

CSI

Working for THE FUTURE

Corrective Services Industries (CSI) is a division of Corrective Services NSW



For most of history, prisons existed to separate and restrain. Traditionally, the role was brutal retribution, to contain and punish. The same applied to any work an offender did.

It might be useful to society but the demands and conditions made it part of the punishment.

It's a notion that doesn't fade easily with time. For Australia it began with England dumping boatloads of convicts on these shores. They laboured under hard discipline, ruled by a gaoler mentality that was driven by military rigidity.

It was a form of slavery for building a colony. Many of its ways set a standard that lasted well into the twentieth century.

Myth & Reality

Life behind prison walls isn't something that the community generally gives a great deal of thought. It's easier to hold to a set of myths and look no further. The truth, as always, is much more interesting and complex.

It would never be easy shifting the old school of tough men and hard knocks. Two hundred years brought strong beliefs about what kind of treatment is effective and what isn't.

The nineteen seventies was a turning point.

When Bathurst prison exploded with rioting so too did the truth of what happened inside. A Royal Commission followed with extensive recommendations for reform. But change is rarely welcomed, most people cling to what they know. The system functioned on its own terms and didn't like to be told it was wrong.

Change was resisted.

By the eighties, there were no cohesive policies in place for correctional industry. The system was loaded with negative ideas and myths. Offenders who didn't want to work lingered in yards where they could bide their time, pacing up and down, often getting into mischief. Finding an appropriate way to manage a prison system is a profound challenge. The shift from punishment to rehabilitation would never be quick. It would only evolve with clear thinking and effective strategies.

Today we recognise work-readiness is a vital aspect of a complex human problem.

Corrective Services Industries has built a dynamic professional entity with the disciplines and environment of any workplace in society. It's achieved only by setting production schedules and holding to a commitment to quality with a clear customer focus. With a growing body of knowledge on offender behaviour, CSI is a benchmark performer in the open market and prepares offenders for a working life. It's a transition that often struggles against negative ideas about Corrections and the nature of offenders.

At CSI we're keen to explode persistent myths such as:

"Once a criminal always a criminal. Nothing really changes the behaviour of an offender."

We've come a long way since the late seventies when it was suggested locking people up didn't change behaviour. There's a strong international focus on Corrections and what works. We have learned plenty in these past few decades and have to be highly selective in what treatments to use and who to use them on. With new understanding and the right programmes we can reduce re-offending three fold.

Offenders with moderate risk of re-offending are very responsive to treatment. We're building an integrated approach to returning offenders to the community.

We are targeting dynamic risk factors in offender behaviour, picking up on individual learning styles. We are looking at levels of risk and need. Society is often impatient and wants instant outcomes, but we're focussed on a long-term approach.

"Putting offenders to work just keeps them busy while they are inside. Training them doesn't change anything once they are released."

Some vocational training is highly appropriate. For example there is a big demand in some industries and hospitality is one of them. But CSI does much more than train people or find them jobs. Training alone won't halt re-offending. Nor will work experience by itself.

The fundamental purpose of this organisation is to reduce re-offending. Our focus is on employability. Work is much more than a skill or ticket to operate a piece of machinery.

It's about broader attitudes, social skills, impulsive behaviour, problem solving and relating to other people. These make a person effective in the workplace. The very least we can do is provide offenders with appropriate skills to be an effective worker. That means getting on with people, taking instructions. The attitudes and values that make us work-ready are those that reduce the likelihood of re-offending.

Many in the workforce aren't skilled and are often part-time or casual. But we all need certain attributes to function and participate in the working community. For many offenders that's where CSI is essential. They have poor work experiences and behaviour that makes them unemployable. We can now identify real deficits in work-readiness. A skill is often important, but to make an offender work-ready requires much more. Its about turning up to work and being responsible, delivering a product or service.

"Offenders are lazy, unwilling and don't want to work."

Many enter Corrections with few social skills and a lack of work-readiness. They often have low literacy or vocational skills and the worst of attitudes. The average age is late teens to early twenties and most will spend between seven and nine months in the system. The statistics show they're nearly all working class.

