Community Based Health and First Aid in Action (CBHFA)

Sisters for Change at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre

What happens when prisoners volunteer to become change makers in their own community?

A safer environment emerges, with less conflict and better relationships with officers. The prison becomes cleaner, fewer women need medical treatment and more people are trained to help if someone is experiencing a mental health crisis.

Then on a personal level, women are more hopeful. They like themselves more, build more confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. They move beyond being judged for their crimes, to being thanked for their actions.

"Not to be judged by our crimes, but our actions."

- SISTER FOR CHANGE

the **POWEr** of humanity



Sisters for Change reach out, speak up and take action on issues affecting women's health, safety and wellbeing at Townsville Women's Correctional Centre.

Key Facts

- Sisters for Change is the name given to the Community-Based Health and First Aid (CBHFA) program run in Townsville Women's Correctional Centre.
- CBHFA operates in three other Australian prisons:
 St Heliers Correctional Centre in NSW, Acacia Prison in WA and Adelaide Women's Prison in SA.
- Prisoners in the program train to become Special Status Red Cross volunteers within their correctional facility.
- The program brings prisoners, prison staff and management and Red Cross together as partners.
- Volunteers receive formal qualifications in Basic First Aid and Mental Health First Aid, Cultural Competency and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

This is where it starts, how it grows is defined by the volunteers and prison community.

Snapshot of Sisters of Change in the first 12 months



53 sessions delivered

24 women graduated





12 volunteer-led community projects

362 volunteer hours

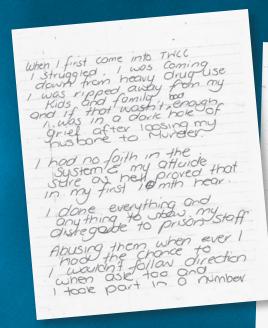


The only time you should be looking down on a woman is when you are giving her a hand up."

SISTERS FOR CHANGE MOTTO

In her own words

Kellie* tells of the turnaround in her life through Sisters for Change. *Not her real name



Being punished for my actions by way of breachers and spending 3 min of my time in & out of the my ways.

It wasn't until I signed up and took part in the sisters for change program.

Run by red cross and facilitared by the amazing Rachel & Glenda

that my attuide started to change.

It was with their amazing & antimes with their amazing

Sense of belonging and sense of belonging and self worth as well as the knowledge of understanding for over come the things of can not change this that can able to give my change with price.

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I also encavage them to do better of tead by example.



After 12 months

the general prison population perceived the prison as safer and relationships with officers to have improved.

of the special status volunteers said they changed from who they were when they first came to prison

felt hopeful and positive about the future

Townsville Women's Correctional Centre has capacity for 170 women, ranging from low to high security offences. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over-represented within the prison population, making up 70% of the population.

> "For the first time I think some of the prison officers actually see those prisoners doing something to better somebody else. Because it's such a dog-eat-dog world in there and it's me, me, me. 'How do I get me the best feed, the best bed?' So it really changed the way some

of the officers looked at the women. That they could actually go down and clean a filthy unit so that another woman going through crisis will have some comfort."

- GLENDA DUFFY CBHFA Cultural Liaison Officer

Sisters for Change projects in the first 12 months

Safe Women Workshops

Weekly information sessions run by prisoners for incoming women to address the high rates of violence and sexual assault. Prisoners report fewer assaults, and less talk of assaulting others since the workshops began.

Clean-Up Crew

Volunteers hold clean up working bees to improve hygiene and wellbeing inside the high security units.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Training

To increase the capacity of prisoners and staff to respond early and proactively to people experiencing a decline in mental health.



Mum's in Jail

A book written for children of prisoners to make prison less frightening by explaining in a simple way what life is like for their mum inside.

Elders for Change

Elders from the community are invited in to help women deal with grief and loss, provide connection to country and cultural safety. They champion the women, lift their spirits, and are caring figures.

Parents, Families and Carers Project

A kit for mums incarcerated for the first time, including information on how to organising visits, playgroup, receive mail and what to tell their kids. Includes a card so women can immediately write to their children.

Community contributions to the prison library

Over 200 new books added to the prison library to help improve emotional wellbeing of women, prevent frustration, worry, boredom and loneliness.



Aunty Dorothy Savage, Elder for Change. Credit: Scott Ranford-Chisholm, Newspix

"By the end of our sessions we had the non-Indigenous women asking 'can we give you a hug?' Aunty Dorothy says.

How powerful is that?

This respectful cultural recognition Aunty Dorothy describes demonstrates the impact Elders for Change have when they visit the prison as volunteers.

"A lot is about lifting their spirts, just helping them survive in there and getting out. We yarn, we tell them some stories about our own mob, let them have a little laugh. Give them that bit of sense of humour.

"Also just having our presence. A lot of them are obviously missing their own mothers, their sisters, their aunties, ven their babies, their children."

> We found before, in our waiting rooms there was lots of screaming and yelling, banging on the walls because they couldn't wait. You'd try to have a conversation and you'd cop a mouthful of abuse, but now you tend to get good conversation and it's real conversation."

- DENISE STICKLEN Nurse Unit Manager, Prison Health Service

"You'll never have the best outcome, but I think if we can change some of the understandings that there are people trying to do the good thing, the right thing to help each other the other mentality will lessen a little bit and open a few more doors for those women in there and get a bit more opportunity for them to do what they want to do."

- SHAREE* former Sister for Change

*Not her real name.

"Building self-reliance and self-worth is what women require. Women are disempowered by the circumstances that brings them to jail, like domestic violence and how their socio-economic positioning disempowers them in society. Jail, by its very nature, is built to further disempower women.

This program is built for women in custody."

- GAY REYNOLDS Accommodation Manager Townsville Women's Correction Centre



"The seemingly small solutions that we've come up with can have a really big impact in that context. I guess it's making an impact with the most vulnerable who have the least access in an institution that has the most power."

- RACHEL MONTGOMERY Team Leader Community Justice and Partnerships

