

Captive Audiences:
Performing Arts in Prisons



Five Case Studies

The *Captive Audience* research team identified dozens of projects across Australia and selected five case studies that use the performing arts in corrections in diverse ways. With each case study, the research team conducted interviews with artists and stakeholder groups, observed the practices and performances, attended workshops and training sessions and collated relevant materials. The following summary provides an overview of each of the case studies:

Somebody's Daughter Theatre *Melbourne, Victoria*

For more than three decades, Somebody's Daughter Theatre (SDT) has been producing high quality theatre, music and art with women in prison, post release and with marginalised young people. SDT works with the most disenfranchised over the longer term with the aim of 'breaking intergenerational cycles of abuse, addiction and institutionalisation by providing pathways back into formal education, training or employment'. SDT are one of the leading pioneers of prison theatre work with women in Australia, and the practice observed through this case study demonstrates the strength of long term partnerships with institutions, the benefits of year round performing arts skills development, and the rich rewards of participants performing high quality well produced shows based on real stories to prison and non-prison audiences. A flagship of Australian prison arts, this company demonstrates the potential of long-term projects.

Drumbeat *Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Perth, Western Australia, and nation-wide*

Drumbeat is a ten-week manualised drumming program that is used in a number of prison, community and education settings in Australia and New Zealand. The program focuses on rhythmic activities that support teamwork and lead to introspection on a range of life issues including communication, peer pressure and social responsibility. Drumbeat also provides an extensive training program that allows anybody to become accredited as a Drumbeat facilitator, and as a result prison staff can be trained to deliver this program. The Drumbeat program is one of the few manualised arts programs offered in Australian prisons. It provides clear goals to assist with correctional service delivery, which can be measured and evaluated. The choice of the drum plays a key role in the participants' experience given the instrument's accessibility and strong social dimension. The focus on easy access for both participations and facilitators does significantly influence the programs' musical outcomes given there is a reasonably low level of musical demand.

One Mob Different Country *Darwin, Northern Territory*

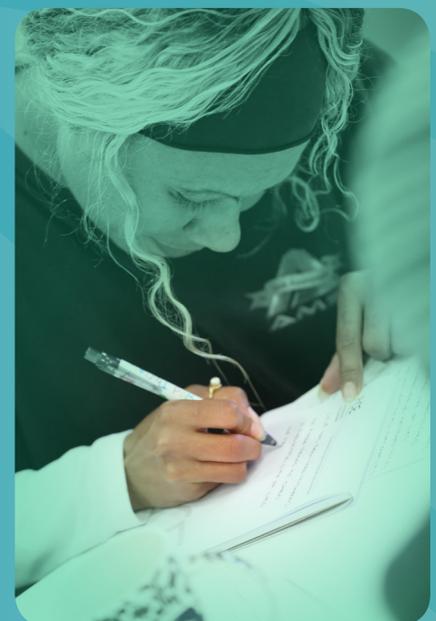
Dance plays a significant role in the lives of Australia's First Peoples. Dances tell stories of the Dreamtime or may be performed as a public celebration of a particular event. As with many of the ties to First Peoples traditional past, ongoing colonisation continues to dismantle and decay traditional ways. The One Mob Different Country case study involved analysing the cultural connection between First People and dance albeit via a prison sentence. Through interviewing and following the dancers intermittently over three years, the One Mob Different Country case study details how the dancers have negotiated skin group differences and cultural rules around dance performance. Negotiating these cultural rules allows prisoners from different clans to perform other clan's dancers on land other than their own. While it is very concerning that the One Mob dancers have been enabled by the vast over-representation of First Peoples in prison, the positive outcome is that the institution of prison provides a mechanism for the non-traditional extension of songlines. In doing so, One Mob provides a link to ancestral past or current events to be celebrated through dance and in do so, building prisoner self-worth.

Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble (QSE) Shakespeare Prison Project *Brisbane, Queensland*

The Shakespeare Prison Project (SPP) works with up to 20 prisoners each year, culminating in the performance of a Shakespeare play. The Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble and founder Dr. Rob Pensalfini have run the project six times since its inception in 2006. The project utilises a combination of Shakespeare text and drama games to create trust and emotional safety for the participants. QSE have developed a sophisticated synthesis of traditional text-based theatre and drama workshops and games. The practice demonstrates that Shakespeare can be an effective aid to developing literacy and communication skills, flexible thinking, building confidence and developing collaborative skills.

