

**Submission to Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria
by Yvonne Jewkes, Professor of Criminology and Expert in Prison Design and Planning**

Submitter

I am Professor of Criminology at the University of Brighton, UK, and Visiting Professor of Criminology at the University of Melbourne. I am Principal Investigator (PI) on a three-and-a-half year research study of prison architecture and design, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). A comparative study of prison design in England & Wales, Scotland, Norway and Denmark, the project has also led to me working in an advisory capacity to corrections personnel and prison planners, architects and designers in several countries and states, including Victoria, Australia. I am also PI on a 6-month study of trauma-informed prison design for women. I have published many academic books, articles and papers on numerous aspects of imprisonment and prison design, and was co-author of a major report entitled "Rehabilitation by Design: Influencing Change in Prisoner Behaviour", which was launched in the Palace of Westminster in October 2016.

Summary of Evidence

This submission of evidence is based on the expertise of the author and on the findings of her previous and current studies, as well as the findings of other scholars working in the field. Although Victoria is one of the most progressive Australian states with regard to criminal justice policy and the quality of its correctional facilities, it lags behind other developed, western nations (e.g. Scotland, Republic of Ireland, Belgium, Austria and the Nordic countries) in its prison planning, design and construction, and in its approach to rehabilitating young people in custody. Victoria could be doing more to establish world-leading standards and international best practice in prison design and planning with a view to breaking the cycle of re-offending, providing more hopeful futures for those incarcerated at a young age, and ensuring greater long-term safety for society as a whole.

The current discussion around planning, design and construction of new Youth Justice Centres in Victoria represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to achieve the aims highlighted in the Terms of Reference (safety, security, a decrease in numbers of juveniles admitted and re-admitted to custody, an improvement in culture and practices, etc.) as well as a chance to foster positive relationships between the juveniles and staff. While architecture, design and spatial layout cannot easily be isolated when it comes to measuring successful outcomes of a corrections facility, my research shows them to have a vital role to play in two important respects: i) in creating custodial environments that offer hope, rather than inflict harm; and ii) in encouraging governments and other stakeholders to think through (and potentially revise) their approach and philosophy to punishment and rehabilitation.

In particular, research indicates that location, size, architecture and design of corrections facilities all impact on prisoners' emotional and psychological reactions to incarceration, including their behaviour, their willingness to engage with regimes and their capacity to build positive relations with other detainees and staff. The same factors may significantly influence their prospects of rehabilitation and reintegration into society on release.

I therefore urge the Inquiry Committee to:

- Acknowledge the growing body of academic research that finds that custodial facilities work more effectively to rehabilitate (young) offenders when small in size, located within close proximity to their home communities, and built with principles of normality and humanisation in mind;
- Focus the planning and design of the new Youth Justice Centre(s) on supporting community values, citizenship and responsible behaviour and reducing physical violence, bullying, intimidation etc. Environmental design features can foster positive relationships and supportive staffing and facility management, which are far more effective at achieving successful outcomes than physical barriers and hardened security;
- The physical separation of (young) offenders and officers can also create control problems.

Dynamic, interpersonal security, backed up by electronic and static security, is the ideal. According to research from the University of Cambridge, surveillance via screens and monitors can lead to staff becoming diffident and insecure. Corrections officers may be tempted to withdraw behind familiar barriers, which can foster a siege mentality among staff – giving rise to the impression of an ‘electronic zoo’. Research suggests that staff-prisoner (or, in this case, staff-young offender) relationships are the single most important element in the creation of a healthy facility long-term;

