

Questions Taken on Notice – Corrections Portfolio – 5 November 2021

Question 17 – Recidivism – Designing out crime (page 33)

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I will consciously stop asking you questions, go onto a different topic and then come back to that. Minister, the rollout of tablets over the last two years in New South Wales prisons has been I think broadly accepted as a success to the extent that it has rolled out. Can you advise how many tablets there are and which facilities have them and/or do not have them?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Certainly. I ask the deputy commissioner to respond to that.

Deputy Commissioner GRANT: I am really happy to say at the moment—and we are not finished yet—that we have rolled out 5,485 of the new tablets. This did not include the ones we had put in place already for COVID purposes. We had 600 tablets for audiovisual link [AVL] visits and so on for COVID. For the new tablets which are the ones to be used in cell, we have rolled out 5,485 of those into our correctional centres. So we have now got them in Dawn de Loas, Dillwynia, Geoffrey Pearce, John Morony, Lithgow, Mannus, Mary Wade, Mid North Coast, Shortland and South Coast. At the two rapid-build centres, we built something different there because we had a plan for that. They have an in-cell digital device also. So there is another 800 of those devices. They are actually affixed to the wall of our accommodation units as opposed to being a handheld device. So we have 800 there. In addition to that, every prisoner in Clarence Correctional Centre, which is around 1,000 prisoners or slightly more, also has a tablet. In total, if you add those together, it is about 7,000 prisoners have a device that they can use at the moment in the evenings after lock-in hours on which they can communicate with their family and friends and have access to another series of arrangements. We have now got a process in place—I am not sure if the Minister wants to talk about that—but we are planning to expand this to the remaining centres in the near future.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I think we can all agree that allowing prisoners to keep connections with family and, if I recall your comments, being able to talk to kids, see the bedroom, keep that connection, is extremely valuable and important. Indeed, returning those community and family connections is one of the best ways of avoiding recidivism. Is there a budget to roll out tablets to the balance of the prison population? If so, what is the budget and what is the deadline?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Deputy Commissioner, I think we have an additional \$42 million. Is that correct?

Deputy Commissioner GRANT: That is right. We have \$23 million confirmed in the first tranche of funding. The rollout is over the next two to three years. It is two years

for the infrastructure work but to get the whole thing up and running. It is not just the tablets that this investment is for; there are a number of other things including live virtual therapy units which operate slightly differently. They are constructing private booths in correctional centres for more private consultations with psychologists. In addition to that, it includes money for developing the platform further. At the moment

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we have a learning management system but a big investment as well is being made in a very high-quality learning management system that we will be going out to tender for. In addition to that, we are including some of the content—we have been trying to put the MindSpot app, which is something developed by Macquarie University—a fabulous behavioural tool for anxiety, depression and trauma. We have to make some adjustment to that to make it really usable for prisoners, so we have got the money for that as well. We are so indebted to the Government for supporting this strategy. We have been working on it for a long time and when we get this in place we will be the envy of the correctional world in Australia. No other agency will have anything like this in play.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: It is intended, therefore, over the next two financial years with that budget to have tablet or tablet-like facilities available to each inmate in New South Wales? I am not including them but there may be some inmates excluded in forensic facilities or in extremely high security facilities. But each inmate, apart from that small handful?

Deputy Commissioner GRANT: The intention is for that to be so, yes. **The Hon. TREVOR KHAN:** That is pretty good

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I commenced this by saying most people had thought it was positive. Minister, will you be looking at the impact on recidivism as a result of these kinds of connective services?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Very much so. I will ask the deputy commissioner to unpack some of the additional services we will be providing. As I keep saying, if you treat someone like a dog, they will behave like a dog. If you lock someone in their room or their cell for 18 hours a day with no ability to access services, to speak with their families or even undertake rehabilitation courses, this just opens up that engagement that we have been missing for such a long time as we continue to reduce the level of recidivism.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I appreciate that, and if there are any further details to be provided on notice I would be more than happy for that to go on notice rather than right now, Minister.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: I am always happy to expand on these things. I am excited by this.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: Minister, I commenced this line of questioning by saying I thought it was positive, so we are ad idem on that.

Deputy Commissioner GRANT: Minister, if I might add something there. We do have documents being prepared by the University of Technology, the centre for Designing Out Crime. We commissioned that group to develop a program logic and a very detailed evaluation plan. It is a very impressive document and I think it helped us to get the Government across the line because the benefits were very clearly articulated

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in the document, as was the approach we were going to take to measuring it. One of the great beauties of the tablets themselves is that they have an inbuilt survey tool which will be very helpful from a number of perspectives even including asking prisoners about their satisfaction with the quality and the nature of the food. We can use that for researching people's usage and to ask people about their experience. That is already in the tablets now. We have a big campaign underway to evaluate those—

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN: I would love to see some of those answers.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I was going to say I would be interested to see the views on food but that is not my question. If that document could be provided on notice that would be of assistance.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Deputy Commissioner, can we provide that? **Deputy Commissioner GRANT:** Yes.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I am more than happy for that to be taken on notice.

Answer

See attached document entitled Research and Evaluation Strategy for the Transformation of Prisoner Rehabilitation through Digital Technology.