



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

**Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson (Deputy Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA**

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Community Corrections

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Chair, Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA  
Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety  
ACT Legislative Assembly  
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Dear Chair and Committee Members

#### Submission: Inquiry into Community Corrections

I have spent many hours over the last 8 years visiting female prisoners in the Alexander Maconochie Centre and worked as a volunteer in the ACT local community assisting women who have been released from the centre either into community corrections or unsupervised into the community.

During this time, I observed that the process of releasing women prisoners back into the community was less than ideal. More often than not they did not have stable housing (and would often spend time at my place) and as a result this left them highly vulnerable. This vulnerability resulted in them returning to their old haunts and associates which usually resulted in them relapsing into drug and alcohol addiction and crime. What would follow was a quick downward spiral and further periods of imprisonment.

This situation was compounded by the fact that often they had had their children removed from their care and they were no longer in contact with their families for various reasons. These women are characterised often by significant trauma (abuse while growing up in the family and/or abusive partners) which results in challenging behaviours that need day to day therapeutic treatment that community corrections cannot provide and services are sadly lacking.

The complexity of these women's needs cannot be understated – they lack human and social capital to draw upon and they have not experienced pro social models throughout their lives. This lack of human capital is evident in their poor literacy, poor education and virtually no employable skills base. Their immediate family is usually either dysfunctional or no longer wants contact with them so the social capital we all drawn upon in times of need is not there for them. The lack of pro social role models in their upbringing and subsequent experience means they characteristically lack the ability to regulate emotions and do not have the requisite skills and insights to care for their own children. The result is often a cycle of deprivation through generations which has obvious costs to our community.

On exit from the prison there are no effective interventions and, if placed in community corrections, the oversight is spasmodic, not focused on core underlying issues, is often driven by a risk adverse culture that inevitably results in a punitive approach to infractions,

and oversight is seldom sustained over a long period. Community corrections officers simply lack the time to be empathetic and attentive to details when they have a large case load.

Due to the inability of community corrections to provide wrap around services and support for these complex cases, and a dearth of residential rehabilitation services that also take children, I started the Farm in Galong in 2019. We have recently received accreditation as a residential therapeutic treatment facility.

The program for the 'ideal type' is for 12 months, although we have had people complete earlier than this and some take longer. We follow the Therapeutic Community method of rehabilitation which provides the women with a structured program designed to address their trauma, their lack of literacy, help them develop coping skills and pro social behaviour, address health issues, and build skills via online courses with TAFE. We also help them reconnect with positive family members and, where appropriate, seek to reunite them with their children in a structured and careful process; we teach them how to be mothers. On leaving we make sure they have stable housing and a job.

We are very focussed on evidence of what works and have close relations with relevant staff in the criminology program at the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods. As a result, we have been building a pipeline of internships for undergraduates who have an interest in this field. This is critically important as securing a skilled workforce is difficult at the best of times but even more so when you are in a small country town. The 3 current paid interns are currently undertaking cert4 training in drug and alcohol counselling to supplement their university qualifications.

To date, we have had no government funding for treatment and have relied largely on donations, volunteer labour and contributions by the women from their Centrelink/disability payments. As we have been establishing ourselves during Covid our numbers have been small but we have had success with several women exiting successfully from the program as evidenced by their ability to access a job, a house and a support network in the place they exit to. We have also had reunification of mothers and children here. We take women from the ACT and one of the benefits of our program is the geographical distance for the women from their pre-existing dysfunctional networks.

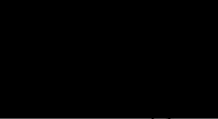
You can read more about the facility at <https://thefarmingalong.com.au/aboutus/>.

However, we have found that women exiting the prison straight into our facility find it very challenging to adjust to living in a Therapeutic Community where they have to take responsibility for their actions and engage in productive activity throughout the day. My view is that establishing a transition program in the prison would be an effective mechanism to start to adjust behaviours. Such a program would also encourage women to seek treatment as an option for them and also help them envisage a future away from the trouble and distress they have become habituated to. Releasing them under a community service order simply does not address their needs and more often than not results in them re-entering the prison system.

Funding is a significant issue. Short-term treatment will not provide the time to address the myriad of issues these women face. There needs to be a mechanism to divert women from prison to community-based programs and to also divert the funding from prison to support those programs. There is now a significant body of evidence that shows that justice reinvestment programs are successful in diverting people away from the very costly option of imprisonment with its very high rates of recidivism.

I would be happy to appear before the committee to elaborate more on my experiences and thoughts.

Kind Regards



Kate Cleary CEO  
The Farm in Galong Ltd

