

Media Release

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MENTAL HEALTH INNOVATION WINS RECOGNITION

An initiative at Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre in Queensland to support prisoners with mental health needs has been recognised and rewarded by the Queensland Government.

With the prevalence of mental disorders amongst prisoners significantly higher than in the general population — and such disorders leading to problems such as challenging behaviour and self-harm — Arthur Gorrie staff have made supporting this group of prisoners a priority.

An innovative model, Mental Health First Aid Training (MHFA), was developed at Arthur Gorrie in 2010 with the aim of equipping staff with an enhanced understanding of the complexities of managing individuals with mental health issues.

In a further development, Arthur Gorrie has extended MHFA to a selected group of prisoner 'buddies' through a rigorous six-week program delivered by a health care professional. Once trained, these buddies are able to identify prisoners who may be experiencing a mental health crisis and inform staff.

The advent of MHFA trained prisoner buddies significantly augments Arthur Gorrie's existing arrangements by having extra 'pairs of eyes' throughout the centre and helps break down barriers as both staff and prisoners have the potential to read the signs and support individuals suffering from conditions such as depression or suicidal thoughts.

Nearly all concerns referred to staff by prisoner buddies have been substantiated upon investigation, reflecting the quality of the MHFA training and the buddies' ability to identify prisoners in need of support.

Since the introduction of the program Arthur Gorrie has seen a 33 per cent reduction in the number of prisoners needing to be placed on formal observation regimes.

"Self-harm and suicide are a tragedy and anything we can do to reduce this is obviously a priority," said Arthur Gorrie general manager Greg Howden.

"Having prisoners involved is a wonderful innovation and shows that prisoners can respond positively when given the chance to exercise responsibility."

The Queensland Government has recognised and rewarded Arthur Gorrie's initiative through an innovation bonus and is considering a wider rollout of the program across Queensland's publicly managed correctional centres.

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For additional information:

Tim McLean

Phone: 02 9295 0206

E-mail: tmclean@geogroup.com.au

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About The GEO Group Australia

The GEO Group Australia is Australia's largest provider of outsourced correctional services. With 1500 employees, The GEO Group Australia provides safe and secure services to the Victorian, New South Wales and Queensland governments through the management of correctional centres and the provision of primary health care services. GEO delivers critical public services that are cost effective and represent value for money for the taxpayer. With security and public safety as a priority, The GEO Group Australia intervenes with the 3500 offenders in our care to reduce reoffending and prevent the community becoming victims of crime. The GEO Group Australia is part of The GEO Group Inc, the world's largest international provider of outsourced correctional services, with over 80,000 offenders and 116 facilities under management across four continents. For further information please visit www.thegeogroupinc.com.au

About Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre

Arthur Gorrie Correctional Centre is Queensland's largest correctional centre. Holding 1040 prisoners, Arthur Gorrie is primarily a remand facility, holding those committed to custody by the courts pending their trial. Approximately 3700 prisoners pass through Arthur Gorrie every year. The facility includes a Maximum Security Unit for high-risk prisoners. Arthur Gorrie has been managed by The GEO Group Australia since it opened in 1992. For further information visit: www.correctiveservices.qld.gov.au