79) and re-joined CCRC.

'Give him a chance..'

"Give him a chance!" was the theme of protests against the dismissal of a teacher because of a crime for which he already had been punished.

The outcry occurred when public attention was drawn to the teacher's plight.

But a small group of people in Canberra spend many hours every week putting the theory of forgive-and-forget into practice.

The group is the Civil Rehabilitation Committee.

Their objective is to help released prisoners return to or adjust themselves to, a normal way of life.

Most of them are ordinary citizens with responsible jobs and family commitments.

They are united in their belief that a man or woman who has been punished for a crime should be reinstated into the community without prejudice, and their desire to see this achieved.

The Canberra committee of a voluntary organisation now well established in NSW and to some extent in WA was formed six years ago.

During that period about 250 prisoners have been assisted in rehabilitation . . . by finding accommodation, jobs, and counselling in personal and social problems.

In the past 12 months 40 new cases were added to many still being assisted.

There are about 20 members of the committee — some of them continuously involved and others available when called on.

Almost all "clients" are referred to CRC by the NSW Prisons Department's parole officer for the area, Miss Lorna Bradwell.

Miss Bradwell attends the monthly meetings and presents details of prisoners who will be released before the next meeting.

In the routine of prison

visits, the parole officer makes known the assistance available through the voluntary CRC organisation.

Some of the prisoners are returning home after terms in NSW institutions following crimes committed in the ACT. Others hope for a fresh start in Canberra with its variety of employment opportunities.



ABOVE: Rehabilitation committee president Mr C. Dyson and record secretary Mrs J. M. Moran at work this week.

They put into practice forgive-forget theory

"Finding employment is not such a problem as accommodation," the president, Mr C. Dyson, said.

"We have firms, particularly in the building industry, where sympathetic executives are willing to give a man a chance.

"But with the closing of Kingston Guest House we have a really serious situation with accommodation.

"We had a very good friend in Mrs Dickinson and haven't been able to find a similar set-up where we are sure of our "friends" being accepted.

"There is a real need for private families willing to provide homely accommodation for even a couple of weeks until a man can start to get himself settled."

"The St Vicent de Paul shelter has been of great help to us.

"But there is of necessity a short-term arrangement.

"Alternate supplementary or permanent offers of accommodation are required."

Mr Dyson said a family atmosphere was often an important influence in rehabilitation.

More than 50 per cent of the cases handled by the committee had been young men under 25.

Their backgrounds invariably were of unhappy and unsettled homelife, with broken marriages and parents' neglect.

Full rehabilitation was achieved in only a small number of cases out of the

total handled, but the results were encouraging and often most rewarding.

The committee's assistance frequently goes beyond the prisoner himself . . . to assisting his family if he is a local man and investigation establishes that his wife and children are in difficulties.

An annual TAB grant is its sole source of income.

Some committee members make their initial contact with the prisoner while he is still serving a sentence - if he is in either Goulburn or Cooma gaols.

This is an important step in successful rehabilitation through a mutual building up of confidence and understanding.

EARLY PUBLICITY: NEWSPAPER CLIPPING FROM 1969 SHOWING JEAN MORAN (Case Secretary) AND CHAPPIE DYSON (President) (publication details not known)

In his report for 1968-69 the President, Chappie Dyson, pointed to the problem of a shortage of accommodation for released prisoners, an issue that was a continuous challenge for CCRC. It became more acute the following year when the Committee had 58 new cases with 33 cases carried over from previous years. This was a significant increase, reflecting the fact that more released prisoners were being referred by local welfare and community agencies and by Monaro CRC which referred 20 clients.

Many of those needing accommodation came to Canberra because of the relatively high level of job opportunities. These men were mostly unskilled, single and over 35. Some were transient but others settled in the city. In either case the challenge was to find affordable temporary accommodation. Two hostels on Capital Hill were used until their demolition in 1968 while the St Vincent de Paul Shelter and Welfare Centre in Mackay Gardens, Turner made a major contribution over many years. Also helpful in finding suitable work for clients was the Commonwealth Employment Service in the person of Ken Graham who was a member of the Committee for several years from 1969.

By 1970 the annual TAB grant had grown to \$700 while \$100 came from the Department of the Interior. Case expenditure amounted to about \$900. Around this time Chappie Dyson, a public servant, was posted to Tokyo and was replaced as President by Ken Woods. Ken worked for a local business, Perfection Homes, whose owner, Eric Doeberl, generously allowed him to use his office in Civic as an unofficial centre for CCRC.¹⁶ Many released prisoners (and sometimes families) telephoned or called in at his office to receive support, advice and encouragement.

Ken sold houses for Perfection Homes and while selling one to me in 1971 persuaded me to come along to a CRC meeting to see what it was all about. By July 1972 I was Secretary which proved a good way of learning about the Committee. Also joining at this time at the behest of her good friend, Jean Moran, was Jean Mulvaney who was already an active and committed worker in the community. A founding member of Canberra Lifeline, ACT Girl Guides Commissioner, and president of the Canberra Mothercraft Society, Jean became a member of CCRC until her death in 2004, including nine years as Secretary.

In 1973 Canberra CRC entered its second decade and witnessed several changes, both large and small. Among the lesser changes was the Committee's decision to close its financial year on 30 April so that the honorary auditor could deal with the accounts at a less busy time. Meetings moved to Beauchamp House in Acton, where Welfare Branch was based. The first training day for volunteers also took place there in November 1973 with a range of speakers in a full day session.

After presenting his fourth consecutive Annual Report covering 1973-74 the President, Ken Woods, took his leave and headed for sunnier climes in Queensland. Despite being on study leave in the UK, I was gently but effectively persuaded by a letter from Jean Mulvaney to take over the presidency.

¹⁶ Doeberl was the founder of the Doeberl Cup, a chess tournament in Canberra that has been running since 1963.

Helping former prisoners

THE community's attitude could make or mar the work of the Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee, the committee's president, Mr Ken Woods, said yesterday.

Later this month, the committee will celebrate 10 years of work for former prisoners and their dependants in the ACT and surrounding areas.

Mr Woods said that in that time the community's attitude to the problems of the former prisoner had changed considerably.

The Commonwealth Service Board had been reluctant to provide jobs for former prisoners who had just been released from jail, but now was most helpful in finding employment for them. Private enterprise was also becoming aware of the need to help former prisoners become independent.

The Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee spent much of its time and resources helping the dependants of prisoners with material assistance and advice. One of the biggest



Mr Ken Woods.

problems for dependants was accommodation, Mr Woods said.

The amount of "distressed housing" available through the Department of the Capital Territory had not grown with the population of Canberra and the consequent increase in crime rate.

Some families of prisoners, particularly in Queanbeyan, were forced to live in shocking conditions in condemned houses in order to have a roof over their heads, he said.

Great help was being

given to single former prisoners by the Society of the Sacred Mission, an Anglican order recently established in Canberra.

The Society owned two houses in Canberra and used one as a priory. The other usually housed four or five former prisoners who were welcome to stay up to three months. This gave the men time to find a steady job and to begin establishing themselves in society again.

Mr Woods said that in the case histories of former prisoners helped by the committee, the incidence of parental failure figured highly. About 80% of cases had had unstable parents and therefore unstable homes.

To mark its 10th anniversary the committee has arranged a seminar and dinner to be held at the Lakeside International Hotel on July 23. The guest of honour and speaker at the dinner will be Sir Leon Radzinowicz, professor of criminal law at Cambridge University.

The seminar will begin at 4pm and will take the form of three panels, each with a chairman.

10th ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITIES: KEN WOODS (President)
Canberra Times, 11 July 1973

At this time, too, the Church of England's Society of the Sacred Mission set up two houses in Lyons which could accommodate four or five young males at risk for periods up to three months. This proved an excellent option for some ex-prisoners, and representatives of the Society were valuable contributors to CCRC meetings.

One far-reaching change in 1973-74 was that the Department of the Capital Territory took over the administration of released ACT offenders from the NSW Department of Corrective Services. Henceforth cases were referred to Canberra CRC by the Welfare Branch of the Department of the Capital Territory.¹⁷ In place of the NSW parole officer, the Senior Social Worker in the Corrections Unit of Welfare Branch now attended meetings. The downside was that ACT officers no longer had the sort of contact with prisoners before their release which NSW parole officers had been able to make. Fortunately for CCRC one of the first officers to work in Welfare Branch was Dennis Johnson who had returned to Canberra to take up the position.

Individual cases were still discussed and usually allocated to a Committee member who would contact the client. Support could mean anything from a one-off financial grant to ongoing involvement lasting two or three years or more. On occasions a CCRC member would be called on to testify in court as to the character of a client who was charged with further offences. At the same time families of prisoners might approach the Committee or be referred by another agency and again a Committee member would be allocated to the case.

Volunteers were greatly assisted by the production of a 22-page handbook in October 1973 which included guidelines for dealing with clients, information about sources of assistance, contact details for other CRCs and procedures for visiting NSW prisons. *Guidelines for Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee Members* was typed, duplicated (using 16 reams of paper), bound and delivered by the Association of CRCs in Sydney for a total cost of \$59.28.

Another major development was the government's proposal in late 1973 to construct a remand centre in the ACT so that remandees would no longer need to be held in Goulburn gaol. This had been advocated by magistrates and others, including Canberra CRC, for some years. To be located next to the police station in Belconnen, the proposed building would have 18-20 single cells, three exercise yards and a range of facilities.

Criticism was soon forthcoming, however, from the ACT branch of the Australian Crime Prevention, Correction and After-Care Council whose president happened to be Ken Woods from CCRC. Members of CCRC were also shown a set of plans that caused some disquiet. The strongest objections were to the building itself which appeared far too much like a high-security prison for detainees who were

¹⁷ The Department of the Capital Territory managed the ACT from 1972 to 1983 and was followed by the Department of Territories up to self-government in 1989.

yet to be convicted.¹⁸ Other groups complained of secrecy in planning and lack of consultation.

Once the Belconnen Remand Centre [BRC] opened in 1976, CCRC members visited remandees on from time to time. Criticism of the building and its facilities continued. Many visitors found its bare concrete walls and cramped spaces oppressive. Nonetheless, some remand prisoners tried to drag out their court cases on the assumption that any sentence would allow for time served in BRC. The benefit of this was that families could visit more easily than if the prisoner was held somewhere in NSW.

At this point it seems appropriate to take stock of CCRC's first dozen years. Jean Moran's statistics show that in this period a total of 426 clients had received assistance, of whom only nine were females. This disparity perhaps reflected in part the reluctance of ACT judges and magistrates to send women into the NSW prison system and in part that women lagged behind men in criminality. CCRC remained the only non-government agency with a special focus on prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families and was meeting many needs that would otherwise not have been met. The Committee was acutely aware, however, that there existed many unmet needs and that success in its objective of rehabilitating offenders was far from certain.

In terms of working for a better community understanding of prisoners and prison, CCRC made a point of contributing to academic and professional discussion on crime and punishment – both to educate its own members and to raise the profile of the organisation. In August 1967, for example, Canberra CRC sent a delegate to the fourth national conference of the Australian Prison After-Care Council held in Canberra.¹⁹ During 1968-69 CCRC was also represented at a seminar on 'Inter-Agency Collaboration in the Field of Law Enforcement and Correction' at Macquarie University; a meeting of the Australian Crime Prevention, Correction and After-Care Council in Adelaide; and a seminar on the 'Involvement of Volunteers in the Re-integration of Prisoners into Society' at the University of New England.

At many of the Annual General Meetings eminent figures in the field were invited to present a lecture to which the general public and the media were invited:

April 1964	Gordon Hawkins, senior lecturer in criminology, University of Sydney
March 1967	Mr Justice J.H. McClemens, NSW Supreme Court
July 1968	Rt. Hon. Nigel Bowen QC MP, Commonwealth Attorney-General

¹⁸ *Canberra Times*, 6 December 1973.

¹⁹ The Australian Prison After-Care Council was set up in Adelaide in 1970. It later became the Australian Crime Prevention, Correction and After-Care Council and in 2011 the Australian Crime Prevention Council [ACPC]. The ACPC has a governmental focus on crime prevention, including through the rehabilitation of offenders.

August 1970	C.L. Hermes, Attorney-General's Department (Clarrie Hermes became Chief Magistrate of the ACT, 1980-84)
July 1971	A.R. Watson, Attorney-General's Department
August 1972	Mr Justice Fox, ACT Supreme Court
July 1973	Professor Sir Leon Radzinowicz (founding director, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge)
1975	Ken Lukes, Director of Probation and Parole, NSW

CCRC also organised public seminars on other occasions. In August 1973, for example, Dr Ivan Scheier of the National Information Centre on Volunteerism, based in Colorado, USA, spoke on the role of volunteers in crime and punishment.

Whether all of these activities had much effect on public opinion at large may be questioned. But the *Canberra Times* did report many of these occasions and its editorials were usually supportive of CCRC aims. Justice Fox's speech at the AGM in 1972, for example, was published in full in the *Canberra Times*. His wide-ranging address concluded by saying that:

Crime, its causes and treatment is a community responsibility. It is not simply the responsibility of the police and the courts, of parole and welfare officers, or of voluntary organisations such as yours.²⁰

An editorial supporting his views appeared on 4 September. Similarly, an editorial in the *Canberra Times* on 4 July following Professor Radzinowicz's address to the 1973 AGM emphasised the importance of fully preparing prisoners for their return to freedom and of maintaining ties between them and their families.

CCRC was also given a hearing before the Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry into Poverty led by Professor Ronald Henderson.²¹ A written submission in April 1973 pointed to the poverty experienced by the families of prisoners while a breadwinner was in prison, as well as by prisoners on their release. 'The State', CCRC argued, 'contributes to poverty by putting people in prison. This is probably not an intended result but it is a likely side-effect'. The submission also argued that 'the relief of poverty among both convicted and potential criminals will contribute to the relief of crime rates'.²² The President, Ken Woods, and Secretary, Hugh Smith, were also given a hearing before the Committee at a session in Canberra.

By the mid-1970s steps had been taken towards the ACT looking after its own offenders – a goal which CCRC had long advocated. As early as 1966, for

²⁰ *Canberra Times*, 1 September 1972.

²¹ The 'Henderson Report', published in 1975, set a 'poverty line' in terms of a minimum income required by a given household to meet 'basic needs'.

²² Submission by CCRC, April 1973, p. 4.

example, a letter from Nora Taylor, Secretary of Canberra CRC, urged the government to appoint a full-time parole officer and to provide accommodation for released prisoners in the Territory.²³ By 1975 the Welfare Branch of the Department of Capital Territory was managing prisoners paroled to the ACT and from 1976 remandees were held in the Belconnen Remand Centre until their trial. The ACT also established its own Parole Board in November 1976.

