Computers in Cells Implementation Strategy

Introduction

Current technology allows for Computers in Cells (CIC) for prisoners. Justice Action's CIC Proposal ('*Proposal*') is a compelling case and its importance has been acknowledged internationally. Prisoners spend up to 18 hours each day in their cells, whereby televisions are already provided. Through CIC this time could be spent productively and interactively. CIC provides prisoners with access to education, technological, literary and numeracy skills, employment skills, social inclusion and reduces the risk of recidivism.

The Proposal has generated tremendous support; most notably in the Community Justice Coalition pre-election forum the **Labor**, **Liberal**, and **Greens** Parties all agreed that CIC is a necessary step in prisoners' rehabilitation and maintaining ties with the community.

Focus for Action

Computers are a significant part of modern society. They provide a format for education, work and play. In the past, work which ex-prisoners had access to was largely unskilled and physical. With technology taking over most of these jobs, ex-prisoners must have computer skills in order to be employable.

An example of the significance of the problem is in Mulawa Correctional Facility, where there are 250 women prisoners. Of these 250 women, only five at a time are given access to a computer for only two hours a week. On training days, once a fortnight, no computer access is provided. These hours are simply not adequate to enable these women to complete their education and training, prepare cases or build computer skills for when they re-enter the community. Computers are an effective tool that can enable women to access information and rehabilitation support networks. Research shows that employment is of essential assistance to inmates avoiding the perils of recidivism once back in the community. The lack of computers and information is detrimental to the rehabilitation of women and does not provide them with relevant training for the future.

An immediate opportunity to respond to our *Proposal* presents itself at Nowra Correctional Centre for which all prisoners would benefit by having access to Computer services on a daily basis. Corrective services anticipated the implementation of a CIC program and thus wired and installed computer fittings in each cell. The implementation of such a program should not be delayed and action must be taken by our government. This could be an almost costless beginning of the implementation.

Support

Our Proposal has generated support and positive feedback, locally and internationally.

Local support:

Political Parties
At a forum organised by the Community Justice Coalition in February 2011, the ALP, Coalition and Greens all supported the introduction of computers in prison cells. Phillip Costa, the Minister for Prisons, emphasised that, "*Computers are a very useful resource so long as you've got that capacity to maintain security and safety*". Similarly, the Greens noted that they support computers in cells, "*With all of the appropriate IT restraints, we are clearly within the grasp of the NSW government*". The ALP and Coalition both stated that, "*Sentencing should incorporate a balance of punishment, deterrence and rehabilitation*".

Legal Services
Will Hutchins, Senior Solicitor for Prisoners Legal Services stated, "*We strongly support the proposal for computers in cells. In addition to assisting inmates to positively occupy themselves, it would assist reintegration into society and reduce recidivism*".

NSW Teachers Federation
Statement from Stewart Burkitt?

Community Justice Coalition
President of the Community Justice Coalition (CJC) David Bitel notes, "*Funding and access to educational programs for inmates has not kept pace with the massive increases to the NSW prison population … computer access should be extended to allow prisoners' use of computers in their cells within a secure network*".

Churches
The Chaplaincy Coordinator for Corrective Services NSW, Reverend Rod Moore states, "*I support computers in cells and I believe it to be a valuable contribution to the overall effort to rehabilitate offenders. From a religious perspective the opportunity for offenders to study and practice their spiritual traditions on a more regular basis through computer programs and studies would be of great benefit in assisting them to find meaning and purpose in their lives*".

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council urges that social and economic factors are key in combating crime. Social and economic disadvantage mean that many offenders are in a continuing cycle of poverty and crime. CIC will assist prisoners in reconnecting and integrating with society upon release, and increase the chances the poverty offending cycle is stopped.

Australian Government's National Cultural Policy
A new National Cultural Policy for Australia is being developed by the government and is intended to be an important opportunity to examine how the Australian Government should support arts and culture in the 21st century. The policy will set a 10-year strategic vision underpinned by tangible action to ensure the governments' arts, cultural and creative endeavours resonate with a 21st Century Australia. Justice Action presented at the National Cultural Policy Forum and discussed the Proposal, relating it to the second goal of the policy; to ensure everyone has access to current and new technological advancements that would enable people to access and participate in arts and culture. Prisoners and institutionalised persons must be included in this goal. The National Broadband Network must include all institutions, especially prisons. The inclusion of prisoners in this goal and the implementation of computers in cells will allow for easier integration into the community upon released.

International development:

US Education development
The executive director of the Correctional Education Association in the United States Stephen Steurer stated, "*CIC is a necessary evolutionary step because education is changing at an alarming rate towards a computer-based platform*". He explains that the US national GED Testing Service (US high school diploma) will be computer-based from 2014. Due to the computerised movement of education, prisoners must have a computer in their cell if they are to receive an education.

US Anti-recidivist effort
The director of **International CURE** (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants), Charlie Sullivan, and a director of the **Fortune Society**, Glenn Martin, have discussed and expressed interest and support in the implementation of a CIC program in the US. The Mayor of New York City and George Soros (founder and chairman of the **Open Society Foundations**) have also stated their interest in providing funding for CIC programs within US prisons, with their focus on reducing recidivism.

Problems to Overcome

Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) responded to the CIC Proposal on 7 April 2011, and presented the most negative response to high recidivist levels in Australia at 43.7%. Although they have put forward their position in 'considering' the proposal, they have stated their concerns with the management of security measures and the costs involved, both of which have been addressed by the Proposal.

Security Standards

Concerns have been raised with regards to the security risks involved with the implementation of the Proposal.

In relation to instances of abuse of the system there are specific areas of concern, such as escape, crime including sex offences, contacting victims and access to pornography, all of which are addressed by the current technology.

Solutions to security breaches such as attempted use of unauthorised memory devices, unauthorised email messages and unauthorised website access are outlined thoroughly in the Security Standards report. The report also discusses the extensive logging of user sessions and monitoring and control of prisoner desktops by custodial staff, as well as the use of enforced curfews.

The implementation of CIC has been proven to be simple and safe through our Proposal and Security Standards report therefore security concerns are not legitimate excuses.

Funding for computers

Each prisoner costs the taxpayer $75 000 per year. If prisoners do not reoffend upon release, this saves a significant amount of money and keeps the community safer.

We have received approximately one hundred secondhand computers from not-for-profit organisations such as Technical Aid for the Disabled (TAD) and anticipate donations from corporations, companies and government organisations.

Conclusion

We live in a society driven by technology. It is a prisoner's right to be a part of that society. To take away this vital opportunity is to leave prisoners many decades behind the rest of the community, with little hope of catching up.

Government policy dictates prisons must have rehabilitation as their fundamental goal. The nexus between CIC has been outlined. Governments across Australia have a responsibility to the community to make it a safer place through the introduction of CIC programs.

Prisons in the ACT and Victoria already have a CIC program. This is an example and a precedent that other states in Australia would do well to follow, and an opportunity whereby we can set an example for prison systems internationally. The change in recidivism rates will perhaps be more gradual than immediate, however the job skills, educational benefits and in turn, social inclusion created by CIC can not be disregarded.