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All the right moves here

By ERIN SOMERVILLE

FOR some, playing chess is more than just exercising the mind.

When Albury Chess Club took on competitors at the Junee Correctional Centre this month, the positive benefits of the game on the inmates were undeniable.

"I can't express enough the appreciation our inmates feel from these type of events with community members visiting the gaol," activities co-ordinator at Junee Correctional Centre Mick Perkins told Albury Chess Club members.

"The changes I see occurring with these inmates are amazing.

"Just a couple of behaviours I have noticed in the last 18 months to two years since we have begun our chess club are a few with low self-esteem have really come out of their shells and become more social.

"Others have shown patience and a willing to help others that in the past would not have happened - and of course the exercise for the mind and thinking skills.

"Who would have thought that playing chess would have these profound benefits!"

Albury Chess Club were joined by competitors from Wagga and Canberra, who all went through metal detectors, security, and gates to get to their game.

"The inmates came from a broad spectrum of society, from young to not so young and a rich mix of cultures," Albury Chess Club secretary Geoff Lindsay said.

But sitting across from each other over the chessboard, all the competitors were equal.

"A number of staff volunteered to come in on their day off to support the inmates - we were told about the services

available to the inmates to develop their life skills, train them in cultural skills, trades and higher learning.

"The whole direction of the gaol was not punishment but training and the development of responsibility and learning such that the inmates could make a successful graduation to society on their release."

After a series of intense rounds, the final scores were tallied before Canberra 1 took out the winning title, followed by Wagga, Albury 1, Junee, Albury 2 and Canberra 2.

"It was a wonderful day for all of us," Mr Lindsay said.

"It was an eye-opener for all of us as to the true nature of a medium to low security prison.

"It was not all about heavy stone walls, stereotypical prisoners and harsh staff.

"It was about a secure but open plan facility with excellent facilities, supportive and helpful staff and a group of men of all persuasions who appreciated the company and the chance to show off some of their incredible talents.

"Hopefully we will be able to return later this year to challenge for the trophy again."



Logistical skills were put to the test on the chessboard.

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