The situation of remandees and some released prisoners was thus improved in some respects but the underlying problem remained. Sending ACT offenders into the NSW prison system meant that the Territory had no say in their management. As far as convicted prisoners were concerned, it was as difficult as ever for families to keep in touch with them. Nor was it practical for those supporting prisoners on release, whether government officers or private citizens, to get to know them before they returned to Canberra.

It was no coincidence that the idea of building a prison in the ACT re-emerged at this time. CCRC supported this development and was actively involved in subsequent discussions and inquiries. The more than 30-year history of the campaign for a prison in Canberra that follows is told primarily from the perspective of CCRC and is therefore by no means a complete account.

²³ *Canberra Times*, 26 November 1966.

3 A PRISON FOR CANBERRA?

The idea that the ACT should cater for its own offenders goes back to at least 1955 when the Department of the Interior suggested that a prison in Canberra could house both Northern Territory and ACT prisoners. The proposal rapidly went nowhere as did departmental discussions in 1965 about the need for a prison. A Joint Submission to Cabinet in 1970 by the Departments of the Interior and the Attorney-General on the topic of a prison for Canberra met a similar fate.²⁴

In 1971 the President of CCRC, Ken Woods, publicly called for the Commonwealth to establish 'a modern correction centre in the ACT' to cater for offenders, especially younger ones, who needed more than probation but less than incarceration in a high security prison.²⁵ Other voices in favour of a prison were raised but all seemed to be falling on deaf ears.

The election of a reform-minded Labor federal government in 1972, however, appeared to change the atmospherics. In 1974 the federal Attorney-General, Senator Lionel Murphy, advocated construction of a prison in the ACT.²⁶ The topic was again raised early in 1975 when the Minister for the Australian Capital Territory, Gordon Bryant, issued a discussion paper on corrections in the ACT. On the first page it observed that in the ACT both adult and juvenile offenders sentenced to imprisonment were confined in NSW institutions, and that

[t]his has obvious disadvantages to both the offender and his family. It also means that ACT authorities lose control over the placement of and treatment programs for ACT offenders after sentence.²⁷

The paper went on to state that while imprisonment should be a last resort the policy of sending offenders to NSW is 'undesirable and the construction of a prison must be considered'. Nonetheless, it concluded, any decision to build a prison would have to take account of other priorities in the corrections field.²⁸

Following the discussion paper a seminar was held on 2-3 May 1975 which addressed the range of corrective services required in the ACT. The seminar was open to the public and members of CCRC were invited to participate. In a presentation the President, Hugh Smith, made clear that CCRC strongly supported construction of a prison. He also argued that in the meantime the government should do more to assist former prisoners. Commonwealth Hostels, for example, could employ ex-prisoners as cooks or cleaners and possibly provide them with a

²⁴ The Law Reform Commission, *Sentencing: Reform Options*, Discussion Paper no. 10 (June 1979) p. 26.

²⁵ *Canberra Times*, 4 November 1971.

²⁶ *Sentencing: Reform Options*, p. 26.

²⁷ *The Future of Corrective Services in the ACT*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, p. 1.

²⁸ *Future of Corrective Services*, p. 11.

room as part of their wages.²⁹ Other speakers and commentators contributed to what seemed to be a broad consensus among those attending in favour of a prison.

The Law Reform Commission discussion paper of June 1979 revived the issue. CCRC had put its views on an ACT prison to the Commission whose report examined both sides of the argument.³⁰ Several factors were identified that favoured the current system of sending prisoners to NSW:

- the capital cost of building a new prison would be considerable and, while payments to NSW were high (a total of about \$404,000 in 1977-78), the running costs per head of a small prison would be even higher.
- there would be difficulties in designing and running a small prison capable of housing both male and female prisoners at all levels of security.
- magistrates and judges are currently reluctant to commit offenders to NSW prisons given the clear disadvantages to the prisoner and the poor condition of those prisons; an ACT prison would encourage a higher rate of imprisonment.

Arguments against the current system included:

- the NSW prison system was in an appalling state. [A recent Royal Commission headed by Justice John Nagle had found ‘an inefficient Department administering antiquated and disgraceful gaols; untrained and sometimes ignorant prison officers, resentful, intransigent and incapable of performing their tasks’.³¹]
- the High Court of Australia had expressed concern about the minimal, or even non-existent, psychiatric facilities in NSW prisons.
- ACT offenders and their families suffer ‘serious injustices’ as a result of being scattered around NSW making visits by family and friends difficult if not totally impractical. It was also the case that work release schemes open to NSW prisoners were not open to ACT prisoners.
- the Commonwealth has a ‘responsibility to provide humane and just conditions of imprisonment’ for ACT offenders.

The Commission also pointed to the potential for an ACT prison to accommodate federal offenders and those NSW residents living in the immediate vicinity of the

²⁹ *Canberra Times*, 5 May 1975.

³⁰ *Sentencing: Reform Options*, pp. 20-27.

³¹ *Report of the Royal Commission into New South Wales Prisons*, NSW Government Printer, Sydney, 1978, p. 460.

ACT who were sentenced by NSW courts.³² On the question of whether ACT judges and magistrates might be more willing to sentence offenders to prison, the Commission doubted that this would occur, noting that occupancy of the Belconnen Remand Centre remained well short of capacity. Moreover, even if an ACT prison did result in a higher rate of imprisonment, the Commission took the view that ‘it is not acceptable that a group of prisoners, however small in number, should suffer injustice in order that others should not be imprisoned’.

The Commission envisaged the construction of three minimum security facilities at relatively low cost – a farm and forestry camp, a periodic detention centre and a work release hostel – plus a maximum security institution. Some savings could be found by co-locating the camp and the prison. While acknowledging the practical challenges, the Commission concluded bluntly that the ‘current practice of sending Territory prisoners to gaols in NSW should be discontinued’.³³

In December 1978 the Australian Institute of Criminology convened a seminar on ‘Sentencing and the Correctional System’. Dr Des O’Connor of the ANU deplored the shift in some states towards a punitive approach to imprisonment and suggested that prison often made offenders worse. In his view the ACT’s practice of deporting prisoners to NSW gaols was ‘a last resort of the most extreme kind’ given the criticisms made by the Nagle Royal Commission. If Canberra was to have a prison, Dr O’Connor argued, it should be ‘experimental’ and ‘open’ rather than punitive.³⁴

Representing CCRC at the seminar Hugh Smith suggested in a paper on ‘Corrections and the Community’ that harsh public attitudes towards prisoners were often a major obstacle to the development of improved correctional facilities. Those who broke the law, many believed, did not deserve the protection of the law. In the ACT, moreover, sending prisoners interstate appeared to relieve the community of responsibility for their treatment – a point supported by Maureen Worsley of the ACT Legislative Assembly.³⁵

Over the years CCRC and its successors wrote to ministers – in federal, NSW and ACT governments – on numerous occasions about the particular problems of ACT offenders in NSW prisons. Some focused on the obvious difficulties faced by families visiting distant prisons. It was not uncommon, for example, for an ACT family to travel a considerable distance to a NSW gaol only to find that a prisoner had been moved elsewhere. Changes in visiting rules or times could also cause problems for families on their arrival. Another set of problems related to visits by lawyers who might be unable or unwilling to spend time travelling to visit clients in prisons outside Canberra. Nor were ACT corrections staff resourced to visit ACT prisoners whether to check on their circumstances or to prepare reports for the ACT Parole Board.

³² *Sentencing: Reform Options*, pp. 30-31

³³ *Sentencing: Reform Options*, pp. 27-29.

³⁴ *Canberra Times*, 5 December 1978.

³⁵ *Canberra Times*, 5 December 1978. Maureen Worsley had been a member of the first ACT Parole Board.

Further anomalies arose because ACT offenders were ultimately governed by Commonwealth law rather than NSW law.³⁶ Thus the grant of remissions under state law and release on licence were subject to the NSW minister's discretion and so were liable to be different for ACT offenders in the same prison system. Again, NSW prisoners might be granted weekend leave to return home but ACT offenders on leave were not permitted to cross the state border into the ACT. These and related topics generated much correspondence between CCRC and the NSW and federal governments though little change resulted.

In 1975 a federal government had taken the first public step towards an ACT prison though the Labor defeat at the election in December 1975 perhaps reduced the impetus. But any federal government was clearly going to face major barriers. The relatively small number of ACT offenders sentenced to prison, the cost of building and operating a prison, and the prior need to put in place a wider range of sentencing options meant that it was not going to happen immediately. As well, any federal government may have expected that moves toward a prison would provoke public opposition.³⁷ In the event, building a prison required self-government for the ACT and another 34 years.

³⁶ This was confirmed by the High Court on 18 June 1985 in *R v. Paivinen*.

³⁷ *Sentencing: Reform Options*, p. 27.

4 BUSINESS AS USUAL: 1975 - 1985

While successive federal governments seemed prepared to discuss a prison in the ACT, they remained unwilling to commit to building one. An ACT prison was on the back-burner.

In the meantime the work of CCRC continued as usual. The existence of a parole service in Canberra improved communications with corrections authorities. CCRC saw an increase in the number of cases assisted to 44 of whom 25 were new and 19 carried over from previous years. Many released prisoners were referred to major charitable organisations, notably St Vincent de Paul, Smith Family and the Salvation Army. In 1975-76 the TAB grant increased to \$1500 while the contribution from Department of the Interior rose to \$500.

At this time membership stood at around 15 plus representatives from Welfare Branch, St Vincent de Paul, Smith Family, the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) and the ACT Police. Welfare Branch representatives in the 1970s included not only Dennis Johnson but also John French (from 1970-71) and Geoff Potts (from 1978-79) both of whom contributed much to the Committee beyond their formal duties. On leaving Welfare Branch Geoff remained with the Committee as a private member until 2010 and was to conduct an influential review of Prisoners Aid operations in 2012.

The St Vincent de Paul representative from 1975 was Felix Elias who remained a valuable member of the Committee for some 20 years. The CES also provided welcome support in the persons of Ken Graham and then Mary Robbie. Individual members such as Jean Moran and Jean Mulvaney continued to show great commitment.

Issues of concern to CCRC were much the same, including lack of government support for wives of prisoners, the need for better accommodation for single men as they came out of prison, and the desirability of Welfare Branch visiting ACT prisoners while they were in NSW gaols. Despite letters and representations by CCRC no real progress was made on any of these issues.

The tradition of inviting the public to hear guest speakers at Annual General Meetings continued on two occasions. In July 1976 the Minister for the ACT, Tony Staley, used the occasion to announce proposals for a work-order scheme for offenders as an alternative to prison (this subsequently took the form of Community Service Orders or CSOs).³⁸ In September 1977 Mr Justice Blackburn addressed the AGM in his capacity as chair of the ACT Parole Board.³⁹

In April 1981 CCRC was formally incorporated as an Association under the ACT's *Associations Incorporation Ordinance, 1953*. This was now a requirement

³⁸ *Canberra Times*, 30 July 1976.

³⁹ *Canberra Times*, 6 September 1977.

in order to apply for government grants. It increased the accountability of the organisation while also providing a measure of protection for actions taken by members of the Committee. Welcome, too, at this time was the grant of tax deductibility status for donations to the Committee. Not so welcome was the need to apply for a bank overdraft when our annual grant was slow to come through. Meetings now moved to the Legal Aid Office in the former Hotel Acton situated across the road from Beauchamp House.

The start of the 1980s also saw CCRC involved in renewed efforts to secure the appointment of a court chaplain. This idea had originated in 1966 when the Rev. Dennis Johnson, then Vice-President of CCRC, urged the churches to appoint a court chaplain to support offenders as a small but important step towards alleviating their problems.⁴⁰ The proposal fell on stony ground but Dennis Johnson's return to the presidency of CCRC for six years from 1977 ensured the revival of the idea.

In 1978 discussions began with churches and other non-government agencies with a view to securing funding for a position of Court Chaplain/Court Liaison Officer. The idea was to appoint a person who would make contact with offenders when they first appeared before the court and as far as possible keep in touch with them during their sentence and on their release. The title of chaplain, it was argued, would be familiar in the courts and, most importantly, be seen as independent of authorities – whether Welfare Branch, the police or the prison system. Duties would also involve visiting ACT prisoners in NSW gaols, something that Welfare Branch had not been able to do because of bureaucratic and financial constraints. The job would in effect combine the roles of court chaplain, prison chaplain and social worker.

Support came from judges, magistrates, the Parole Board and members of the legal profession. In late 1980 the Joint Commission for Church Development [JCCD] which represented the major churches in the ACT reached agreement with CCRC on a submission to the Minister for the Capital Territory, Michael Hodgman, seeking funding for the position. The churches offered to contribute 25% of the cost and requested the government to pay 75%. The Minister agreed to consider the proposal and in discussion with the JCCD set out two requirements: the written consent of all churches in Canberra to the proposal, and an assurance that the person appointed would provide support regardless of religious denomination and not seek to convert any client.⁴¹

Prior to making a decision the Minister referred the proposal to an ACT House of Assembly Committee for possible inclusion in the new Community Welfare Grants scheme. However, the proposal was deferred for 12 months to allow further investigation by his Department. Eventually an offer was made to the JCCD and CCRC but the amount was too small to make the project viable.

Nonetheless, efforts continued. In 1983 CCRC organised a public meeting to mark its 20 years of operation at which the Rev. Paul Cameron from St Margaret's

⁴⁰ Address to the Canberra Council of Churches, *Canberra Times*, 22 November 1966.

⁴¹ Letter from the Secretary of the JCCD to the Anglican Auxiliary Bishop, 24 September 1981.

Uniting Church, Hackett, spoke on the value of a having a court chaplain. Anyone involved in the courts – accused persons, witnesses, families, victims of crime and others – would be able to seek assistance from the chaplain who would be immediately recognisable. The person appointed, moreover, would be acting for all churches in their caring role. The address was fully reported in the *Canberra Times*.⁴²

A problem arose, however, in that some churches which had initially pledged funding found that they could not guarantee continuing financial support. Most churches in Canberra were generally in favour of the proposal but all suffered from a shortage of funds for social welfare purposes. Some reported that they were already contributing heavily to social welfare in Canberra and so could not give the court chaplain high priority. Some churches were considering setting up chaplaincies that would serve the ANU, the Canberra College of Technical and Further Education, the Institute of Sport or the Canberra Hospital. For its part, the Salvation Army pointed to its record of nearly 100 years in working in the courts, and in a letter to the *Canberra Times* argued that it had a part-time voluntary worker in the courts who was not being fully utilised.⁴³ In response the President of CCRC, Hugh Smith, reinforced the case for a full-time and permanent court chaplain.⁴⁴ For the time being, at least, the project was stalled.