Unlocked *Kempsey and various other locations in New South Wales*

Unlocked is a self-funded initiative of Red Room Company, a not-for-profit organisation that aims to create "unusual and useful poetry projects which transform expectations of, and experiences with, poetry." Focusing on the educational domain and positioned within that ambit by all those involved, it takes Australian poets into correctional centres to work with inmates, and stimulating active creative participation. In doing so, it also contributes to fostering cultural access and prisoner wellbeing. Reading selected poems, writing and combining lines inspired by images, playing surreal 'missing words' games, and co-writing rap texts create an environment for the inmates' personal expression. The outcomes — recorded and published in hardcopy — provide a strong sense of achievement. Sound in pedagogical approach and impressive in outcomes, the project seems to undersell itself in both educational potential and its contribution to other corrective services aims, which could hopefully lead to more sustainable funding model.



Investigating Performing Arts in Prisons

Performing arts have become a growing worldwide presence in prisons over the past 30 years. Increasing numbers of theatre, music, dance, performance poetry, opera and film programs are being facilitated with both male and female prison inmates in diverse secure settings. They attract significant academic and media attention. Organisational reports, documentary films, journalism, theoretical and applied research have been detailing prison arts, creating recognition that this body of work is becoming an increasingly valued part of the correctional enterprise. However, despite the sheer number and diversity of programs across the world, there has been very little research into the presence and effect of performing arts projects in Australian prisons. *Captive Audiences* is the first national prison arts research project that examines a range of different practices across Australian states with various prisoner populations.

Prison arts in Australia

Australia has a notable history in prison arts. One of the earliest recorded examples of theatre with prisoners was the 1789 staging of Georg Farquar's restoration comedy *The Recruiting Officer* by NSW convicts. In more recent times, however, Australia has paid less attention to this area of work than other English-speaking countries such as the UK or the US. Nonetheless, examples of excellent performing arts practice in Australian prisons do exist. In every state, examples of projects can be found: choirs, theatre, music theatre, drumming, song writing, performance poetry, Shakespeare, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance. Companies funded by government, non-government arts funding organisations and/or philanthropy deliver projects, with one flagship company, Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company in Victoria, having delivered a continually running program for over 30 years.

Performing arts projects in prisons take myriad forms. Some prison education units provide courses in music or drama; others have specialist facilities such as instruments, recording technology and music rooms. Some rehabilitation programs utilise arts-based methodologies, such as drumming or offence-related, drama-based activities and role-play. NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee) week is often a focus for performing arts practice, with many state jurisdictions encouraging culturally significant performing arts opportunities at this time for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners. In addition, there have always been people drawing, writing poetry, or playing a guitar in prison, and this too continues in most correctional facilities in Australia.



Given the wealth of practices, it is surprising there has been little research that documents arts-based activities in Australian prisons, especially since corrective services providers express a need for a knowledge base from which to engage, implement and evaluate such activities and programs. *Captive Audiences* has sought to make inroads into this line of research by mapping and contextualising current practice, and by generating a research-based framework for prison arts in Australia based on current practice and extant literature. It is precisely this type of foundational knowledge that is commonly overlooked in the urgency to deliver and evaluate new services and innovative projects, which can provide a solid basis for future theoretical and evaluative studies.

Finding a common language

Captive Audiences' most common observation throughout the research has been the challenge to find a basis for effective dialogue between arts and correctional organisations. Whilst the intentions of arts facilitators and correctional managers were very similar, it seems that a common language enabling arts organisations to effectively communicate with corrections was missing. There is a pressing need for a framework that allows proposals to be developed for projects that will have relevance and meaning, and which provides correctional professionals with information which will assist their policy development, decision making, and effective engagement with arts projects and arts-based approaches within programs and activities.

Emerging from the *Captive Audiences* research is a practical tool that can assist in the development and management of prison performing arts projects: for arts facilitators it offers a vehicle for reflecting upon the intentions of the project and a language and structure for developing proposals; for correctional managers it offers a framework for understanding the potential contribution of proposed arts projects to the prison, and a language for developing policy and engagement with arts organisations.

This framework positions performing arts within two major areas of correctional service delivery; namely, *Prisoner Development* and *Humane, Effective and Safe Prisons*. Arts projects are by their very nature heterogeneous: no two projects are the same, and therefore their contribution to the correctional enterprise is varied, and often multifaceted. Our observations of arts practice within Australian prisons saw projects that contributed across a number of domains: cultural access, education, health and wellbeing, prison environment, changing offending behaviour and reintegration.

Finding a Common Language: Performing Arts in Prison Service Delivery

The framework below is intended to guide arts practitioners in positioning projects within the various areas of correctional service delivery. It is not prescriptive: not every art project has to address all domains/columns nor respond to all questions on the adjacent page.