- Recruit new staff on the basis of their values, rather than simply experience, and train them as a valued, professionalized workforce. Victoria youth justice requires a wholesale change of staff culture, and one that is intent on making a positive difference to young people’s lives;
- Do not ‘future-proof’ the facilities or overdesign security assuming it will result in a safer environment. Plan for the *minimum* level of security conditions for the risk the juveniles pose, not the maximum security, based on future oriented fears. Instead, use design to nurture engagement in positive activities and interactions;
- Build into the design the fundamental principles of hope, empathy, decency, respect and trust – the young people are more likely to respond in kind. Do not reinforce negative labels with bolted-down, vandal-proof furnishings and harsh materials, which only encourage those in custody to live up (or live down) to those labels and seek to damage them. An obsession with security communicates an expectation that offenders will be violent and destructive – which invites the very behaviour they seek to prevent and reinforces the image of young offenders’ deviance in staff. The population in question are juveniles, and their behaviours *can be changed*;
- Consider that, as far as possible, prisons in countries that are leading the way in correctional design in Europe (e.g. Scotland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland) ‘normalise’ the environment; that is, they ensure that prisons approximate normal life and people are sent to prison *as* punishment, not *for* further punishment. These countries have also taken significant steps to ‘humanise’ the custodial environment. They exploit natural landscapes, blur boundaries between inside and outside (e.g. through the incorporation of large, bar-less windows), use natural building materials (wood, stone), use bright colour palettes to de-institutionalize the environment, incorporate sensitive acoustics to minimize noise in busy areas, and make plenty of outdoor space accessible. Research from the University of Birmingham on a UK Secure Training Centre (STC) holding children aged 12-17 found that young people value access to open air and gardens as much as adult detainees. Gardening (the STC under study has a Gardening Club) was the second most popular activity (after weights and resistance exercises) and the gardens were a strong source of pride for the youngsters;
- Incorporate excellent indoor and outdoor exercise/sports facilities. In the Birmingham study, young people suggested that they could most ‘be themselves’ or ‘feel most normal’ in gyms, sports halls and on playing fields, hard courts and pitches. Young people also commented that relationships with staff were very good in these areas, with significant interaction happening between staff and young people. Especially important are occasions when young detainees and staff can engage in sports and recreation activities together. In these interactions, good relationships are fostered, long-term safety is improved and staff absenteeism is reduced;
- Know that the introduction of animals into custodial environments has proved very successful in achieving good behaviour and other positive outcomes. Examples from the UK include small farm animals such as chickens rescued from battery farms and goats (used to keep grass down); dogs that offenders can train (rescue greyhounds trained to be re-homed; dogs for the blind and deaf etc.); and donkeys that can be given sanctuary. Even young offenders with the most complex and challenging needs can be helped through contact with

animals. An excellent example of a behavioural programme using horses is <http://www.thehorsecourse.org>

- Consider that an increasingly common plan for corrections facilities is a progression/regression model, where prisoners start in basic accommodation but are pulled through the complex to standard and then enhanced (and sometimes 'super-enhanced') units where they are trusted to live more independently (Wiri prison in New Zealand is an example). Design in 'incentivised spaces' that promote responsabilisation (also known as the 'responsible prisoner' model). Reward good behaviour with softer furnishings, higher quality fixtures and fittings, greater access to outdoor space, including sports pitches and equipment etc. and deter poor or disruptive behaviour with *temporary* residence in a sparser and more austere living space;
- In all the examples cited, there is a belief that prisons/youth justice centres have the potential for positive individual and group experience (personal development, sociability and pro-social skills) and that an asset-based approach – that is, identifying offenders' strengths and developing them – is favourable to a deficit-based approach – focusing on what's wrong with an offender and try to 'fix' it. In other progressive nations, new prisons are being commissioned and built with an explicitly rehabilitative aim; one that is realized through their size, location, architecture and design;
- Do not be influenced by the popular media. Between 2008 and 2016 most crime rates in Victoria decreased (according to ABS annual crime victimisation survey), yet there appears to be something of a moral panic about youth crime being played out in the pages of Victoria's newspapers. This is good for their circulation figures, and for politicians who believe that there are no votes in prisoners' rights, but it is potentially disastrous for the long-term prospects of many of the state's most vulnerable and marginalised young people;
- Commission a design for the new facilities that resembles a college campus. Consider rebranding the Youth Justice Centres 'Colleges' (and the juveniles 'students'), where the emphasis will be on education, training in work skills specific to the needs of the region, and preparing the young people for a useful and fulfilling life on release. Juvenile facilities must be built with digital competency in mind and must be ambitious in what young people can aspire to and achieve, including at Higher Education level. The Intensive Learning Centre in NSW (designed by the University of Technology Sydney's Designing Out Crime research centre) provides one example (<https://sourceable.net/can-good-prison-design-improve-rehabilitation-prospects/>). Another is Hydebank Wood in Belfast, Northern Ireland (<http://tinyurl.com/gm27jz3>).
- Be mindful that siting the facilities in the locations from which offenders hail is a vital element in encouraging desistance from offending. Recidivism is made more likely when a custodial sentence entails: i) loss of access to family, or having relationships severed or damaged; ii) loss of the 'web of connections' which reinforce non-criminal values, and encourage the adoption of values and knowledge which make offending easier and more likely; iii) loss of accommodation; iv) incompleteness of education, or loss of job and income. In short, when offenders are dispatched to distant facilities, maintaining close relationships and pro-social bonds, and easing re-entry following release, become intransigent problems.

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