One piece of good news in 1981-82 was a grant to CCRC of \$3,000 from the Department of the Capital Territory's Community Development Fund. This scheme incorporated grants from the TAB and replaced the former Community Welfare Grants Scheme. CCRC saw this as a more rational system of assistance to community groups, especially in view of the fact that the new grant was twice the amount from the TAB and government combined in the previous year. By 1985-86 the grant had increased to \$5,500 and CCRC could boast that a very high proportion of grant money was spent directly on client assistance. In 1985-86, for example, 97% went on supporting clients and only 3% on administration.

The Vinson Review 1984

In the mid-1980s new pressures began to build up for building a prison in the ACT. One of the more influential was a comprehensive report on welfare policies in the ACT that was presented to the federal Minister for Territories in December 1984.⁴⁵ This was the work of a three-member panel, led by Professor Tony Vinson of the School of Social Work, University of New South Wales, and a former chair of the NSW Corrective Services Commission.

In July 1984 CCRC made a submission to the Vinson Review arguing for an adult prison and a juvenile detention centre in the ACT. The submission concluded by saying: '[t]he corrections field, it seems, is one which receives attention from various authorities from time to time but which never quite reaches the top of the list of priorities'. A lengthy chapter in the review entitled 'Corrections in the ACT'

⁴² *Canberra Times*, 30 November 1983.

⁴³ Letters, *Canberra Times*, 7 December 1983.

⁴⁴ Letters, *Canberra Times*, 19 December 1983.

⁴⁵ *Beyond the Image: Review of Welfare Services and Policies in the ACT*, AGPS Canberra, 1985.

found much that needed to be done. It cited with approval the remarks of Xavier Connor, Chairman of the ACT Probation and Parole Board, at a seminar run by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 1984:

Every community ought to do its own dirty work. That being so, the ACT should have its own full range of facilities for dealing with persons coming within the criminal justice system.⁴⁶

The Chief Justice of the ACT Supreme Court, Sir Richard Blackburn, was also cited, agreeing with this view of the Territory's practice and observing that the only virtue of the current system was its lower cost.⁴⁷

The Vinson Review commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology to conduct a survey of all 48 ACT offenders in NSW prisons. The researchers were able to contact 34 of them, the majority serving their time in the 'local' prisons of Goulburn, Cooma and Mannus (Tumbarumba). Only about 40% reported that they received at least one visit each month. The main obstacles were seen as distance (or travel time) and the financial cost to visitors. This was echoed in a survey of 16 family members who made prison visits.⁴⁸

The Vinson Review recommended that '[a] prison system catering for all but maximum security adult prisoners should be created in the ACT'.⁴⁹ The exclusion of high security prisoners was essentially on grounds of cost and likely low numbers; the review, however, suggested that they could be returned to an ACT prison if their classification was lowered while in NSW gaols. Part of the new system would be the conversion of the Belconnen Remand Centre into a medium/low security prison and the construction of a new remand facility. The Centre itself was deemed by the review to be inadequate on virtually every measure, and remarkable for 'the sheer sterility and soul-destroying nature of [its] environment and the mismanagement of security and training operations'.⁵⁰ Major changes in its staffing, procedures and buildings were proposed as an interim measure.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Beyond the Image*, p. 193. Connor also pointed to the difficulty faced by the Parole Board in securing timely reports on applicants for parole.

⁴⁷ *Beyond the Image*, p. 194.

⁴⁸ *Beyond the Image*, pp. 194-200. See David Biles and Geoff Cuddihy, *A Survey of ACT Prisoners in NSW Prisons*, Australian Institute of Criminology, 1984.

⁴⁹ *Beyond the Image*, p. 251.

⁵⁰ *Beyond the Image*, p. 201.

⁵¹ *Beyond the Image*, pp. 209-31.

5 DEVELOPMENTS: 1985 - 1995

There were no immediate moves towards the construction of a prison but progress came on two other fronts. First was the introduction of Community Service Orders [CSOs] in 1985 as recommended by the Vinson Review. These required offenders to undertake between 24 and 208 hours of unpaid work for the benefit of the community. Importantly, CSOs were to be imposed only when an offender would otherwise have been sent to prison. This was a valuable new option for sentencers and was seen by many as necessary before the construction of a prison; it might also make a prison more acceptable to the community though perhaps at the same time less obviously necessary.

A second important development involved Canberra CRC directly. A last attempt was made to secure funds for a Court Chaplain/Court Liaison Officer through the Minister for Territories, Gordon Scholes. In June 1986 CCRC in conjunction with the churches requested funding of \$32,000 p.a. for three years. While sympathetic, the Minister believed that given the relatively small population of Canberra further justification was needed. He suggested CCRC discuss the proposal in more detail with the Director of Welfare in his Department.⁵²

From late 1987 meetings took place between Welfare Branch and members of the Committee – the churches were no longer involved – to discuss the establishment in the courts of what CCRC called a Court Assistance and Referral Service [CARS]. Its purpose would be to ‘provide advice and assistance to persons in need in the ACT court system, including those charged with offences, witnesses and the victims of crime’. The government agreed to provide sufficient funding for CCRC to employ one or two people to work a combined total of up to 30 hours per week. CCRC was to report on the service to Welfare Branch every three months and a review of the position was to be conducted after 12 months.

Following advertisement in the *Canberra Times* the Committee appointed the highly experienced Bill Aldcroft as the first Court Assistance and Referral Officer.⁵³ After working as a welfare officer with the Snowy Mountains Authority he joined Welfare Branch in Canberra and had recently retired from this position. Bill began work on a part-time basis – about 20 hours per week – on 14 June 1988 in the old Supreme Court building. Initially, no office space was available so Bill worked in the public areas with ‘no fixed abode’. It was not long, however, before a judge who knew Bill insisted that an office be found somewhere in the building. The ‘office’ was literally a converted cleaners’ cupboard where there was just enough room for two small tables and a chair. Visitors often had to stand in the doorway or sit with Bill on chairs in the corridor. But this did not deter the many clients that he soon attracted.

Bill proved to be an ideal choice for the position. With an easy-going approach and a friendly manner, he had clear ideas on what was needed and how to get it

⁵² Letter to President of CCRC, 13 January 1987.

⁵³ Bill had been a paratrooper in WW II and seen action in North Africa, Italy and Arnhem.

done. After 12 months it was apparent that the service was valuable not only to clients receiving assistance but also to magistrates, judges, lawyers, police and various government agencies. CARS filled many gaps in the system that only Canberra CRC was available to fill. The sole concern on the part of Welfare Branch was that Bill should not provide testimony in court on behalf of clients lest this indicate a conflict with the Probation and Parole Service.



**GEOFF POTTS (left) AND BILL ALDCROFT
AT THE 50TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS**

In 1988-89 annual funding was increased to \$36,103. This was sufficient to allow the appointment of a second part-time employee as demand for the Court Assistance and Referral Service increased. In April 1989 the position was taken up by Maryrose Creswell who had extensive experience dealing with drug addicts and women in need. This set the pattern of having a male and female available to assist clients that has worked well ever since. By this time a new office was provided in the Magistrates Court building which was a little more spacious – albeit lacking windows – and more easily found by most clients.

Bill and Maryrose were in attendance from 9am to about midday when the courts were sitting and sometimes later. They were soon dealing with over 100 clients each month providing support for accused people, offenders and families of prisoners, whether answering phone inquiries, making referrals to a wide variety

of agencies or providing extended personal support that might last several months. Visits were also made to detainees in the police cells and in Belconnen Remand Centre. In 1991 a submission by Canberra CRC to the ACT Community Law Reform Committee (later the ACT Law Reform Commission) that was examining the treatment of victims of crime, pointed out that the Court Assistance and Referral Service did support such people and was likely to be the first point of contact for any victims of crime in the court building.

In August 1991 the Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee ceased to exist as such. Members of the Committee had long believed that the old name was unhelpful in describing what the organisation actually did. The name Prisoners Aid Committee (ACT) was adopted in the hope that those in need would be able to find our services more easily. The downside, as one ACT politician subsequently told the President, was that any organisation with the word 'prisoner' in its title would start off on the back foot when seeking public funds. The organisation's constitution was also amended in order to comply with the *Associations Incorporation Act 1991*.

Changes in personnel also took place. In August 1990 Maryrose Creswell left CARS to take up a position with Corrections while her successor, Ann Mather, also left shortly afterwards to take up a full-time position. Her successor, Lecia Kachyckyj, stayed for some years but was to leave for another position in 1995. Bill was jokingly criticised for training his staff too well but it was true that CARS employees dealt with all manner of clients and that this kind of practical experience appealed to prospective employers. Bill fortunately remained in post while also taking on the part-time position of Official Visitor at the Belconnen Remand Centre. It was around this time that he witnessed a client forcibly resisting arrest in the CARS office.

On 26 January 1993 Jean Moran was awarded a well-deserved Medal of the Order of Australia for her services to the community. At this time, too, Prisoners Aid Committee meetings had to move from the Legal Aid offices and meetings were held in the boardroom at Ainslie Village. This at least brought us a lot closer to many of our clients who were staying in the Village.

During 1994 the Committee received an evaluation of the Court Assistance and Referral Service by Peter Olorenshaw, a final year student in the Bachelor of Applied Science in Health Education at the University of Canberra.⁵⁴ Evidence was gained from interviews with a magistrate, three court officers, the superintendent of BRC, the Community Services Grants Program, two ACT Corrective Services officials, the Legal Aid Commission (ACT), the Aboriginal Legal Service and three community organisations: Ainslie Village, Drug Referral & Information Centre and the Salvation Army. The findings of the 43-page report were very positive. In particular, the report found that the Court Assistance and Referral Service helped expedite court proceedings, facilitated referrals of persons appearing before the courts to appropriate agencies, and provided helpful information to clients.

⁵⁴ Peter Olorenshaw, *Rights of Passage: An Evaluation of the Court Assistance and Referral Service (ACT)*, University of Canberra, 1994.

The key assets of CARS identified by the report included the following points:

- it is physically located in the court precinct;
- it is ‘unencumbered by the requirements of bureaucratic accountability’;
- its independence from government and legal institutions is well known; and
- clients know that they can rely on CARS staff to observe confidentiality.

In short, the report found that ‘the way CARS is structured and the skills and experience offered by the current counsellors leave little or nothing to be desired’.⁵⁵

Noting that the two staff members often worked beyond their paid hours, the principal recommendation of the report was that funding be increased to allow the appointment of a full-time coordinator in addition to the two existing part-time positions. This was another ambition not to be achieved for some time.

⁵⁵ *Rights of Passage*, pp. iv-v.

6 PRISON – THE NEXT STAGE: 1985 - 1995

In the second half of the 1980s the idea of a prison in the ACT moved along in fits and starts. In 1987 the Law Reform Commission again examined the arguments for and against a prison together with related issues such as prison management and discipline, grievance mechanisms and civil disabilities such as restrictions on voting by prisoners and on access to the courts. In what it called a ‘tentative view’ the Commission supported the establishment of an ACT prison. The key reason was its belief that the Commonwealth government had an obligation to ensure the welfare needs of ACT prisoners were met. Indeed, it argued, ‘[t]he government should lead Australia in establishing new standards for the humane containment and treatment of these prisoners’.⁵⁶ The report then set out principles for the construction and management of a prison and endorsed the view that it should contain female prisoners. It also referred to the possibility that in some circumstances federal prisoners could be housed in an ACT prison.⁵⁷

In 1988 the Liberal Party of the ACT expressed its support for a prison in the Territory. Its spokesman, senior vice-president Bill Stefaniak, a prosecutor with the Director of Public Prosecutions, pointed to a major increase in crime in the 1980s. This, he believed, had led the community to the point where it would accept a prison whereas ten years earlier one had appeared unnecessary. ‘If we had our own prison’, Stefaniak argued, ‘not only could the ACT courts regulate exactly what happens to the ACT prisoners there, but it would also be easier for the rehabilitation process’.⁵⁸ In February 1989, however, the Liberal party also briefly floated the idea of a joint ACT-NSW prison to be built near the ACT.⁵⁹

Soon, however, the issue of a prison for the ACT ceased to belong with the Commonwealth and became the responsibility of the ACT government first elected in March 1989. The early years of self-government saw several changes in office between Labor and Liberal-led coalitions but there was considerable overlap between the parties in relation to the proposed prison and corrections policy in general.

In the Legislative Assembly in December 1990 the Minister for Housing and Community Services in the Liberal-led government, Bernard Collaery, announced the establishment of a Corrections Review Committee to examine future directions for juvenile justice and adult corrective services in the ACT. The terms of reference were modified by the succeeding minister, Terry Connolly, following the change to a Labor-led government in June 1991. The new terms of reference pointed very clearly in the direction the government wished to go, including:

reduce reliance on NSW custodial institutions by increasing ACT responsibility for the welfare of those sentenced by ACT courts.

⁵⁶ Law Reform Commission, *Sentencing: Prisons*, Discussion Paper No. 31, August 1987, p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Sentencing: Prisons*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Canberra Times*, 6 April 1988.

⁵⁹ ‘Liberals plan joint ACT-NSW prison’, *Canberra Times*, 7 February 1989.

The Committee was further required to have particular regard to certain considerations, including:

- ‘the ACT should as far as possible be responsible for the welfare of its citizens including the administration of sentences imposed by its courts’; and
- ‘the hardship caused by the sending of offenders interstate to serve their sentences and the cost of that punishment to the ACT’.⁶⁰

In June 1991 there were 88 male and two female ACT prisoners in NSW at a cost of approximately \$50,000 per prisoner per year.

The Review Committee was chaired for most of its existence by Professor David Hambly of the Law Faculty at the ANU and then by David Chandler, Managing Director, Australia Pacific Projects Corporation. Other members included David Biles (Deputy Director, Australian Institute of Criminology), Ron Cahill (ACT Chief Magistrate), Kass Hancock (ACT Council of Social Service), and Hugh Smith (PAC). The Committee met regularly, received 36 submissions from agencies and individuals, and canvassed the whole range of corrective services.

The review entitled *Paying the Price* was submitted on 31 December 1991 and contained 88 recommendations. Number 42 stated unequivocally:

The ACT should have its own prison and the government should take steps to ensure that the practice of transportation ceases.