Developing and Assessing Performing Arts Proposals

Captive Audiences identified a need for guidelines in developing and assessing proposals for performing arts project delivery in Australian prisons. A recommendation arising from both fieldwork interviews and the steering committee was to use a logic model approach for project development, management and evaluation. This versatile tool is used extensively within both correctional and arts management to develop projects and build common understanding amongst stakeholders. Working through a logic model process also helps to ensure that any evaluations yield relevant, useful information based on the intentions and assumptions of the project.

A prison arts proposal using the logic model could include:

- 1. Situational Analysis:** What are the perceived needs? Why are we doing this project? (e.g. *Lack of engaging rehabilitation services for a distinct prisoner group; need for development of the educational curriculum in ways that are relevant to a prisoner population; low motivation among prisoners for engagement in prison activities and programs*).
- 2. Goals:** How is this project meeting this perceived need? Phrase your goal in terms of the change you want to achieve over the life of your project, rather than a summary of the services you are going to provide. (e.g. *Developing links with community and culture for Aboriginal prisoners in this prison; motivating prisoners to engage with literacy through poetry and performance*).
- 3. Assumptions:** What assumptions are we making? (e.g. *Arts projects can assist in the rehabilitation of prisoners; cultural expression is a basic human right.*)
- 4. Intentions of the project in terms of correctional service delivery:** How does this project fit in with the service delivery of the prison? (Refer here to the positioning of the project in terms of the framework outlined on the centre page).
- 5. Project Inputs:** What resources are necessary for completing the activities? (i.e. human, financial, organisational, community or systems resources in any combination). How will these assets/resources be gained? (e.g. *physical facilities, costumes, sets, art supplies, musical instruments, funding of the project, facilitator skills, approvals, sufficient prison access, staff support, willing participants*).
- 6. Project Activities:** What are the specific actions that make up the project? Describe the activities involved in the project (e.g. *theatre games; song writing; group reflection; rehearsing a play*) in line with the project's aims and goals, appropriate for the participants, the facility, the technology, the resources of the facilitators, the intended artistic outcome, and the intended instrumental outcome. Include detailed descriptions covering the duration and intensity of the project activities.
- 7. Project Outputs:** What are the creative outputs (e.g. *theatre performance; film; published material; songs; dances*)? Describe these in detail (including audience type and anticipated number; numbers of prisoners involved and in what roles; what happens to any creative product or data generated by the project).
- 8. Short-term Outcomes:** What are the projected immediate and tangible benefits of the project? Ensure that projected outcomes are linked with stated resources and activities.
- 9. Intermediate-term Outcomes:** What are the next projected results or impacts that occur because of the project activities? Document expected changes in program participants, the organisation, the prison, and/or the community as a result of the program. Include specific changes in awareness, knowledge, skills and behaviours. Include any previous evaluation data here. These link your short-term outcomes with long-term outcomes as a logical progression and must remain within the scope of the program's control or sphere of reasonable influence and be generally accepted as valid by various stakeholders of the project.
- 10. Long-term outcomes:** What change do you **hope** will occur over time? Long-term outcomes are those that result from the achievement of your short- and intermediate-term outcomes. They are also generally outcomes over which your program has a less direct influence. Often long-term outcomes will occur beyond the timeframe you identified for your logic model.





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Chief Investigators

Professor Huib Schippers
Professor Michael Balfour
Associate Professor Brydie-Leigh Bartleet
Dr John Rynne

Research Fellow

Ms Linda Davey

Steering Committee

Mr Andrew Beck (Deputy Managing Director & Director of Operations, Serco Justice and Community, Asia Pacific Serco)
Dr John Paget (NSW Inspector of Custodial Services)
Professor Andrew Day (Deakin University)
Ms Maud Clarke (Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company)
Aunty Anne Leisha (Griffith University Elder-in-Residence and Co-Chair of the Griffith University Council of Elders)

The Case Studies

Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company:
Ms Maud Clarke and Ms Kharen Harper
Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble,
Shakespeare Prison Project: Dr Rob Pensilfini
DRUMBEAT: Mr Simon Faulkner
Red Room Company/Unlocked Project:
Ms Johanna Featherstone
One Mob Different Country: Mr. B Schroder

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Mr Mark Walters (Director of Southern Queensland Correctional Centre)
Dr Anne Marie Martin (Assistant Commissioner Offender Management and Policy, Corrective Services NSW)
Mr Rod Wise (Deputy Commissioner Operations, Corrections Victoria)
Mr K. Middlebrook (Commissioner of Northern Territory Corrective Services)
Ms Deb Myers (Big hArt)
Dr Natalie Lewandowski (Centre Manager QCRC, Griffith University)

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Red Room Company

Report

To order a copy of the *Captive Audiences* report, please email qcrc@griffith.edu.au.