JUSTICE ACTION

Defending human rights in the hardest places

Justice Action Report 2026

This report is to update you with our news, projects and achievements for 2026. To learn more, visit our website: ***justiceaction.org.au***



JA Team defending physical visits at Silverwater Correctional Complex

Introduction

2026 was a busy year for everyone at Justice Action (JA). Here are some of our highlights.

One of our major campaigns has been the promotion of computers in cells. To ensure prisoners have access to education, legal information, counselling and communication with their families. JA continues to advocate for young people in detention to have access to this technology, helping to reduce isolation and support their wellbeing.

JA has also been working to bring back iExpress, the world's first prisoner webpage and interactive email system. We have restructured the website and are continuing to automate the email service, while developing new features to help prisoners maintain connections with the outside world and access important support services.

Another important initiative is the Australian Prisoners Union (APU), a prisoner-led organisation established to provide prisoners with a platform for advocacy and representation at local, national and international levels. The APU works to address individual prisoner disputes, raise human rights concerns, and give prisoners a greater voice in decisions affecting their lives.

Through these initiatives, JA continues to advocate for prisoners' rights, access to essential services, and opportunities for prisoners to communicate and have their voices heard.

PHYSICAL PRISON VISITS

The NSW attempt to replace Sunday physical visits with video calls at Macquarie Correctional Centre Wellington has been stopped. Mid last year, Corrective Services NSW attempted to replace in-person visits with video calls, a move driven by cost-cutting and staff convenience, but one that came at a serious cost for prisoners and their loved ones. Physical family visits are essential for rehabilitation, reintegration, emotional support, and maintaining relationships, especially with children. A video call cannot be called a video visit, just as a phone call isn't a phone visit, and Corrective Services NSW must stop using that term.

COMPUTERS IN YOUTH JUSTICE CELLS

JA is working to prevent the isolation of youths in cells for 14 hours a day without access to the basic vital services and communications provided by computers.The NSW Government claimed in part they cannot afford to provide access to that technology; however, it spends $1.17 million per child per year in prison. We were quoted $260,000 per prison for the installation of the server a few years ago. Access to computers remains vital for children to enhance education, enable social connections, and contribute to their mental well-being.

At the NSW Budget Estimates hearing on 24 February 2026, Youth Justice Minister Jihad Dib was questioned about progress on tablets and telecommunications in cells. The Minister was blunt about his priorities by stating that "it was a very, very expensive task," and "retrofitting would be very difficult." We do not accept that this is so.

In March 2026, JA began distributing emails to all youth justice authorities nationally along with a media release and the 'Youth Justice Cruelty Exposed' video, drawing attention to the cruelty of isolating children in cells without access to counselling, education, and families.

At the end of March 2026, the Youth Justice Minister published a media release, *'Safer, more secure Youth Justice Centres,'* announcing a $138 million investment into Youth Justice Centres across NSW, designed to refurbish accommodation units to

offer *"more specialised support where needed to give young people a chance to change their behaviours."*

Recently, members of JA visited Bimberi Youth Justice Centre in Canberra to conduct an initial inspection; however our movement was highly restricted by security guards (see below photo). At Bimberi JA observed young people confined to their cells, with outdoor and communal spaces largely vacant, causing many to express frustration, angst, tension, and downbeat sentiments.



We wrote to the ACT Ombudsman, Custodial Inspector, and Human Rights Commission expressing our concern for the lack of computers in cells. We pointed out that Bimberi was opened after the Alexander Maconochie Centre, also in Canberra, where adult prisoners have had computers in cells since day one and yet Bimberi's children still have nothing. They agreed to follow up.

EDUCATION REVIEW

JA is continuing to follow through with several commissioners to address limited access to education.

The Prisoner Education Survey Report across Australia revealed that there has been a systematic failure to deliver education to prisoners across Australia. Prisoners have expressed that they felt disappointment, frustration, and disempoweredness when pursuing education within their facilities.

Educational Institutions have adopted an online delivery model; however despite this new shift in educational accessibility, Correctional Services across the country have not adapted to this shift, leaving prisoners with no access to education at all. Research shows that education reduces recidivism by 43%.

Below are the three recommendations widely adopted after the survey.

- Enable open access to diverse courses run by educational institutions for people in prison, supported by in-cell access to computers, external keyboards, updated educational software, and websites.
- In the meantime, allow prisoners to purchase books from Australia's major booksellers, such as Dymocks, permitting self-directed education.
- Employ trained 'Education Officers' to inform, assist, and support prisoners in accessing and completing education.

Without opportunities to stimulate their brain, prisoners grow bored, turning to drugs to cope with feelings of helplessness.

It's outrageous to know that the education resources that were accessible for Nelson Mandela over 60 years ago during the strict regime of apartheid are not currently obtainable for the vast majority of Australian prisoners today.



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXTERNAL COUNSELLING

Following a successful campaign with the 2017 Cost of Inaction Report, computers have been made available in cells for all NSW prisoners. However, online counselling services are yet to be turned on.

The 2017 Cost of Inaction analysis stated that over 500 women and children could have been spared the traumatic effects of domestic violence (DV) - and $110 million saved annually - if NSW prisoners had received trusted external online counselling.

With 31% of prisoners on remand being held for domestic violence-related charges, the need for effective programs to assist resettlement is significant. The situation has escalated, with a 24% increase of DV since 2023, yet trusted online counselling services are still not accessible in the cells.

In Parliament the NSW Corrections Minister was confronted with a detailed eight-page analysis of his concerns about video access in cells and our responses. A series of consultations were held with crossbench parliamentarians, and the Minister and Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence, who all agreed with the need for independent, external counselling services, through telecommunications into cells.