The review set out the problems associated with sending prisoners into the NSW system. Many were familiar: the principle that the ACT should take responsibility for its citizens; the human cost to prisoners and their families; the poor standards found in NSW prisons; and the loss of control over offenders – the NSW ‘truth in sentencing’ reforms of 1990, for example, meant that ACT prisoners could no longer seek remission on their sentences.⁶¹ In short, sending prisoners to NSW was ‘an anachronism that must cease’.⁶²

The Committee also considered arguments against an ACT prison. It rejected claims that sentencers would simply fill the prison. It recognised that a relatively small prison would be less able to provide a full range of services for a wide range of prisoners but argued that a flexible design would alleviate this. It pointed out that the Northern Territory and Tasmania which had comparable populations both had their own prisons.⁶³ The review also made detailed recommendations

⁶⁰ *Paying the Price: A Review of Adult Corrective Services and Juvenile Justice in the ACT*, December 1991, ACT Government Printer, Canberra, 1992, p. xii.

⁶¹ *Paying the Price*, p. 93. See also Australian Institute of Criminology, *Research Papers prepared for the ACT Corrections Review Committee*, November 1991, pp.19-21 which pointed to research showing that ‘truth in sentencing’ had increased the average length of prison terms.

⁶² *Paying the Price*, p. 97.

⁶³ *Paying the Price*, p. 95.

concerning the siting, design, management and operation of the prison which were intended to overcome some of the expected problems.

Two issues proved difficult and produced awkward compromises. First, the likely small number of female prisoners would make it difficult to provide the full range of services for them, or at least a range equal to that enjoyed by male prisoners. This problem applied even more forcefully to an entirely separate prison for women that was advocated by some groups. Recommendation 45 therefore suggested that in order to secure better facilities and to avoid feelings of isolation long-term female prisoners should have the option to transfer to a women's prison in NSW. This, of course, would have the effect of reducing the number of females in an ACT prison even further.

Second, some members of the Review Committee strongly supported the principle that unconvicted remand prisoners should not be housed in the same facility as convicted prisoners. In their view, remandees should ideally be held in a redeveloped court complex. However, this could prove expensive and impractical given small numbers and different security levels. As a compromise, the Committee recommended that a remand facility should be built 'near to but distinct from a prison complex'.⁶⁴

Other parts of the report looked at interim measures to improve support for ACT prisoners detained in NSW. These included the appointment of an ACT Official Visitor to NSW prisons, reports to the Parole Board by ACT officers on prisoners seeking parole, a liaison unit based in Canberra, better support for families of prisoners, notably in the form of funds for transport and overnight accommodation when visiting. These proposals certainly reflected PAC input to the Committee.

A separate chapter examined the value of volunteers in corrections, pointing out several advantages over government officials:

- 'volunteers providing support shows prisoners that, while the criminal justice system has judged them, there are people in society who have not written them off';
- 'volunteers do not represent authority or have any formal powers over offenders or their families, and this often means influence can be exercised informally';
- 'volunteers are less bound by rules and regulations in providing support and can try out innovations or take risks more freely'; and
- 'volunteers generally have fewer inhibitions in criticising corrections policy and administration, a factor that is all the more important in a field where media and public interest is minimal'.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Recommendation 47, *Paying the Price*, p. 99.

⁶⁵ *Paying the Price*, p. 117.

Referring to the Prisoners Aid Committee the review recognised an additional benefit, namely that several members had worked in the corrections field before retiring or moving to other employment. Their training and experience represented a valuable community asset and more should be done to encourage individuals to move into voluntary work on retiring or resigning.⁶⁶ The review also pointed out that effective volunteer organisations require adequate funding and recommended that PAC, rather than competing for grants with other community groups each year, should be funded directly by Corrective Services on an on-going basis.⁶⁷

The views of the Prisoners Aid Committee were further disseminated at a seminar arising from the report of the Corrections Review Committee. The public seminar on 25 March 1992 focused on improving services for ACT prisoners in NSW gaols. The presentation by Hugh Smith argued that the ACT had done and was still doing little to alleviate the problems associated with its long-term reliance on NSW prisons. He outlined a number of ways in which support could be given to ACT prisoners in the NSW system (such as better information and visits by ACT officials), to their families to help them in maintaining contact (such as subsidies for travel or telephone calls), and to ACT prisoners on their release back into the ACT (such as a half-way house and early release for employment in the ACT).

In December 1992 the government responded in broadly positive terms to *Paying the Price*. With regard to a prison the government undertook to conduct a 'feasibility study', including 'consideration of a new remand centre as the first stage of a combined complex'. The prison complex would provide facilities of a high standard for all detainees, in particular women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the mentally ill and those with drug and/or alcohol problems. Detailed cost benefit studies, including the potential for private construction and/or operation, would be undertaken. Preliminary site identification would begin 'as soon as practical'.⁶⁸

This support for a prison, however, was somewhat qualified by the statement that detailed studies could not begin until it was clear how alternative sentencing options would affect the size of the future prison population. The issue of whether it should be operated by the government or by private industry was also foreshadowed when the Shadow Attorney-General, Gary Humphries, after visiting a number of private prisons in Queensland, published a report entitled *Private Prisons, Public Options*. In his view *Paying the Price* was deficient in failing to consider the option of a privately-operated prison.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it was clear that the case for a prison had been accepted – though its exact nature and location remained unclear and it was not until the mid-1990s that the next steps would be taken.

⁶⁶ *Paying the Price*, p. 120.

⁶⁷ *Paying the Price*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ *The Government Response to 'Paying the Price'*, December 1992, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Private Prisons Public Options. A Report on the options available to establish cost effective and humane prison and remand facilities in the ACT* (1992). See also the response by Hugh Smith, Letters, *Canberra Times*, 6 May 1992 and the reply by Gary Humphries, Letters, *Canberra Times*, 14 May 1992.

7 PRISONERS AID: 1995 - 2007

In 1995 Lecia Kachyckyj left CARS and was replaced by Glenda McCarthy who stayed for nine months before taking up a position with Corrective Services. She was followed by Seija Talviharju who had a background in welfare work at the Ainslie Village. Seija fitted easily into her new position and formed an effective partnership with Bill Aldcroft that was to last for over twelve years. At this time over 150 clients per month were being assisted and the office, in the words of one client, was like 'a safe haven' in the courts.

In August 1995 the Prisoners Aid Committee lodged a 'Submission on the Role of Volunteers in Corrections' with the ACT government. The document began by pointing out the important qualities of volunteers in the corrections field: they are more acceptable to prisoners and ex-prisoners because they exercise no authority over them in contrast to government officials; and they demonstrate that at least some ordinary people in society choose to accept and assist offenders despite their past.

The submission went on to argue that volunteers in this field were difficult to find and that the services of a paid staff member were necessary to provide support in recruitment, training, monitoring and coordinating volunteers. It also noted that volunteers could reduce some of the burden faced by government workers in the corrections field. Only modest increases in annual grants ensued but the submission may have prepared the ground for major increases that were secured after 2000.

In September 1997 the organisation made another (and perhaps final) name change by dropping the word 'Committee'. Members believed this would show more clearly that 'Prisoners Aid (ACT)' was independent of government or any other agency rather than being a committee of some larger organisation. It also avoided some confusion in that the Prisoners Aid Committee was itself managed by a committee of office-bearers and elected members. From the perspective of clients, too, the new name would appear less bureaucratic.

January 1998 marked the passing of Dennis Johnson who had retained a keen interest in the organisation's activities after his retirement and was still serving as Public Officer at the time of his death. A happier moment came in January 2001 when Bill Aldcroft was awarded a Medal in the Order of Australia in recognition of his many years of dedication to social welfare in Australia. Never one to rest on his laurels Bill continued at work regardless of his honours and his age. He and Seija Talviharju together assisted up to 200 clients each month through the Court Assistance and Referral Service. An important part of this help went to families for the purpose of visiting NSW gaols and sometimes further afield. In 2001-02, for example, nearly 200 visits to prisoners were supported.

This high level of activity was welcomed by the government which made additional funds available through the Community Services Grants Program and

also through a separate grant from the Department of Corrective Services. In the three years from 1999-2000 to 2002-03 income from grants increased from \$52,503 to \$94,253. The year 2003 also saw monthly meetings move from Ainslie Village to the Meeting House of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Turner. This was facilitated by Dr Brian Turner who had joined Prisoners Aid in 1990 through the Society of Friends, a group which has a long history of involvement in prisoner welfare and prison reform.

In 2003 Prisoners Aid made a submission to the ACT Assembly's Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity which was conducting an inquiry into the 'effectiveness of support services for families of people in custody from the ACT'. In its written submission Prisoners Aid pointed out that there existed

a moral obligation on the community and the ACT government to minimise the disadvantages of sending prisoners outside the ACT, especially as far as the harmful effect on family relationships is concerned.

The greater the contact between prisoners and their families, moreover,

the better the prospect of their successful reintegration into the community and the lower the risk of their committing further crimes. There is a business case for supporting the families of prisoners.

At the invitation of the Standing Committee Bill Aldcroft and Hugh Smith also gave oral evidence on 2 October 2003.

The Committee's report which was tabled in 2004 expressed major concerns about the effect of imprisonment on a prisoner's family, especially children. The range of services currently provided for families, it concluded, was 'grossly insufficient to meet the needs of families with someone in custody'. This was a view, the Committee observed, that appeared to be 'shared by all witnesses, including the Government and public service'.⁷⁰

The report also acknowledged the work of Prisoners Aid as the sole agency funded specifically to support prisoners' families and noted that it was 'severely limited due to lack of human and financial resources' as well as the fact that it served not only the families of prisoners but also a wide range of other clients.⁷¹

The Standing Committee recommended that the government develop 'a specific plan for enhancing support services for these families'. In particular, it sought a specialist service that would understand the distinct problems faced by prisoners' families rather than a general welfare service. Information about the support available to prisoners, released prisoners and their families was also seen as

⁷⁰ ACT Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, *The forgotten victims of crime: families of offenders and their silent sentence*, June 2004, p. 22.

⁷¹ *The forgotten victims of crime*, pp. 23-4.

important and the Committee indicated ways in which information about the service could be provided to those who needed it.

The Standing Committee also recommended that the government ‘fund an organisation to provide a family support worker to: provide welfare assistance to families of people in custody’.⁷² No organisation was named but Prisoners Aid found the report encouraging.

In all, the Standing Committee made 42 recommendations, including several specifically relating to the children of prisoners (e.g. the appointment of a Children’s Officer within Corrective Services) and to visitors to the proposed ACT prison. Importantly, too, the Standing Committee supported the idea that families living in the ACT should be assisted even in those cases where a family member had committed a crime and been sentenced outside the ACT. This had been longstanding Prisoners Aid policy.

In the course of 2003-04 Jean Moran retired from active involvement in Prisoners Aid and was elected the first Life Member in recognition of her long and valuable support for the organisation and of her tireless efforts on behalf of prisoners and their families. Sadly, members recorded the death of Dave Murray who had been another keen and long-standing contributor before illness compelled him to retire from Prisoners Aid.

In 2005-06 Prisoners Aid was as busy as ever. Over 200 family visits to prisoners in NSW and two to a prisoner in Victoria received financial and other support. The two part-time Court Assistance and Referral Service staff were dealing with 200 or more clients each month including many released prisoners, and now made regular visits to the Belconnen Remand Centre. For some years Prisoners Aid contributed to a welfare fund for the benefit of detainees at the Centre and supplied art materials for their use. This kind of support would not otherwise have been available to detainees. At this time Geoff Potts was appointed Official Visitor at the Remand Centre.

The following year a Prisoners Aid member, Dr Vernon Bailey, secured funding from the Uniting Church in Canberra to set up a work experience program for released prisoners. The program was aimed at ex-prisoners likely to have difficulty in finding employment and entailed one day of supervised work per week over eight weeks. A small number of people benefited from this but it proved difficult to find enough employers to keep the program viable.

In the second half of 2006 two social work students from the Australian Catholic University conducted a small survey of Prisoners Aid clients as part of their degree work. This was a challenging task as clients are often reluctant to talk to people they do not know and to provide information which they want to be confidential. The survey employed a questionnaire and, although the sample was small, the results were encouraging. All respondents expressed appreciation for the support which they had received from Prisoners Aid – whether financial, emotional or

⁷² *The forgotten victims of crime*, Recommendations 1 and 6.

simply the provision of information – and all were very satisfied with the level of service provided.⁷³

⁷³ Meg Price, Crystol Fox, *The Usefulness and Visibility of the Prisoners Aid (ACT) and Court Assistance and Referral Services in the Australian Capital Territory*, 2006.

8 DECIDING ON THE PRISON: 1995 - 2004

In 1995 a Periodic Detention Program (as recommended by the Vinson Report) came into operation and this seemed to clear the way for a fresh run at the plan for an ACT prison. Some uncertainty was created when Kate Carnell, the Chief Minister of an ACT Liberal government, announced that some ACT prisoners could be housed in Cooma gaol which the NSW government was planning to close down. A letter to the *Canberra Times* from Hugh Smith as President of Prisoners Aid criticised the Chief Minister's suggestion on the grounds that this would defeat the key purpose of keeping prisoners in contact with their families and that Cooma gaol itself was antiquated and run-down.⁷⁴

The Attorney-General, Gary Humphries, who for some years had advocated a privately-operated prison, took the view that serious consideration should now be given to the construction of a prison in the ACT. In 1996 he asked ACT Corrective Services to develop a paper in order to promote public discussion of the proposal. In his Foreword to the Discussion Paper issued in December the Attorney-General observed that the ACT 'has a unique opportunity to build a "model" correctional facility'. The design of the prison should be compatible with '[m]odern prison management styles' which were considered difficult to implement in old prisons. The ACT, moreover, was fortunate in that it did not have 'an entrenched prison culture to overcome'.⁷⁵

The case for an ACT prison was based on similar grounds to those found in *Paying the Price*. The Discussion Paper, however, went into greater detail on problems of implementation such as expected numbers of detainees, the likely needs of various categories of prisoners, the management of detainees, rehabilitation programs, staff recruitment and training, and principles for the design of the prison. Women, the Paper assumed, would be sent to the ACT prison and would require appropriate facilities and training opportunities.

Several other important issues were raised in the Discussion Paper. It accepted that the Belconnen Remand Centre was poorly designed, required high levels of maintenance, and frequently exceeded its normal capacity, while its small size made it one of the most expensive custodial institutions per detainee in Australia. Though government policy was to keep remand and sentenced detainees in separate facilities, the Paper recommended a combined institution essentially on economic grounds.

Another controversial issue that led to much debate was flagged by the Discussion Paper – namely whether or not the prison should be run by the government or by private enterprise. About one quarter of the Paper was devoted to this issue.⁷⁶ Liberal governments in the ACT and in the national parliament were interested in

⁷⁴ Letters, *Canberra Times*, 21 November 1996.