But once they are in Corrections, their social background doesn't help treat

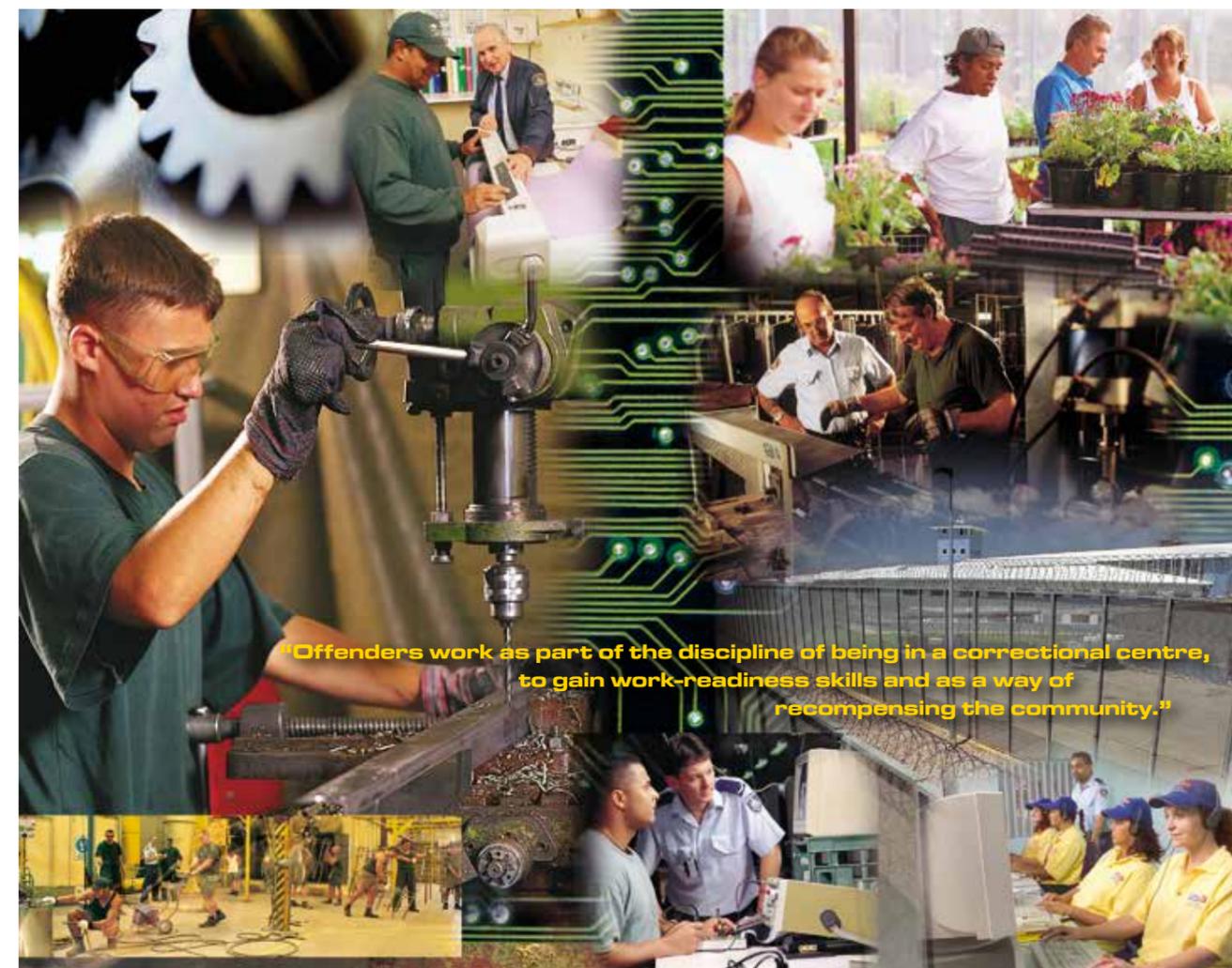
them. Many have never worked and don't know how to present themselves for employment or how to fill out a job application. They often lack patience, perseverance or basic community values. Self esteem has been the focus of many youth based programmes. But if self esteem is all you're working on, you'll develop happier and better adjusted criminals. CSI exists to find a more enduring way for them to live and work in the community. It's about giving them habits that will keep them working.

Our social commitment is to reduce their chance of re-offending, to expose them to real work with its responsibilities, satisfaction and rewards. We help them understand the value of being ready for work. CSI staff provide an objective and give feedback. We help offenders build maturity and how to cope with success and failure

Making an offender work-ready is only part of the answer, but it's a vital part of a complex human problem.

With over sixty business units throughout New South Wales, we have made a quantum leap from the bad old days of breaking rocks, building roads, stitching mailbags and making number-plates, brooms and brushes.

We place great value on work and the way in which it can change a life. Offenders work in an environment similar to the outside world. They get a balance of treatment, education and work. The CSI focus is to prepare our workers for a working life in the community. Its not just vital and valuable to the individual, its essential to society. We work with offenders who often have limited skills and low education levels. Our labour turnover is high as people



"No-one knows who's most likely to commit a crime. And no-one can second guess who will re-offend."

We can now work out who is more likely to re-offend and whether they have a high or low risk of re-offending. There are static risk factors such as an individual's age and number of offences.

People in gaol are generally characterised by different ways of thinking and behaving. Their behaviour is learned and reinforced. There's a limited number of dynamic factors in working out who is likely to re-offend.

These include drug use, anti-social thinking and attitudes, the offender's impulsivity, the impact of friends and family and their readiness for work. Anti-social thinking emerges time and again as an important factor.

are released or security classifications shift them around the system. In the past CSI's commercial thrust was regarded with deep suspicion by parts of the business community. Our labour isn't cheap and we don't offer unfair competition. Our workers are high maintenance and in need of a sympathetic balance between work and the many demands of life inside.

We form partnerships and work to contracts with business and community. We work to deserve the strong support we get. We take great pride in the quality of our products and services and in meeting tight deadlines.

For further information, phone the Corrective Services Industries Corporate Office on 02 4582 2420, email csi@justice.nsw.gov.au or visit our website at csi.nsw.gov.au Publication February 2004.