



# 'ART IN PRISONS'

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF  
THE PHILOSOPHIES AND IMPACTS  
OF VISUAL ARTS PROGRAMS FOR  
CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS

Alexandra Djurichkovic



Arts Access Australia



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CORRECTIONAL POPULATIONS

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**Report for Arts Access Australia**

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## FOREWORD

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As the Executive Director of Arts Access Australia from 2003 to 2010 I had an interest in extending the scope of arts access beyond disability services and into areas such as mental health, homelessness and prisons. In early 2010 Arts Access Australia approached UTS Shopfront for assistance to undertake research on prison art programs in Australia and elsewhere as a first step towards developing a national prison art strategy.

As the national peak body for arts and disability, Arts Access Australia understands the significant correlation between mental illness and prison populations. While internationally there has been some work on art in prison programs and mental health—particularly in North America, New Zealand and the United Kingdom—in Australia these programs are fragmented and invisible at a policy level and prison art workers and advocates lack a common purpose; resulting in a lack of support for these programs.

There are a number of current issues for prison art programs in Australia, making the field one worth further academic, policy and program attention from both the arts and corrective services sectors. For example recent legislative changes in Queensland mean that prisoners can no longer earn income from their art—a form of punishment that disproportionately targets Indigenous inmates and further limits their potential rehabilitation.

During my time with Arts Access Australia, I was able to collate a body of background research from students relevant to Australia including:

- Anthea Cheng. 2009. Prison Art Programs for Aboriginal People: A research paper. Sydney College of Fine Arts.
- Priya Panchilingam 2009. National Prison Art Database. Arts Access Australia and the University of Technology, Sydney.
- Annette Tesoriero. 2009. Research into Arts and NSW Education Training Units in Juvenile Justice Detention Centres. Community Cultural Development NSW and the University of Technology, Sydney.

As student research much of this work remains unpublished though the reports do form a starting point for future research and strategy development in this field.

Alexandra Djurichkovic's work in this report was designed to complement that existing research, hence the decision to conduct secondary research that did not include the themes of 'Juvenile Justice' and 'Indigenous Art'. Nevertheless her work, undertaken over one semester as an undergraduate student at the University of Technology, Sydney, is commended to you as a starting point that I hope will stimulate further research and public interest in this area. And, as this report is the first review dealing with art in prisons to be made publicly available, Alexandra can also claim to have produced 'first-of-its-kind' research for Australia.

While the development of a national prison art strategy informed by international models and grounded in Australian practice and priorities remains a vision for the future, this report is an important first step. I hope it is picked up by Arts Access Australia and other stakeholders to inform their future work in this important area of social justice.

**Gareth Wreford**

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Project Background

This report is a review of academic and other literature examining the impacts of art in prison programs. The research was undertaken on behalf of Arts Access Australia through UTS Shopfront Community Program and conducted over the course of a semester as a Professional Placement for my Social Inquiry degree with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Arts Access Australia is the national arts and disability advocacy body, motivated by the belief that all Australians should enjoy equal opportunity to both be creative and participate in the arts. The organisation is representative of a network of state and territory arts and disability organisations that work to increase access and participation in the arts for individuals with disabilities. Arts Access Australia lobbies at a federal level on behalf of its members and the broader arts and disability community. With mental and psychiatric disorders falling under the umbrella of 'disability' and the established connection between mental health disorders and incarceration, Arts Access Australia has an interest in achieving a nationwide approach to prison art programs.

My project brief was to undertake a review of literature to provide evidence for the value of prison art programs with a focus on the impact of visual arts programs on adult inmates, particularly those categorised as 'disabled'. My research questions included:

- What is a prison art program and how are they typically organised?
- What philosophies drive these programs?
- Are they successful? (including how 'success' is defined)

Arts Access Australia aims to use this research to inform an advocacy campaign for further funding of art in prisons programs and, in a country where corrective services are run by state-territory jurisdictions, to consider a national approach to development.

## 1.2 Research Aims

The existing literature that discusses issues relating to the use of creative arts in prisons is largely descriptive (Currie 1989, 7) and it appears that little systematic evaluation of prison art programs has been undertaken anywhere in the world (McMillan 2003, 5). The history of art program evaluation in the criminal justice sector mainly consists of short-term studies assessed on the strength of anecdotal evidence, personal accounts, and subjective reports of the positive impacts of inmates engaging with art projects (McMillan 2003, 5).

This report aims to define what a prison art program is and to examine whether these programs are successful (and how 'success' is defined) as well as how they are organised. The research also aims to contribute knowledge to the question: Does Australia need a more unified national strategy for implementing art programs in prisons?



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As art programs are usually concerned with internal goals and self-development (Clements 2004, 174), their benefits are inherently difficult to determine in 'objective' quantifiable measurements (see Parkes & Bilby 2010, 103-4). That said, this review examined both qualitative and quantitative evaluations in order to share insights from these methods. To ensure that artistic programs inside prisons do not continue to be disconnected projects with short-term funding, it is crucial to develop a research base that outlines the positive impact of these interventions (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 105). It is hoped that this report will stimulate this development.

### **1.3 Method**

The Fisher Library and Fisher Law Library at the University of Sydney and the Haymarket Library at the University of Technology, Sydney, were the physical sites where I based my research and all provided valuable resources. In addition, extensive searches were conducted through specialist online databases and search engines. The most useful were:

- EBSCO
- British Humanities Index
- Communication Studies
- ISW Web of KNOWLEDGE
- Project Muse
- SAGE Journals Online
- INFORMIT Databases
- JSTOR
- ProQuest
- Elsevier.