⁷⁵ *The possible establishment of a correctional facility in the Australian Capital Territory, Discussion Paper*, ACT Attorney-General's Department, ACT Government Printer, 1996.

⁷⁶ *Discussion Paper*, chapters 4, 5.

promoting competition in the corrections sector, and four states already had private companies running prisons alongside public sector prisons. The Paper canvassed various arguments for and against private prisons, ranging from philosophical principles through staff considerations to the sheer difficulty of costing prison operations. Another factor to consider was the advisability of the ACT relying solely on a private prison rather than a mix of public and private as was the case in the four states. In the end it was proposed that ACT Corrective Services should prepare a detailed, fully costed proposal 'in confidence' covering various alternatives. The government could then decide whether or not to initiate a competitive tendering process for running the prison.

Further government studies followed. In 1997 ACT Corrective Services recommended that 'the construction in the ACT of a new 300 bed multi-purpose correctional facility should commence as soon as possible'.⁷⁷ In September 1997 an informal inquiry into corrections by the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Legal Affairs reported positively on the construction of a prison, recommending amongst other things that regional prisoners from NSW could be accommodated as a way of recouping costs. Some members of the committee reported that they had been initially sceptical about the need for a prison but were convinced by visits to modern facilities in NSW and Queensland and by the argument that strong family relationships were vital.⁷⁸

At this time about 80 ACT offenders were held in NSW prisons on any given day at a total cost of about \$5 million p.a. This payment at least would no longer be required once the ACT had its own prison. In addition, removal of the Remand Centre to another site would free up valuable land in the centre of Belconnen. But it was clear that a prison would not be cheap to build or cheap to operate.

By October 1998 the government was ready to announce a timetable for the construction of the prison though the matter of where it was to be located remained open. This and other issues were referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety of the ACT Legislative Assembly. It received 50 submissions, including one from Prisoners Aid, one from Bill Aldcroft in his private capacity and one from the Society of Friends. At public hearings in March-June 1999 some 38 individuals and 16 organisations gave evidence, including Prisoners Aid (Hugh Smith) and the Society of Friends (Brian Turner and Bill Aldcroft, both of whom were also members of Prisoners Aid).

The Standing Committee's first interim report in July 1999 endorsed Minister Humphries' view that the ACT faced a unique opportunity to build a model prison; it also noted the community's interest in and goodwill towards the prison project. The report examined the usual range of arguments for and against a prison. Two relatively new objections considered were that prisons had 'historically failed to rehabilitate, reform or "deter" criminal activity' and that many prisoners were drug users who needed health programs rather than imprisonment. Nonetheless, the Committee found the arguments in favour of a prison persuasive and recommended that 'an ACT prison complex (including a remand centre) be

⁷⁷ *The Future Correctional Needs of the Australian Capital Territory to the Year 2020*, 1997.

⁷⁸ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Hansard*, 4 September 1997, p. 2904.

established'.⁷⁹ The report then went on to consider various factors relating to the choice of a site for the prison and commented on a number of specific locations.

The second interim report of the Standing Committee in October 1999 presented more detail on how the prison should operate and how any competitive tendering should be managed. Recommendation 2 set out a high ambition:

that the guiding philosophy of the prison facility be directed towards rehabilitation, restorative justice and reintegration into society.⁸⁰

Of particular interest to Prisoners Aid was the emphasis on post-release programs and on the need to make family visits as simple and easy as possible. Notably, the report regarded a good bus service on each visiting day as essential while visiting facilities needed to be comfortable and appropriately designed, including a play area for children and facilities for babies and infants.⁸¹ The report also noted Prisoners Aid's belief that the prison should be government-run as this would reinforce 'the principle that prisoners are still part of the community'.⁸²

In February 2000 the Minister for Justice and Community Safety announced the creation of a broad-based ACT Prison Community Panel as part of an important and necessary process of community consultation. With Jim Leedman as chair, there were 19 members drawn from a wide range of government and non-government stakeholders.⁸³ Hugh Smith represented Prisoners Aid while Geoff Potts, a member of Prisoners Aid, participated in his capacity as Official Visitor at the Belconnen Remand Centre. The Panel differed from all of its predecessors that had examined the prison proposal in that it did not have to consider arguments against a prison. It was set up on the clear assumption that there would be a prison.

The Panel's report nonetheless went through the arguments *for* a prison which it found to be 'overwhelming'. It also stressed the urgent need to replace the Belconnen Remand Centre which it considered no longer fit for purpose.⁸⁴ Topics examined included: prison culture, health management, prison programs, prisoner employment, staffing, prison governance, consideration of ATSI and female detainees, security and prison design. Of particular interest to Prisoners Aid were recommendations relating to family visits, community education, transitional release, and a Prisoner Support Program.

The report also concluded that continuing contact with families was important to rehabilitation and thus required both a convenient bus service to the prison and good visitor facilities. Relatives should be encouraged to make visits and community groups should be involved in courses and activities of various kinds.

⁷⁹ *Future Correctional Needs*, pp. 12, 14.

⁸⁰ Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, *The Proposed ACT Prison Facility: Philosophy and Principles*, Second interim report in the prison series, October 1999, p. 31.

⁸¹ *The Proposed ACT Prison Facility*, pp. 50-1.

⁸² *The Proposed ACT Prison Facility*, p. 75.

⁸³ Report of the ACT Prison Community Panel, *An ACT Prison – Getting it Right*, December 2000, p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Getting it Right*, p. 12. At 30 June 2000 there were 63 detainees in BRC and 159 sentenced prisoners in NSW prisons.

Broad community support for the prison was regarded as ‘essential’ so the philosophy and functions of the prison needed to be explained to the public. Various options for the transitional release of prisoners into the community were also proposed, including work release, day release and weekend release. In addition, both pre-release and post-release centres in the form of accommodation located outside the main prison needed to be examined and resources allocated.

The proposed transitional arrangements tied in with the Prisoner Support Program advocated by Prisoners Aid. Based on volunteers the Program would begin with visits while a prisoner was still incarcerated and aim at setting up necessary supports for the prisoner on release, including referral to various organisations and maintaining personal contact through meetings and phone calls. The Panel recognised that such a Program would require a budget and one or more full-time workers who would organise and train volunteers and establish contact with the families of prisoners. The Program would also require ‘at least one office’ at the prison.⁸⁵

On 17 April 2001 the ACT government received a report from Keith Hamburger, a former Director General of Corrective Services in Queensland. Entitled *ACT Prison Project* his report set out in some detail factors to be considered in the design, operation, financing and the timing of transfers from NSW to the new prison. The following month on 30 May the Liberal government led by Gary Humphries announced that a prison was to be built in the ACT. The site would be chosen by 2004 with a view to completing the project by 2007. But there would be a few twists and turns before the first prisoner arrived in March 2009.

In an election in October 2001 the Humphries government was defeated and a Labor government under Jon Stanhope took office in coalition with the Greens and the Democrats. Stanhope proved to be a strong advocate for the prison project and ensured its progress despite criticism from various quarters over the expense involved and delays in completion amongst other issues.

ACT Corrective Services set up a Prison Project team led by John Paget, a former senior corrections official in South Australia with experience in building prisons. In November 2002 the team published a paper entitled *From Exclusion to Inclusion – a report on the role of the local community in the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners*. Prisoners Aid welcomed the paper’s recognition of the therapeutic value of interaction between detainees and their family, friends and the local community as a means of promoting rehabilitation and eventual reintegration into society – principles which were maintained throughout the planning stage.

⁸⁵ *Getting it Right*, pp. 61-9.

9 PRISON – THE LAST LAP

By 2004 the government had determined that the prison would be located in the suburb of Hume in the south of Canberra. Over the years sites as dispersed as Gungahlin, Majura, Symonston and Honeysuckle Creek (about 30 km outside Canberra) had been touted. For Prisoners Aid Hume was a highly satisfactory outcome as it was not far from the city and near the light industrial suburbs of Hume and Fyshwick where employment might be found. After preliminary siteworks the main contract for building the facility was let to Bovis Lend Lease in October 2006 at a projected cost of \$113 million. After decades of debate concrete was at last to be poured.

At an early stage in the design of the prison I was invited to visit the Prison Project office where John Paget asked me whether Prisoners Aid wanted an office inside the secure area of the prison or at the visitors entry.⁸⁶ Our members had discussed the sort of service we wanted to provide at the prison and it was clear that we should be operate where we would have best contact with families and friends visiting prisoners. The office allocated to PA is located in the area where visitors arrive and wait before entering the prison itself.

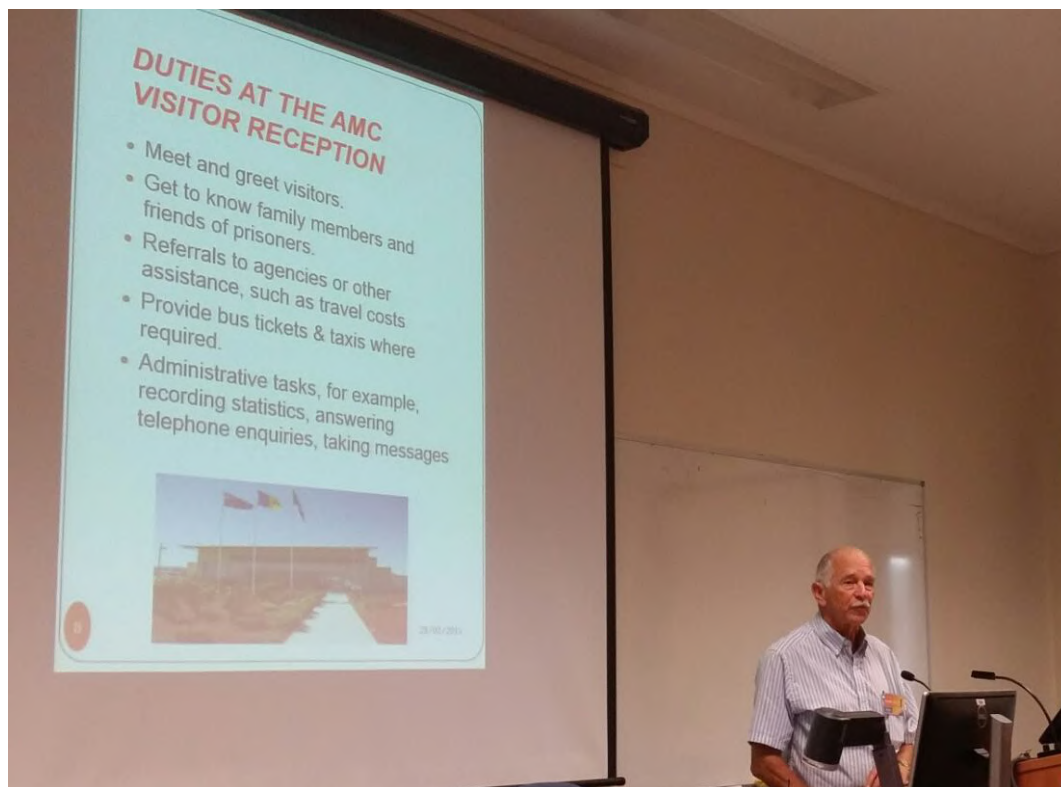


VISITOR ENTRY AT AMC

⁸⁶ As it happened I knew John Paget from his time as an Army officer at the Royal Military College Duntroon when I was on the academic staff there.

Prisoners Aid was heavily occupied in planning for its activities at the prison – which was to be called the Alexander Maconochie Centre [AMC]. A sub-committee was set up in 2006 and met monthly. The key idea was to employ a part-time staff member at AMC who would be based in the office planned for Prisoners Aid in the Visitor Entry Area. A roster of volunteers would supplement the work of the staff member and ensure a Prisoners Aid presence for all visiting times. (This was ambitious as visits to AMC were initially permitted on seven days of the week.) The staff member or a volunteer would make contact with visitors either on their arrival or as they left after their visit. In addition, the staff member could visit prisoners inside with the permission of the Superintendent. This expansion of PA services was made more possible by an additional grant of \$20,000 from Corrective Services.

The sub-committee also developed separate Charters for Clients, Volunteers and Staff together with a mission statement and a set of values. A training day for volunteers – new and old – was conducted in 2007 in anticipation of the prison opening on schedule. To better support its volunteers Prisoners Aid decided that one of its Vice-Presidents would be designated as having responsibility for volunteers while the other would be responsible for administrative matters.



**TRAINING SESSION FOR VOLUNTEERS
PLANNING TO ASSIST AT AMC
(Brian Turner at the lectern)**

Prisoners Aid had also been participating in the Community Coalition on Corrections since its inception in 1998. Under the auspices of the ACT Council of Social Service representatives from about 20 non-government agencies met from time to time to discuss issues relating to the prison. The Coalition was committed to the ideals of the prison but was particularly concerned to ensure that proper consideration would be given to drug rehabilitation, mental health and post-release support. It also sought to establish the principle that the wider community had a clear right to be involved in the future prison system.

A more institutional form of successor to the Coalition met on 19 March 2008 at the initiative of the Attorney-General, Simon Corbell, who chaired the first meeting. This was the AMC Community Reference Group which included staff from Corrective Services and representatives of interested community organisations, including Prisoners Aid. The purpose of the Group, Corbell explained, was not to manage the prison but to advise on issues, particularly where prisoner needs were not being met. The Group would also be a vehicle for informing the wider community about AMC. The Group met only a few times and ceased to exist in 2010. The Minister did not maintain his intention to attend every meeting while Corrections staff found presentation of reports time-consuming when day-to-day matters were pressing.

More encouraging was the seminar on *Inclusive Practices: ACT Prisoners and their Families* on 22 April 2008 which was opened by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, and which Prisoners Aid attended. It was clear that the government accepted the view that maximising prospects for prisoner rehabilitation required coordination between a wide range of governmental and non-governmental agencies. The plans for case management and after-care of prisoners on release were also highly progressive (though proving difficult to implement in practice). The imminent opening of the prison was also signified by the attendance of Prisoners Aid volunteers at a security awareness training course run by AMC in August 2008.

The inevitable prison?

Prisoners Aid had supported the construction of a prison in the ACT since the first public seminar in 1975 and had contributed to the public debate in various ways. These included not only involvement in major reports – *Paying the Price* (1992) and *An ACT Prison: Getting it Right* (2000) – but also submissions to committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly, letters to the *Canberra Times*, and participation in the Community Corrections Coalition, the AMC Community Reference Group and ACTCOSS's public forum on 'The community sector and the ACT Prison' in May 2006. During these years the prison was by no means a certainty but the tenor of the debate was largely favourable. There was a broad consensus in three main areas.