Justice Action, working with the Community Justice Coalition, was represented at international conferences in Thailand and Morocco to discuss with experts any issues around video counselling, calls, and other tele services into cells. We then prepared a Consultation Report bringing together the responses of the world experts criticising the reluctance of Australian authorities to open up telecommunications in cells, and distributed it nationally to all authorities in prisons and youth justice. It is a work in progress almost won.

Since the introduction of computers in cells overseas, research shows a 60% reduction in assaults on prison guards and a 30% reduction in prisoner-on-prisoner assaults. It works for everyone.

iEXPRESS

iExpress is the world's first prisoner webpage and interactive email system, running since 2013. As a result of COVID lockdowns, the iExpress email service was stopped in 2020, but our team is working to bring it back!

We have restructured the website, automated the email service, and are currently looking for sponsors so it is financially sustainable and prisoners can use the free service.

Still running on the iExpress website are the Prisoner Profiles. Similar to a Facebook profile, this platform allows prisoners to showcase personal achievements, and lets prisoners make a personal statement about their current feelings and attitudes.



A penpal service is being developed along with a new services directory, providing access to state-specific support including counselling, housing, healthcare, legal aid, and employment services.

Through the iExpress website, there is also an option to file complaints through the 'Report on Your Prison' function. Every prison is listed on the website. We encourage people to use it, to help shine light on issues that need attention and to push for change.

AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS UNION (APU)

The APU was established in 1999 to provide a prisoner-led social and political platform, for advocacy and representation at local, national and international levels. The APU structure aligns with the UN Convention Against Torture for consistent monitoring of detention facilities.

The APU handles single prisoner's disputes with a prison official, submissions to governments and parliaments about laws affecting prisoners, as well as speaking to UN bodies about prisoners' human rights.

Something new is a timeline of Australia's prisoner history from prisoners' perspectives, from the beginning of the penal colony. People with internet access can propose additions. We also have an inspiring APU anthem created by a prisoner's family linked to the website.

The APU has the legal form of a cooperative, owned by prisoners themselves. It will create assets and employ people in the future. JA will support it until it is financially stable.

You can now register your interest through family/friends on the APU website (https://australianprisonersunion.org.au/) or directly via mail. Spread the word, propose yourself or others whom you would trust to help manage the organisation and possibly link with the current delegates of your institution.

ACCESS TO LAW AND THE AUSTRALASIAN LEGAL INFORMATION INSTITUTE (AUSTLII)

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms that access to law is a fundamental common law right in Australia, regardless of a person's social status. However, prisoners are often placed at a significant disadvantage when attempting to understand, defend, or appeal their criminal charges.

JA continues to advocate for full prisoner access to legal information. Providing access to AustLII would support prisoners in preparing defences and appeals, either independently or with legal assistance and can be provided to prisoners at no additional expense. Such access could be delivered by AustLII rather than a restricted prison-based intranet database, to ensure independence and reduce concerns about monitoring by prison authorities.

RELIGION AND FAITH-BASED ENGAGEMENT

JA is currently developing a new initiative to improve prisoners' access to external religious services through in-cell tablet technology. We propose leveraging in-cell tablet technology to facilitate Audio-Visual Link (AVL) sessions with trusted external religious leaders. This would allow prisoners to access streamed digital sermons of their preferred external religious leader, thus, breaking down the isolation of detention. We propose personal counselling with external religious services would be of benefit.

Section 116 of the Australian Constitution provides a clear legal foundation for this initiative by prohibiting laws that restrict the free exercise of any religion. JA is contacting religious organisations and gaining support from prison chaplains.

WORLD CRIME CONGRESS



The 15th World Congress on Crime Prevention, organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, was held in Abu Dhabi a few weeks ago. JA was negotiating on behalf of International CURE, a global NGO based in Washington DC, to advance the Nairobi Declaration on Detainee Telecommunications Rights.

The Nairobi Declaration states that all detainees have a right to access telecommunications services — including counselling, legal, and educational resources, and that these connections should support their preparation for release and reintegration into the community. We were attempting to insert three clauses from this declaration into the Abu Dhabi Declaration, on behalf of CURE.



We got significant international support including from Finland through established networks and the Global Alliance of NGOs, but unfortunately the initiative didn't get on the agenda. We will persist with this endeavour into the future.

HEALTH

JA has backed some high profile prisoners as focus cases defending their rights to develop, get counselling, exercise and have friends around them. This includes access to technology in their cells and receiving trusted external care that is responsive to their needs. Healthcare is a right, and must be delivered with dignity, respect and informed control. Access to mainstream services and medicare for some services has been won. Health means social health, feeling positive and not desperately hopeless and helpless.

PRISONER COMMUNITY VALUES

Another initiative JA has been working on is a paper on values within the prisoner community. Our aim is to promote a culture of mutual support, tolerance, and acceptance within the prisoner population, in the place of some of the personal aggression directed at those who have done disgraceful things.

The paper makes the following recommendations:

- Establish a prisoner reception committee in each prison composed of trained peer mentors to welcome new prisoners, provide practical guidance and support, and help them to settle safely into the prison community.
- Engage external organisations to provide specialist support to the reception committees.
- Engage prison authorities to recognise the value of fostering constructive relationships amongst prisoners for the wellbeing of prisoners and management alike.



APU anthem launch

CALLAN PARK

Justice Action has been working on a proposal for using the eight room Rose Cottage at the old Callan Park psychiatric hospital for a consumer-led mental health centre. Instead of locking people up and medicating them it would be a modern centre for building connection, community and communication especially for those in detention. Peer-led support with TAFE courses building digital skills, art, music and computer recycling are on the agenda.



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