

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.

When I first come into TWCC I struggled. I was coming down from heavy drug use I was ripped away from my kids and family and if that wasn't enough I was in a dark hole of grief after losing my husband to murder. I had no faith in the system & my attitude sure as hell proved that in my first 10 mth here. I done everything and anything to show my disregard to prison staff. Abusing them when ever I had the chance to I wouldn't follow direction when ask too and I took part in a number

of assaults against other inmates. Being punished for my actions by way of breachers and spending 3mth of my time in & out of the BU didn't change my ways. It wasn't until I signed up and took part in the sisters for change program. Run by red cross and facilitated by the amazing Rachel & Glenda that my attitude started to change. It was with their amazing & continues support

that I have endured a sense of belonging and self worth. aswell as the knowledge & understanding to over come the things I can not change. It is because of this that I am able to serve my role as a sister for change with pride. I have gained the up most respect from my fellow peers for the support I am able to give them. I also encourage them to do better & lead by example in a positive way.

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



"Gave me hope
for change."

— FORMER SISTER FOR CHANGE

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.



Illustration from 'Mum's in Jail', the book created by Sisters of Change of children of women incarcerated

After 12 months

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

75% of the **special status volunteers** said they changed from who they were when they first came to prison

50% 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

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 spirits, 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



*“We have achieved things
- not just talking.”*

– FORMER SISTER FOR CHANGE



“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