First, discussion of the prison in the ACT was almost always focused on the rehabilitation of prisoners. This may seem the obvious approach but in the 1990s several other jurisdictions in Australia turned towards a more punitive approach to

corrections.⁸⁷ Those who supported this trend claimed that rehabilitation was a ‘soft option’ that reduced the deterrent effect of prison and led to loss of public confidence in the prison system. Judges, it was argued, should determine sentences; allowing other authorities to decide when and under what conditions a prisoner should be released undermined the justice system. Such views are still to be found from time to time but by and large the ACT debate focused on rehabilitation rather than retribution.

A second, related factor was the broadly bipartisan nature of support for a prison in Canberra. As noted earlier, the ACT Liberal Party came out in favour of a prison as early as 1988 while the Labor Party had long been sympathetic to the idea. Some party political differences emerged over the cost of a prison but the most contentious issue was that of privately-run versus public prisons with Liberals more ready to look at options in the private sector. The ALP together with the Community and Public Sector Union were suspicious of a commercially operated prison and perhaps prepared to oppose one altogether on this basis.

Once this issue was out of the way, however, critics – apart from those opposed to a prison on principle – tended to find fault with the process rather than the project itself, pointing to the choice of location, delays in site selection, the types of prisoner to be accommodated, construction issues, contract mismanagement, failure to consult widely enough and the like. Nevertheless, the project did find strong political support on the part of Jon Stanhope as Chief Minister from 2001 to 2011. Without this the delays, costs and obstacles in the way of the prison might not have been overcome as soon as they were.

Third, human rights were accepted as important in the corrections field. As early as 1984 the deputy chair of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Peter Bailey, had observed that ACT prisoners sent to NSW gaols were ‘the forgotten people’ and that a prison in the ACT was ‘amply justified’ on human rights grounds.⁸⁸ In April 2002 the Chief Minister and Attorney-General of the ACT, Jon Stanhope, established the ACT Bill of Rights Consultative Committee to consider a possible bill of rights for the ACT.

In September 2002 Prisoners Aid made a submission to the inquiry arguing that any bill of rights should include reference to the internationally-recognised rights of prisoners on the grounds that individuals remained citizens even when held in detention.

The report of the Consultative Committee cited the key argument of Prisoners Aid’s submission: ‘precisely because prisoners are deprived of their liberty and other rights such as free communication with others, it is important to spell out their basic entitlements’. It also recommended that a bill of rights take the form of an Act of the Legislative Assembly rather than an entrenched bill of rights to be interpreted by the judiciary.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Mackay, ‘The Road to the ACT’s First Prison’, pp. 47-52.

⁸⁸ ‘Building of jail in ACT “amply justified”’, *Canberra Times*, 16 February 1984.

⁸⁹ ‘Towards an ACT *Human Rights Act*’, May 2003, p. 88, p. 2.

In 2004 the ACT Legislative Assembly passed the *Human Rights Act* which effectively incorporated elements of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, in particular Article 10 (1):

All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

The *Human Rights Act* also stated that no-one may be ‘treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way’ as well as making more detailed provisions about the rights of individuals concerning treatment on arrest, the conduct of a fair trial, the presumption of innocence, and compensation for wrongful arrest or detention.

Later that year ACT Corrective Services held a forum, attended by over 100 interested parties (including Prisoners Aid), to ‘increase awareness of human rights within a correctional framework’.⁹⁰ It was clear that the ACT government had committed to planning a human rights compliant prison and this was often presented as the first such project in Australia, if not in the world.⁹¹

In 2005 the ACT Human Rights Commission was set up by legislation with authority to investigate any human rights issues arising in the Territory. The acceptance of human rights in relation to AMC meant the Commission had standing to report on the observance of human rights in the prison. It has done this on occasion, notably in its Human Rights Audit on the *Treatment of Women at the Alexander Maconochie Centre* issued in 2014. The Commission also produced a factsheet in 2018 on the *Right to Humane Treatment in Detention* in which it refers to a Supreme Court decision to the effect that humane treatment includes providing a prisoner with an opportunity for ‘useful work’.⁹² The emphasis on human rights in the AMC has been maintained with the publication by the Directorate of Justice and Community Safety of a booklet entitled *Human Rights Principles for ACT Correctional Centres* in January 2019.

Finally, there was widespread support in the community for the view that prison had to be seen as – and actually be – a last resort.⁹³ Up to 1975 the ACT courts had few options other than fines on the one hand and imprisonment on the other. Magistrates and judges were among the most vocal in pressing for wider choice in sentencing. Over the following years programs including probation and parole, community service orders and periodic detention were set up and a remand facility was built. Even those who argued that offenders deserved severe punishment

⁹⁰ ACT Corrective Services, *Developing a human rights framework for corrective services*, Canberra 2 July 2004. Of particular interest to Prisoners Aid was the session on ‘Maintaining links with the community’.

⁹¹ See Anita Mackay, ‘Operationalising human rights law in Australia: Establishing a human rights culture in the new Canberra prison and transforming the culture of Victoria police’, *Law in Context*, vol. 31 (2014) pp. 261-296; and Lorana Bartels, ‘The ACT Prison: Human Rights Rhetoric Versus Crowded and Bored Reality’, *Court of Conscience*, no. 9, pp. 14-15.

⁹² The case was *Eastman vs. Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Justice and Community Safety* (2010).

⁹³ Anita Mackay, ‘The Road to the ACT’s First Prison (The Alexander Maconochie Centre) was Paved with Rehabilitative Intentions’, *Canberra Law Review*, vol. 11 no. 1 (2012), pp. 40-2.

accepted that lesser crimes could be dealt with more cheaply and more effectively outside prison. It is fair to say that these alternatives needed to be in place before a prison could be built.

10 THE AMC ERA: 2008 - 2020

The ceremonial opening of the Alexander Maconochie Centre by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, took place on 11 September 2008 despite the fact that the prison was not ready to accept prisoners. The planned hi-tech security system had experienced numerous problems and it took a further six months before the first prisoners – remandees from the Belconnen Remand Centre – arrived on 30 March 2009. This delay caused difficulties at both BRC and in NSW prisons which were overcrowded at that time. It also prompted the Liberal opposition in the Legislative Assembly to initiate an inquiry.

On 21 January 2009 the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety resolved to examine the causes of the delay and its consequences. In its sights were the timing of the official opening, aspects of the management of the project, the financial cost of the delays, and the impact of the delays on sentenced prisoners in NSW and remandees in BRC. This was met with varied reactions with the Minister for Corrections, John Hargreaves, calling it a ‘counterproductive witch-hunt’ while the Attorney-General, Simon Corbell, saw it as ‘a valuable opportunity to clear the air’.⁹⁴ On 4 March 2009 Hugh Smith appeared before the Standing Committee as President of Prisoners Aid, testifying as to the situation of prisoners and their families. The Committee’s report made some 25 findings – mostly critical but none opposing the prison – and 11 recommendations.⁹⁵

From March to July 2009 the AMC received its full complement of prisoners, first from BRC and then from NSW gaols. A new member of Prisoners Aid, Wayne Hutchison, who had a background in psychology, was appointed to a part-time position with the task of setting up the new office. At an early stage Wayne received permission from the Superintendent of AMC to enter the prison to speak with detainees. To increase the number of volunteers who would be available for duty in the Prisoners Aid office at AMC, a further training session was held in July 2009.

CARS continued to function as before through the work of Bill Aldcroft and volunteer support from time to time, Seija Talviharju having left to work for Headspace after a decade of outstanding service (and later returning to Prisoners Aid as a private member). One valuable arrangement was a free phone line for prisoners in AMC to call the Court Assistance and Referral Office, as had been the case for detainees in BRC.

In the nine months from July 2008 to March 2009 Prisoners Aid had assisted 34 families to visit relatives in NSW prisons (and one detainee in Victoria), making a total of about 114 visits. As most of these prisoners were progressively ‘repatriated’ to the AMC, the need for this kind of assistance diminished but did

⁹⁴ ACT Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, *Inquiry into the delay in the commencement of operations at the Alexander Maconochie Centre*, Report 3, (November 2009), pp. 6-7.

⁹⁵ *Inquiry into the delay*, 2009, pp. v-viii.

not disappear altogether. The families of ACT residents who committed crimes in NSW (or elsewhere) and found themselves in prison in that state were still assisted to make visits. Prisoners Aid also decided that it would support visits to prisoners in AMC by relatives living outside the ACT on the grounds that this would contribute to the rehabilitation of the prisoner and to the good order of the prison.

Another travel issue that arose after the opening of AMC was that in some cases relatives of prisoners had great difficulty in making the trip to AMC and back, especially if they did not have use of a car. The bus service was infrequent and often did not coincide with visiting times. Even when the schedule was suitable, moreover, bus travel did not necessarily suit the frail or handicapped person or the visitor with several children in tow. Almost always they would need to make one change and quite commonly two changes of bus both there and back. Prisoners Aid decided that it would assist such people by paying taxi fares on a case-by-case basis and on a limited number of occasions.

Given the major changes taking place at this time Prisoners Aid decided that an external review of its operations would be appropriate. This was undertaken in 2010 *pro bono* by Alan Hodges, a member of the board of Communities@Work. Alan put in much time and effort, consulting widely with PA members and outside agencies (including the Community Restorative Centre in Sydney, formerly the Civil Rehabilitation Committee). Following a comprehensive and constructive examination the review concluded that Prisoners Aid was ‘a highly respected organisation [which] fills an essential community need’.⁹⁶ It made a total of 30 recommendations (including the draft of an entirely new constitution), the great majority of which the executive readily adopted over a period of time.

By 2010-11 Prisoners Aid was receiving increased grants from Community Services (\$83,881) and ACT Corrections (\$50,808). This allowed the employment of a second part-time staff member, Christine Moore, to be based at the AMC office from November 2010. Bill Aldcroft remained in the CARS office in the Magistrates Court and began fielding phone calls from prisoners in AMC once the direct line was established. Bill spent many patient hours over several years talking to one regular caller from the prison.

The Annual Report for 2010-11 listed some of the ways in which Prisoners Aid provided support in the 12-month period:

- 24 fares to rehabilitation centres
- 156 payments to prisoners released from AMC
- 75 cases of travel assistance for ACT families to visit prisoners in NSW prisons
- 13 cases of travel assistance for inter-state residents to visit detainees in AMC
- 357 visitors to the CARS office
- 229 phone calls received from AMC detainees.

⁹⁶ Communities@Work, *Prisoners Aid (ACT) Inc: Operational Review*, 21 June 2010, p. ii.

Small payments to prisoners on their release were made because many were coming out with little or no money and had to wait 2-3 weeks before government benefits came through. Also important was funding travel to rehabilitation centres when this was ordered by the courts as part of a sentence. The centres were located in Sydney or elsewhere in NSW, and offenders were expected to make their own way there – with predictable results. There was no official provision to ensure this happened so Prisoners Aid regularly purchased travel tickets and often saw the individual onto the bus or train. This practice still continues.

In the course of 2011-12 Prisoners Aid underwent a major staff re-organisation. After more than 20 years with Prisoners Aid Bill Aldcroft was retiring (again). His loyal service was recognised not only by Prisoners Aid which made him a Life Member, but also by the Chief Magistrate, Lorraine Walker, who signed a formal Certificate of Appreciation citing his ‘ongoing generosity to the ACT Magistrates Court and the ACT Community’.

Given Bill’s retirement and the fact that having three part-time staff was not working well, a review of staffing was commissioned from Geoff Potts, a long-time member and supporter of Prisoners Aid with broad experience in corrections. In a written report of February 2012 his strong recommendation was to replace two of the part-time positions with a full-time manager. Prisoners Aid endorsed the finding and advertised the new position widely while Geoff acted as interim manager. Our first full-time manager, Paul Thompson started work in May 2012 and was based at the CARS office.

Thanks in large measure to Paul’s efforts, Prisoners Aid made good progress across a number of fronts. First, membership was doubled from about 12 volunteers to 25 and induction courses were organised for prospective members. This helped particularly in expanding PA’s presence at the AMC and hence in improving contacts with and support for prisoners’ families.

Second, Prisoners Aid set up a panel of trained volunteers to work in the Court Assistance and Referral Service in the Magistrates Court. Numbers rose from two initially to four or five. Their role was to assist the manager in dealing with clients and to fill in for him when on leave or called away on other duties. Once these volunteers were fully experienced and prepared to commit to full mornings in the CARS office, Prisoners Aid began to pay them an honorarium to cover expenses and as an acknowledgement of their value.

Third, Prisoners Aid became more closely involved in prisoner throughcare. The manager, assisted on occasions by volunteers, interviewed prisoners in the AMC shortly before their release in order to identify major areas of need. By way of example, driving licences – or lack of them – proved a common problem and Prisoners Aid began assisting released prisoners to obtain or renew their licence. This marked the start of what was to become an enduring form of cooperation when ACT Corrective Services instituted its formal Throughcare system in mid-2013.

Fourth, Paul boosted our finances by taking part in several of the annual CEO sleep-outs in Canberra organised by St Vincent de Paul, each time raising a substantial sum for Prisoners Aid. He also arranged for a donation from the North Belconnen Baptist Church which he attended.

Finally, Paul began the major task of bringing Prisoners Aid into the modern age. We joined Facebook, acquired our own domain name, began using a logo and developed a range of merchandise such as pens and T-shirts to publicise our work. A quarterly newsletter was initiated by Paul and circulated among interested parties. All of these developments helped to raise the profile of Prisoners Aid in the corrections, welfare and legal communities and made our presence better known to prospective clients. This was further helped by Paul qualifying to serve as a Justice of the Peace.



PAUL THOMPSON (Manager. left) and BRIAN TURNER (President)

The first half of 2012 also saw the introduction of a system of prequalification by the Community Services Directorate. Non-government agencies providing human services were required to meet a range of requirements before they were eligible to receive a funding grant. Eligibility would last for three years and then need to be reviewed. The proposal was challenged by Prisoners Aid on the grounds that producing a large amount of documentation – in relation to about 40 policies, procedures and safeguards – was an undue and unnecessary burden, especially for

small agencies.⁹⁷ The Directorate pressed on with its policy and PA successfully met all requirements. However, in February 2013 PA was pleased to attend a 'Red-tape Reduction Forum' as part of the ACT Government's Community Sector Reform Program. One helpful advance was a reduction in grant reporting requirements. Prequalification was never heard of again.

