

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre  
Media: ABC News  
Published Date: 25 April 2013

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## Colourful Dreaming changing inmates lives

### **A Wiradjuri elder says a program at Junee Jail is transforming the lives of Aboriginal inmates and their children.**

Elder, Kath Withers founded the art and culture program Colourful Dreaming - a first for helping rehabilitate inmates.

The 64 year old foster carer says the program helps Aboriginal inmates and their children form closer bonds.

"No mums, where Dad just stays and looks after the kids all day, plays with them, paints, plays games and has lunch, just that really quality time with Dad," said Ms. Withers.

"That's really important because it's having connection with the children before he gets out, so he's not estranged from them, they can have visits but this is just Dad and the kids time."

Ms Withers says the transformations of inmates has been remarkable.

"Men that just sat there with their arms folded didn't really want to do anything and they've come onto to do great things."

"I think they are more aware of their culture they are more aware of themselves, it's given them confidence, I've seen a lot of improvement in the men out there."

Kath Withers says art is therapeutic and inmates have told her it has changed their lives.

She says she has received many letters from participants and read out one by an inmate describing his art.

"This is my story, The centre circle is home, all the other circles are the foster homes I went to," read Kath.

"Some of these lines represent the scars I've gotten over these years mentally, physically and emotionally and the black all around represents the shady past and what went on behind closed doors."

"But all those lines put together represent no matter where I was I always found my way home."

Art works by the Junee Jail inmates will be sold at a black tie Gala Charity Art Auction on May 1, along with hundreds of paintings, sculptures, prints and donations.

Money raised will go to Riverina TAFE Arts and Shine For Kids, which funds Colourful Dreaming.

The program is currently funded by Shine For Kids which supports children with a parent in jail, but Ms Withers says it needs more assistance.

Kath Withers is pushing to get government funding to continue.

She also wants the Indigenous Arts program to be introduced in other jails.