

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre
 Media: Australian Artist
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A creative diversion can have far-reaching positive results.

Everyone Benefits When Art is

“In The Frame”

The Junee Correctional Centre, run by the GEO Group Australia Pty Ltd has created an innovative program which allows inmates the opportunity to express themselves creatively and to actively achieve tangible and positive results during their incarceration. Inmates are encouraged to develop their interest in painting and spend their time creating, rather than in introspection in their cells.

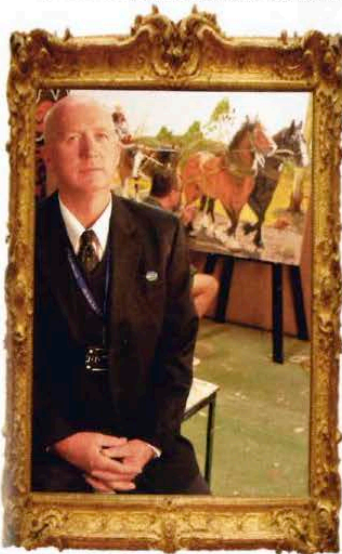
This may seem at odds with traditional methods in penology which tend to focus more on punishment than rehabilitation, but according to Junee Correctional Centre's Offender Services Manager, Mr Trevor Coles, *“There has been a solid benefit for the inmates, for the prison and for society as a whole”,* he said. This is borne out, he went on to say, by the fact that more than a hundred of the inmate's artworks have been donated for auction to a variety of charities.

Once the plan was conceived and put into action, the initial difficulties of having no place for the artists to work was resolved when a need was recognised for a cultural space to allow for the diverse cultural backgrounds of the inmates and to celebrate events such as Polyfest, Australia Day and Chinese New Year for those inmates. A former gymnasium was converted for the purpose and inmates with artistic skills were invited to paint some relevant murals.

As a result The Cultural Centre, as the gym is now known, is graced with more than 100 culturally inspired works that leave virtually no clear wall space in the centre that has become the creative focal point for many of the prison's 800-odd inmates. The well rendered paintings cover subjects as diverse as Aussie bush scenes next to Polynesian warriors, and portraits of such inspirational characters as Mahatma Ghandi, Mary McKillop and Martin Luther King beside stylised Egyptian pyramids, all interspersed with finely detailed Aboriginal art.

The centre also allows the space for the incarcerated artists to work outside of the confines of their cells and to create and store their work in a studio space. As one inmate puts it, *“It's our inner escape... and it's a chance, through the charity auctions, for us to make a real and a very personal contribution to society whilst we're in here. That's very satisfying.”*

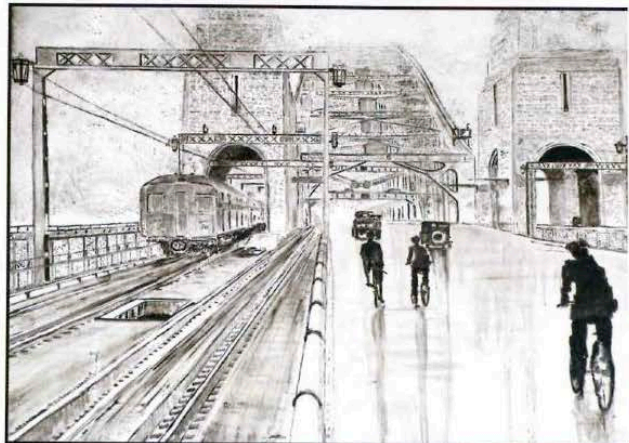
These artistic activities are wide-ranging with some inmates sculpting in stone and wood; others weaving grasses, with local Wiradjuri Elder 'Aunty Kath Withers' teaching traditional skills. What long-term effects programs of this nature have to rates of recidivism will be something known in the future, but one cannot mistake the positive effect on the artists of having this creative outlet available to them and there can be no doubt that the many charities that have been supported out of donations of the inmate's art haven't yet found a downside.



ART STORIES



Silhouettes, acrylic on canvas, 20 x 30cm, by 'Lucky'



The Bridge, 1930s, fresco, by 'Paul'



'Roy' painting Emily Kristina Santic, Philanthropist, acrylic on board, 1.2 x 1.8m, The Cultural Centre.

(Far Left) Mr Trevor Coles (Offender Services Manager, Junee C.C.) with inmate artist, 'Smithy' working in the background on a large scale painting.