The year 2013-14 was a significant one for Prisoners Aid (ACT). We reached our 50th year of operation and held a birthday party in September 2013 that was well attended by members and others involved in corrections. Our anniversary was also marked by the ACT Chief Minister's Gold Award Certificate for 50 Years of Community Service presented at a civic ceremony in April 2014.



**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE
Rosemary Godfrey (Volunteer), Minister Shane Rattenbury,
Claire Natoli (Volunteer) and Paul Thompson (Manager)**

At the AGM in November 2013 Brian Turner became President, much to the relief of Hugh Smith who took over as Secretary and was made a Life Member. As a temporary measure PA's monthly meetings had been held at the Wesley Uniting Church in Forrest while the Friends Meeting House was being refurbished. Prisoners Aid now returned to the comfortable and convenient premises in Turner.

⁹⁷ Letter from the President to the Minister for Community Services, Ms Joy Burch, 27 March 2012.

This facilitated our practice of inviting visiting speakers to give a short talk of about 15 minutes – followed by questions and answers – on a topic of interest to members. In the first year we heard from representatives of Communities@Work, StreetLaw, and Greg Stretton, Senior Counsel. We also took advantage of a speaker visiting from Singapore to co-host with the Society of Friends a seminar on that country’s Yellow Ribbon program which organised employers to provide jobs for prisoners on their release.

In May 2014 we welcomed a new part-time staff member, Adele Morton, who had extensive experience in corrections in NSW and who began work in the CARS office as Assistant Manager. Membership also increased and we ran two recruiting and training meetings for volunteers as well as a strategic planning day. For the first time we arranged for hampers with food and toiletries to be packed prior to Christmas 2014. These were distributed to newly-released prisoners and to the families of prisoners in need. ‘Hamper-packing Day’ became an annual fixture in December with volunteers, staff, family members and others – including on occasions the Minister for Corrections, Shane Rattenbury – taking part.



SUCCESSFUL HAMPER-PACKING 2019

Our part-time Assistant Manager began visiting women prisoners and male remandees at AMC for half a day per group each week. Partly to facilitate this Prisoners Aid decided that Adele would move to our AMC office in May 2015 for the three days a week that she worked. This also enhanced our service to visitors and our capacity to mentor volunteers working with visitors to the prison.

In October 2014 Brian Turner as President and Hugh Smith as Secretary gave evidence to an inquiry into sentencing by the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety of the ACT Legislative Assembly. This testimony and Prisoners Aid's written submission to the inquiry (made in April 2014) were extensively summarised in the report of the Committee.⁹⁸ PA's key argument was that both Intensive Corrections Orders and the Extended Throughcare program which had begun in 2013 should be adequately funded and this was endorsed in the report.

Activity increased across the board in 2014-15. Funding assistance was given for 101 interstate visits to AMC and 29 visits by ACT families to interstate prisons. Some 367 trips by bus and taxi within Canberra were also funded, mostly for visits to AMC. In addition, 19 individuals were assisted with travel to an interstate rehabilitation centre as ordered by the courts. Property retrieval was undertaken for 56 prisoners and emergency accommodation found for 18 released detainees. On literally hundreds of occasions information, advice and support on a wide range of client concerns were provided over the phone or in person.

In June 2015 Hugh Smith, now Vice-President (Administration), was made a Member of the Order of Australia in part for service to the community through Prisoners Aid as well as for academic work in the field of military sociology.⁹⁹ Also at this time Prisoners Aid initiated its Participate Program which paid for the children of prisoners to take part in out-of-school activities such as dance or swimming lessons that their family could not otherwise afford. This, PA believed, would not only benefit the child but also reassure the parent in prison that their son or daughter was not missing out on opportunities. A new member, Kate Smyth, made a major contribution to the program until work responsibilities necessitated her resignation. Initial funding of \$2,500 had been provided by the Snow Foundation, later supplemented by other community sources, and 20 or so children have so far received support.

In December 2015 the part-time Assistant Manager, Adele Morton, resigned and the position was re-designated as AMC Coordinator to more accurately reflect the duties entailed. One of PA's existing volunteers, Summer Leiper, was appointed in April 2016 and began to actively develop the role. One issue at AMC that came up at this time was greater security requirements for volunteers working at the prison. There were constructive discussions with ACT Corrections, and Prisoners Aid agreed that its volunteers at AMC would obtain a Working with Vulnerable People card and undertake AMC's Security Awareness Course which was offered once a month.

In April 2016 Prisoners Aid made a submission to another inquiry by the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety of the ACT Legislative Assembly

⁹⁸ ACT Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, *Inquiry into Sentencing*, Report no. 4 (March 2015), pp. 176-83.

⁹⁹ As an academic with UNSW at RMC Duntroon my interest in prisons was sparked in part by the sociological similarities between prisons and military units. On taking up appointment at Duntroon a colleague, Gerry Walsh, gave me a copy of an essay by Erving Goffman entitled 'Asylums' which examined the parallels between prisons, military units, monasteries and mental asylums.

which was examining a report by the ACT Auditor-General entitled *The Rehabilitation of Male Detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre*.¹⁰⁰ Brian Turner, Hugh Smith and Shobha Varkey (Vice-President) subsequently testified before a public hearing in May. The Committee's report covered the significant issues raised by PA's submission and oral evidence i.e. the importance of 'purposeful activity' and 'meaningful work' for prisoners, the problems for visitors to AMC, mental health concerns, throughcare and families of prisoners.¹⁰¹ The report and the government response were strongly supportive of the goal of effective rehabilitation.

Another significant activity was a public seminar in the Griffin Centre conducted by Prisoners Aid as a contribution to the ACT Mental Health Forum in October 2016. Karen Maglasis (a member of the CARS Panel) and Paul Thompson organised the well-attended event which included presentations by the Acting Director of Corrective Services and Associate Professor Lorana Bartels (a member of Prisoners Aid).

At the monthly meetings speakers included local politicians, academics and representatives of community organisations. Hugh Smith returned to the presidency while Stacey Little as Public Officer led work on updating the constitution; Helen Stone revised the grievance procedures for staff, members and clients; and Shobha Varkey worked on modernising PA's presence on Facebook and the PA website.

In April 2017 the full-time Manager, Paul Thompson, departed after nearly five years of valuable service. As well as his other contributions he had initiated the practice of Prisoners Aid taking on tertiary students for a period of time as part of their diploma or degree requirements in social work, law and the like. This has proved valuable both to students who get a sense of the practical problems faced by prisoners and their families and to Prisoners Aid which enjoys an extra pair of hands and a fresh perspective on its activities.

In the gap between Paul Thompson's departure and the arrival of his successor the challenge of keeping the CARS office open for business was met by volunteers – notably Shobha Varkey, Brian Turner and Hugh Smith – and our CARS panel which included Karen Maglasis, Julia Liu and Alvin Wang. The arrival of Glen Tibbitts as Manager in July 2017 brought a new sense of purpose to the position. Glen related well to clients and soon established good working relations with both ACT Corrective Services and a range of non-government agencies. He was assisted in the office by members of the CARS panel and client contacts remained at a very high level.

Staff changes also occurred in the AMC Coordinator position with Summer Leiper leaving PA in May 2017 for a full-time position at AMC. Her successor, Pooja Mallik, stayed all too briefly, leaving for a full-time position with ACT

¹⁰⁰ Report No. 2/2015.

¹⁰¹ ACT Legislative Assembly, Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, *Inquiry into the Auditor-General's Report on The Rehabilitation of Male Detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre*, Report no. 7 (August 2016), pp. 66-7, 80-2, 88-9, 92-4, 114-5, 115-6.

Community Services in October 2017. Fortunately, PA was able to recruit Janet Reeves to the position starting in May 2018 as she had been volunteering in our CARS office as a panel member. We also welcomed a new Treasurer, Ann Thorpe, a former Chief Finance Officer in Foreign Affairs and Trade, who took over the financial reins in November 2017.

On two occasions members of the executive met with the Director of ACT Corrective Services to clarify the working relationship between Prisoners Aid and the Throughcare Unit. Referrals from the Unit were growing in number as Prisoners Aid could offer services that were not always or easily available through the Unit e.g. obtaining inter-state birth certificates, booking transport, and registering individuals for training courses. This cooperative relationship developed further when Prisoners Aid agreed to purchase mobile phones and issue them to released prisoners. Corrective Services reimburses Prisoners Aid for this and other expenditure but Glen and his assistants put considerable time and effort into the process. Released prisoners who do not qualify for the Throughcare program continue to receive support from Prisoners Aid.



GLEN TIBBITTS (Manager) AT WORK

Support for clients has been made more efficient in various ways. Along with the issue of Essentials Cards for the purchase of groceries, Prisoners Aid has made use of Foodbank to provide basic necessities. For trusted clients who regularly cross

state borders to visit prisoners we opted to make electronic bank transfers rather than issue cheques. For travel by clients within Canberra, Prisoners Aid now makes use of Uber in many cases since it has proved cheaper and more flexible than standard taxis.

In addition, arrangements with other agencies have allowed us to expand what we can offer to clients. St Vincent de Paul's 'Thread Together Clothing Hub' will supply a wide range of clothes. The 'Every Chance To Play' program run by Belconnen Community Service (now Capital Region Community Services) will pay for children of prisoners whom we identify as wanting to take part in major sports activities. This relieves demand on our 'Participate' program which funds children's participation in other out-of-school activities. Prisoners Aid is also registered with the charity 'Givit' which links donors of goods and services with those in need.

By 2018 our net income amounted to about \$187,500 almost all of which came from the Community Services grant of about \$186,000 (the Corrective Services funding having been rolled into that grant). In sharp contrast to our early days when there were no employees, the breakdown of expenditure was approximately: 74% on salaries and related costs, 7% on administration and 19% on direct case assistance.

In November 2018 the AGM elected Caroline Doyle as President while Hugh Smith moved thankfully to Vice-President (Administration). Caroline is the first woman to preside over Prisoners Aid though women have had equal or greater representation on the executive for most of our history. As an academic at UNSW Canberra (which also happens to be the author's former employer), Caroline has research interests in criminology as well as a strong commitment to the practicalities of assistance to clients.

These qualities proved advantageous in 2018-19 when Prisoners Aid involvement with tertiary institutions expanded rapidly. Two students from the Canberra Institute of Technology completed their placement hours with Prisoners Aid while four law students from ANU and the University of Canberra completed studies on topics related to prisoners during their internship with PA. Negotiations with the Australian Catholic University also began with a view to PA hosting some of their social work students.

In the same year the newly-formed ACT Inspectorate of Correctional Services (the first Inspector took office in March 2018) approached Prisoners Aid for assistance with a survey of visitors to AMC. Prisoners Aid members helped with the formulation of a questionnaire and with its distribution to visitors. The findings of the survey contributed to the first so-called 'Healthy Prison Review' which the Inspectorate is required to deliver to the ACT Legislative Assembly every two years.

Prisoners Aid also made a submission to the review on 26 April 2019 setting out ways in which it filled important gaps in services for prisoners, released prisoners and the families of prisoners. The review was extensive and made 71 recommendations concerning the management of AMC together with several

suggestions concerning prison visits.¹⁰² The government accepted 61 of these recommendations and agreed in principle to seven, rejecting only two (relating to the introduction of peer support workers in the admissions centre and funding for a specific administrative position).¹⁰³

In mid-2018 the Court Assistance and Referral Service was able to move into new premises in the ACT Courts building that had just been completed. An official opening of the PA offices by the Minister for Corrections, Shane Rattenbury, took place on 21 September. The premises are located on one side of the main entry area and so are readily accessible to clients. They consist of a more spacious office with adequate room for two desks and considerable storage together with an adjoining interview room. Clients can now talk with a staff member or volunteer in private and without interruption. To add some decoration Prisoners Aid purchased two artworks with an Aboriginal design painted by a prisoner at AMC, one for the CARS office and one for the AMC office.



ARTWORK IN THE COURT ASSISTANCE AND REFERRAL SERVICE OFFICE

Our Manager, Glen Tibbitts, qualified as a Justice of the Peace, which has proved useful to clients (and to others in the court building). In addition, as part of a policy to make itself more widely known and more easily recognisable, the Prisoners Aid website was redesigned and the need for a fresh and more distinctive logo was recognised. A competition to design a new logo was held among detainees in the Alexander Maconochie Centre with a prize of \$100 for the winner and a further \$100 if that design was actually adopted. Prisoners Aid was pleased

¹⁰² *Report of a Review of a Correctional Centre by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services: Healthy Prison Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre, 2019.*

¹⁰³ *Government Response to the Report of a Review of a Correctional Centre by the ACT Inspector of Correctional Services, 2020.*

to announce that the winning entry from AMC would, with some tweaks, be adopted as the new logo. It is to be found on the front cover of this history.

11 COVID-19 IN 2020

In the course of 2020 Prisoners Aid continued to provide the sort of support for detainees, for released prisoners, for their families and for those caught up in the court system that it had been doing for many years:

- Essentials Cards, Foodbank membership, bus tickets
- Local travel by Uber or taxi
- Interstate travel (to AMC, to interstate prisons and rehabilitation centres)
- Temporary accommodation
- Housing costs (rent, electricity, gas garden, removals)
- Birth certificates, driving licences
- Training courses
- Furniture
- Clothing (on release, for court appearances etc.)
- Mobile phones
- Caring for pets
- Mowing lawns
- Retrieving prisoners' property
- Visiting detainees in AMC and in police cells
- Out-of-school activities for children of prisoners
- Small cash payments

Other forms of assistance included referrals to government and non-government agencies, advocacy, help with filling out forms, explanation of Corrective Services' policies and functions, taking phone calls from prisoners, use of office facilities such as phone and copier, accompanying people in court and providing a wide range of personal support. In assisting clients Prisoners Aid has cooperated with ACT Corrective Services, Legal Aid, magistrates, judges, court staff, police and private lawyers, as well as government and non-government agencies of all kinds.

These activities have continued during the Covid-19 pandemic albeit on a reduced scale. The ACT Courts continued to operate and the Court Assistance and Referral Service office stayed open to provide support while observing the standard precautions of sanitisers, hand washing and physical distancing. Fortunately, the demand for student placements has continued and we have been able to meet those requests with some limitations.

The Alexander Maconochie Centre was closed to family visits on 22 March 2020 and as a result the Prisoners Aid presence could not be continued. Janet Reeves, normally based at AMC, began working from home and in the CARS office. Closure of the prison to visitors also meant that PA was no longer called upon for assistance to families travelling to AMC. As from 6 May 2020 PA's monthly meetings and executive meetings were held via video conference; in September 2020 we held a combined video and face-to-face meeting.

