

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre
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Inmates find harmony through cultural festival

HARMONY and unity aren't easy to find for men locked away from the free world, miles from the people they love the most.

But, in a moving and empowering celebration at the Junee Correctional Centre on Friday, men from Asian countries had a chance to gather and support one another through one of the most important events on their calendar.

Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean inmates filled the centre's stunning Cultural Centre with joy and positivity during Friday's Chinese Moon Festival.

The Moon Festival or Mid-Autumn Festival is deeply embedded in Asian culture and is regarded as a time for families to reunite, dine on moon cakes and enjoy poetry.

Principal of the Australian School of Contemporary Chinese in Canberra, Doctor Fuxin Li, visited the centre for the first time on Friday to represent Australian Capital Territory's 20,000 strong Chinese community and join in the festivities.

"I am so proud to be here to join in and support the event here at Junee," he said.

"This is one of the most important festivals on the Chinese calendar and is a time when families gather and friends and communities come together when the moon is full.

"The ancient Chinese observed that the movement of the moon had a close relationship with changes of the seasons and agricultural production, so it is a time when communities pay thanks to the moon for a successful harvest."

Vietnam and Korea both observe similar festivals which celebrate the successful reaping of rice and wheat.

"This celebration is a big deal for the Asian inmates," entertaining MC and inmate John (last name withheld) said.

"It is so important for inmates to still have a chance to gather, celebrate and discuss their culture so they don't lose their identity and their culture because it is so important.

"When you are locked up it is so easy for that to happen because we are a long way from our families."

John paid tribute to the understanding and empathetic staff and management at the correctional centre who made the wonderful celebration possible.

"This sort of celebration wouldn't be possible in a lot of other prisons," John said.

"In most prisons inmates of different cultures or races can't mix and they are kept in pods that are based on their nationality... In those prisons I would never be here with Chinese or Lebanese or Aboriginal prisoners.



DESERVED: (Left) Offender services manager Trevor Coles presents invaluable volunteer Anthony Boerboom with a painting created by an inmate at Junee.

"For example until I came to Junee I didn't know other cultures celebrated the Moon Festival or what the meaning was because I didn't get to talk to inmates from those countries."

The uplifting and inspiring celebration was not only well-received by inmates, but also members of the wider community – including representatives of the Wagga Art Society and Coolamon Can Assist – and inmates families.

After brief outlines from inmates explaining the meaning of the festival to different Asian nations, visitors were treated to an impressive lion dance, martial arts demonstration, calligraphy presentation and a banquet featuring dishes from a variety of Chinese provinces.

"It was wonderful to see these men have a chance to celebrate their culture and share this festival with us," volunteer art mentor Anthony Boerboom said.

The festival provided the perfect backdrop for inmates and staff to showcase the truly magnificent Cultural Centre, and the beautiful artworks that adjoin the walls.



STUNNING: One of the incredible artworks in the Cultural Centre.