On the financial front there is for once an advantage in the fact that Prisoners Aid depends largely on ACT government funding rather than on community donations. Our annual grant is now over \$225,000 p.a. and as long as it continues we are able to pay our staff and provide assistance as required. An additional bonus was a one-off payment of \$10,000 in April 2020 by the federal government together with various tax concessions as part of its assistance to the charities sector. Prisoners Aid staff are following up those families and released prisoners who might be most in need of assistance now or later in the year.

Exactly how Prisoners Aid will come out of the pandemic remains to be seen. We are anticipating a greater call on our resources once AMC re-opens for visitors (expected in September 2020), while released prisoners and the families of prisoners are likely to face greater difficulties if economic conditions worsen. We are also planning to offer assistance to families who do not have their own facilities to make video-visits to relatives in AMC or inter-state prisons. No doubt there will be other ways in which we will have to adapt to changing circumstances. The one thing we can be sure of is that crime and imprisonment will continue and our services will be needed as much as ever.

Reflections

Any community organisation depends ultimately on the contributions of many individuals. From the outset Prisoners Aid has been fortunate in attracting volunteers and staff from a wide variety of backgrounds who believe in the goal of giving prisoners a 'fair go'. PA members recognise that released prisoners often carry additional burdens with them such as addiction or mental health issues as well as facing everyday discrimination in the community. Members also understand that families of prisoners suffer in their own way and they too deserve a 'fair go'. These shared beliefs have made for remarkably harmonious and cooperative relations among our members.

Many individuals have put in long and meritorious service. The pioneers included Dennis Johnson, Chappie Dyson and Jean Moran who got the organisation off to a strong start. In the course of Prisoners Aid's history many other volunteers and staff have made significant and sustained contributions. Some have been mentioned in this history but there are numerous others who also deserve recognition. Their work for Prisoners Aid may not be recorded here but it is not forgotten, not least by the many individuals who have received assistance.

In the early years the Civil Rehabilitation Committee was kept afloat by donations from a number of churches, service clubs and individuals. The TAB and then ACT government grants subsequently took over the main burden. But over the years donations have also come in from sources other than government including private individuals, the Snow Foundation, ACT Law Society, Hands Across Canberra, Southern Cross Club, and the Baptist Church. It is reassuring to see that the problems of prisoners and their families are recognised by other organisations and individuals across the Canberra community.

The work of staff and volunteers can be challenging. Each year is likely to see two or three clients die – from suicide, drug overdose, illness or violence of some kind. Staff and volunteers have attended funerals and wreaths have been sent by Prisoners Aid or organised on behalf of detainees unable to do this themselves. Nevertheless, staff and volunteers have found the work rewarding, however difficult it has been. On leaving the Court Assistance and Referral Service after 12 years Seija Talviharju observed in her report in August 2008 that her position had been 'one of the best community jobs in Canberra'. Many of our members would agree.

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APPENDIX

OFFICE BEARERS 1963 - 2020

Information is taken from Annual Reports. Affiliations, where known, are given at the first mention of a name. 'New members' includes mainly those who later become office-bearers; in some cases members ceased representing their organisation but stayed on as private members.

Year covered

1963	<i>Canberra-Monaro Civil Rehabilitation Committee</i>
Secretary	Captain Elwyn Hopper (Salvation Army) No other records
1964 (calendar)	<i>2nd Annual Report (presented 1965)</i>
President	Rev. Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	Chapman (Chappie) Dyson, K Bogg
Secretary	Bill Smith (Anglican) Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Bill Smith (YWCA)
New Members	Frank Hayes, Jack McSpeerin (ACT Police)
Parole Officer	Ken Lukes
1965	
President	Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	Bill Smith, J Martin (Salvation Army)
Secretary	Noel King (Salvation Army) Case Secretary Jean Moran
Treasurer	Noel King
New members	Ralph Green (Barnado's)
Parole Officer	Ken Lukes
1966	
President	Noel King / Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	Dennis Johnson, Ralph Green
Secretary	Nora Taylor Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	M Ridley
New members	John French (Welfare), Ray Whitrod, Mary Brooks
Parole Officer	Ken Lukes
Jan. 1967 – June 1968	<i>Canberra Civil Rehabilitation Committee</i>
President	Chappie Dyson
Vice-Presidents	Ray Whitrod, Ken Woods
Secretary	Mary Brooks Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Gwen Svoboda
New members	Ken Woods, John Haslem, Tony Ayers, Gladys Skov
Parole Officer	Lorna Bradwell

July 1968 – June 1969

President	Chappie Dyson	
Vice-Presidents	Ken Woods, John French	
Secretary	Mary Brooks	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Gwen Svoboda	Publicity Officer: Margaret Boeve
New members	Ken Graham, Gwen Svoboda, Margaret Boeve, Nora Dixon	
Parole Officer	Lorna Bradwell	

1969 - 1970

President	Ken Woods	
Vice-Presidents	Chappie Dyson, Jack McSpeerin	
Secretary	G Rippon	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Gwen Svoboda	Publicity Officer: Margaret Boeve
New Member	Anne Johnstone	
Parole Officer	Lorna Bradwell	

1970 - 1971

President	Ken Woods	
Vice-Presidents	Chappie Dyson, Jack McSpeerin	
Secretary	G Rippon	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	L Stephens	Publicity Officer: Margaret Boeve
Parole Officer	Lorna Bradwell / Dave Murray	

1971 - 1972

President	Ken Woods	
Vice-Presidents	John Haslem, Margaret Boeve	
Secretary	Hugh Smith	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Margaret Boeve	Publicity Officer: Anne Johnstone
New members	Jean Mulvaney, Brother Kinsela, Hugh Smith	
Parole Officer	Dave Murray	

1972 - 1973

President	Ken Woods	
Vice-Presidents	John Haslem, Nora Dixon	
Secretary	Hugh Smith	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Margaret Boeve	Publicity Officer: Anne Johnstone
Parole Officer	Dave Murray	

July 1973 – April 1974

President	Ken Woods / Hugh Smith	
Vice-Presidents
Secretary	...	Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	...	
New members	Ken Graham (Commonwealth Employment Service), E Klimowicz,	
Welfare Branch	Bob Donnelly (Department of the Capital Territory)	

May 1974 – April 1975

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents John French, E Klimowicz
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Moran
Treasurer Ken Graham
New members Br. Peter Harper (Sacred Mission), Ian Robertson (Smith Family)
Welfare Branch Dennis Johnson

1975 - 1976

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents John French, E Klimowicz
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer Brother Peter Harper
New members Felix Elias (SVdeP)
Welfare Branch Dennis Johnson

1976 - 1977

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Ken Graham, John French
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer Brother Peter Harper

1977 – 1978

President Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents Ian Robertson, John French
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer Hugh Smith
New member Mary Robbie (Commonwealth Employment Service)

1978 - 1979

President Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents Ian Robertson, John French
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer Hugh Smith
Welfare Branch Geoff Potts

1979 - 1980

President Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents Ian Robertson, John French
Secretary Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer Hugh Smith
Welfare Branch Geoff Potts

1980 - 1981

President	Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	Ian Robertson, John French
Secretary	Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Hugh Smith
New members	Verdune Biles, Bill Kirk (AFP)
Welfare Branch	Geoff Potts

1981 - 1982

President	Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	John French, Jean Moran
Secretary	Jean Mulvaney Case Secretary: Jean Moran
Treasurer	Hugh Smith
Welfare Branch	Geoff Potts

1982 - 1983

President	Dennis Johnson
Vice-Presidents	John French, Jean Moran
Secretary	Jean Mulvaney
Treasurer	Hugh Smith
New member	Charles Gallagher
Welfare Branch	Geoff Potts

1983 - 1984

President	Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents	Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran
Secretary	Verdune Biles
Treasurer	Charles Gallagher
Returned member	Mary Robbie
Welfare Branch	Geoff Potts

1984 - 1985

President	Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents	Verdune Biles, John French
Secretary	Jean Moran
Treasurer	Mary Robbie
New members	Dave Murray (private capacity)
Welfare Branch	Dave Murray / Michael Tidball

1985 - 1986

President	Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents	Dave Murray, Jean Mulvaney
Secretary	Jean Moran
Treasurer	Mary Robbie Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Welfare Branch	Michael Tidball

1986 – 1987

President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-President	Jean Mulvaney	
Secretary	Jean Moran	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Welfare Branch	Michael Tidball	

1987 – 1988

President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-President	Jean Mulvaney	
Secretary	Jean Moran	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
New members	Eva Hancock	
Staff	Bill Aldcroft,	
Welfare Branch	Michael Tidball	

1988 – 1989

President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-Presidents	Jean Mulvaney. Eva Hancock	
Secretary	Jean Moran	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff	Bill Aldcroft, Maryrose Creswell	

1989 – 1990

President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-Presidents	Jean Mulvaney. Jean Moran	
Secretary	Geoff Potts	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
New members	Brian Turner (Religious Society of Friends)	
Staff	Bill Aldcroft, Maryrose Creswell	

1990 – 1991

President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-Presidents	Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran	
Secretary	Geoff Potts	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff	Bill Aldcroft, Ann Mather	

1991 – 1992

	<i>Prisoners Aid Committee Inc.</i>	
President	Hugh Smith	
Vice-Presidents	Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran	
Secretary	Geoff Potts	
Treasurer	Dave Murray	Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff	Bill Aldcroft, Ann Mather	

1992 – 1993

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Ann Mather / Lecia Kachyckyj
ACT Corrections Pat Jones

1993 – 1994

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Lecia Kachyckyj
ACT Corrections Pat Jones

1994 – 1995

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Mulvaney, Jean Moran
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Lecia Kachyckyj
ACT Corrections Pat Jones

1995 – 1996

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Dave Murray, Jean Moran
Secretary Lecia Kachyckyj
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Lecia Kachyckyj
ACT Corrections Pat Jones

1996 – 1997

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Jean Mulvaney
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson
New member Mary Samara
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju
ACT Corrections Pat Jones (to December 1996)

1997 – 1998

Prisoners Aid (ACT) Inc.
President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Mary Samara
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Dennis Johnson /
Chappie Dyson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

1998 – 1999

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Mary Samara
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Chappie Dyson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

1999 – 2000

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Mary Samara
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Chappie Dyson
New member Dorothy Willmore
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2000 – 2001

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Verdune Biles
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Chappie Dyson
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2001 – 2002

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Verdune Biles
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Chappie Dyson /
Hugh Smith
New member Vernon Bailey
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2002 – 2003

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Jean Moran, Verdune Biles
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Hugh Smith
New members Robert James, Shobha Varkey
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2003 – 2004

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Verdune Biles, Dorothy Willmore
Secretary Geoff Potts
Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Hugh Smith
Life member Jean Moran
Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2004 – 2005

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Verdune Biles, Mary Samara
 Secretary Geoff Potts
 Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Malcolm Whyte
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2005 – 2006

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Geoff Potts, Mary Samara
 Secretary Vernon Bailey
 Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2006 – 2007

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Geoff Potts, Robert James
 Secretary Vernon Bailey
 Treasurer Brian Turner Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Wayne Hutchison
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2007 – 2008

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Geoff Potts, Robert James
 Secretary Vernon Bailey
 Treasurer Brian Turner / Malcolm Whyte Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Linda Pure
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Seija Talviharju

2008 – 2009

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Robert James (Administration), Linda Pure (Volunteers)
 Secretary Vernon Bailey
 Treasurer Malcolm Whyte Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Wayne Hutchison

2009 – 2010

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Robert James (Admin.), Linda Pure (Vol.)
 Secretary Brian Turner
 Treasurer Malcolm Whyte Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Jane Reynolds
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Wayne Hutchison

2010 – 2011

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Robert James (Admin.), Linda Pure (Vol.)
 Secretary Brian Turner
 Treasurer Barbara Li (new member) Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 Staff Bill Aldcroft, Wayne Hutchison, Christine Moore (AMC)

2011 – 2012

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), Jane Reynolds (Vol.)
 Secretary Brian Turner
 Treasurer Barbara Li Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New members Claire Natoli, Lettecia Thompson
 Life member Bill Aldcroft
 Staff Paul Thompson

2012 – 2013

President Hugh Smith
 Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), Claire Natoli (Vol.)
 Secretary Brian Turner
 Treasurer Barbara Li Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Amber Carroll
 CARS Panel Kira Alsop, Elaine Deng, Lettecia Thompson, Elizabeth Yoo
 Staff Paul Thompson

2013 – 2014

President Brian Turner
 Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), Amber Carroll (Vol.)
 Secretary Hugh Smith
 Treasurer Emma Street (new member) Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 New member Alvin Wang
 Life member Hugh Smith
 CARS Panel Kira Alsop, Elaine Deng
 Staff Paul Thompson

2014 – 2015

President Brian Turner
 Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), ... (Vol.)
 Secretary Hugh Smith
 Treasurer Emma Street Public Officer: Hugh Smith
 CARS Panel Alvin Wang, Karen Maglasis
 Staff Paul Thompson, Adele Morton (AMC)

2015 – 2016

President Brian Turner
Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), ... (Vol.)
Secretary Hugh Smith
Treasurer Renée Smith (new member) Public Officer: Hugh Smith
New members Caroline Doyle, Julia Liu
CARS Panel Alvin Wang, Karen Maglasis
Staff Paul Thompson, Summer Leiper (AMC)

2016 – 2017

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), Caroline Doyle (Vol.)
Secretary Brian Turner
Treasurer Hannah Tran (new) Public Officer: Stacey Little (new)
CARS Panel Alvin Wang, Karen Maglasis, Janet Reeves
Staff Summer Leiper (AMC)

2017 – 2018

President Hugh Smith
Vice-Presidents Shobha Varkey (Admin.), Caroline Doyle (Vol.)
Secretary Brian Turner
Treasurer Ann Thorpe (new member) Public Officer: Stacey Little
CARS Panel Julia Liu, Karen Maglasis, Janet Reeves, Alvin Wang
Staff Glen Tibbitts, Janet Reeves (AMC)

2018 – 2019

President Caroline Doyle
Vice-Presidents Hugh Smith (Admin.), Julia Liu (Vol.)
Secretary Stacey Little
Treasurer Ann Thorpe Public Officer: Stacey Little
CARS Panel Karen Maglasis, Alvin Wang
Staff Glen Tibbitts, Janet Reeves (AMC)

2019 – 2020

President Caroline Doyle
Vice-Presidents Hugh Smith (Admin.), Shobha Varkey (Vol.)
Secretary Lorana Bartels / Kathrine Whitty
Treasurer Ann Thorpe Public Officer: Caroline Doyle
CARS Panel Karen Maglasis, Alvin Wang
Staff Glen Tibbitts, Janet Reeves (AMC)