Using a Boolean search, the key words used were 'prison', 'jail', 'imprisonment' and 'art' as well as 'Australia'. Within the multi-disciplinary databases, areas such as art, criminology, communications, education, psychology, law and the humanities were selected for searches. Information was also obtained from websites. These were found by searching for specific websites, such as Arts Access Australia, or by conducting searches with the previously mentioned keywords in search engines or websites. There was a deliberate focus on academic literature—peer-accredited journals and books—although several conference papers, media articles and advocacy articles are also cited.

### **1.4 Limitations**

The information in this report was not intended as an exhaustive review of all relevant literature. In order to balance time constraints and project objectives, attention is focused on identifying the positive effects of visual arts programs on adult inmates as these programs currently receive the bulk of academic attention. Other artforms that occurred commonly

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in the literature, but not covered by this report, include theatre, poetry and music. Looking beyond Australia, I also consider the United States and New Zealand experience and have included the United Kingdom in the annotated bibliography.

The themes of 'Indigenous' or 'juvenile' were outside the project scope originally defined by Arts Access Australia as those themes had been covered in previous internal research (see Foreword).

Finally, in the academic literature (and, consequently, in this report) 'art therapy' rather than 'arts access' features heavily. Yet arts access approaches, informed by human rights, are of most interest to the arts sector and Arts Access Australia.



## 2.0 THE VALUE OF ART IN PRISONS

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There is an overarching tension within correctional services, as prisons are required to punish the offender while simultaneously reforming and providing social order (Belton & Barclay 2008, 7). A judgment handed down by the Victorian Court of Appeal in 2005 articulated this tension, stating that prisons are intended to achieve retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation (Kellam 2006, 16).

The cognitive-behavioural rehabilitative strategies currently favoured in the western criminal justice system (see Clements 2004, 170-2, 177; Parkes & Bilby 2010, 100) 'have yet to prove their effectiveness in reducing re-offending' (Johnson 2008, 100), and in an international context of rising prison populations much of the focus is placed on housing the incarcerated instead of rehabilitating them (Iyer 2008). Politicians 'pandering to a fearful public are getting elected for their short-sighted "tough-on-crime" band-aids' (Kornfeld 1997, 77), and the consequence of this political populism necessarily entails severe punitive measures that deny prisoners 'what [are] thought to be unwarranted privileges and amenities' (Johnson 2008, 104), including opportunities for self-improvement through arts participation (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 99; Clements 2004, 172-3).

There is thus a philosophical contradiction inherent in prison art programs, as

the prison is punitive, but creative activities are very rewarding. Prison is intended to strip power and deliver pain; art empowers and delivers happiness (Johnson 2008, 115).

Art activities in the criminal justice system are therefore an attempt to 'reconcile the irreconcilable' (Peaker & Vincent in McMillan 2003, 2). Within prisons, art activities are 'provided within a range of theoretical frameworks, including an arts access model, arts education or art therapy' (Hunter & MacNeill 2008, 1). The following sections are an attempt to theme key knowledge about prison art programs operating within these frameworks.

### 2.1 Art is educational

The opportunity to participate in creative expression through the arts can be a major factor in the success—or otherwise—of the rehabilitation and re-educative processes made available to inmates (Dean & Field 2003, 2, 4, 8; Clements 2004, 172-4). Education is integral to individual growth, contributing to one's wellbeing and enabling improved life opportunities (Dean & Field 2003, 4, 8), yet many inmates have low education levels (Dean & Field 2003, 2, 5; Peaker 1997), further discouraging engagement with conventional learning models (Currie 1989, 32). Prison art programs provide a viable alternative for prisoners without basic education skills and/or low levels of literacy and verbal communication (Dean & Field 2003, 2; Johnson 2008, 102). Traditional education courses within prisons, such as basic numeracy or literacy, tend to provide 'lowest common denominator qualifications that are unlikely to override the stigma of criminalization for prospective employers' (Clements 2004, 173) so the availability of other means of learning is an important educational tool (Dean & Field 2003, 2, 4, 8). Additionally, they often remind inmates of their failure within the education system on the outside, with many engaging in the process only to 'play the system', not to learn (Currie 1989, 32).

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Art programs are distinguished by inmates as distinct from the authoritative system of one-way learning whereby the teacher teaches and the student passively learns (McMillan 2003, 4; Currie 1989, 33, 41; Durland 2002), as art teachers and artists are 'regarded as being there to help, assist and guide the inmates in learning how to create' (Currie 1989, 41). Art programs are further experienced as beneficial as they provide the participant inmate with a positive relationship that is not based around authority, one that also provides a link to the 'outside' world (Dean & Field 2003, 7). These qualities of art programs make them more accessible, absorbing and rewarding, and are therefore more likely to be taken seriously by the participants (Gussak 2007, 450; Clements 2004, 173).

Enjoyment and achievement in prison art programs have been shown to result in a re-introduction to education for many inmates, stimulating them into pursuing further education both inside prison and upon release, whether it be additional creative education or more 'traditional' types (Currie 1989, 97; Dean & Field 2003, 6, 8; Clements 2004, 174; Peaker 1997). The active learning inherent in art making is educational in its own right; it is important that art classes do not get lost in their instrumentality (Clements 2004, 173) where their merit is only measured in terms of their success in achieving criminal justice aims and targets (McMillan 2003, 2) or of the numbers of saleable artwork produced (see Dean & Field 2003, 6-7). Prison art programs offer multi-dimensional value, facilitating opportunities, not only for further learning, but also for recreation and vocation (Johnson 2008, 101)—providing both specific skills that open doors to creative careers as well as generic, transferable job skills (Dean & Field 2003, 6; McMillan 2003, 1; Peaker 1997)—and a rehabilitative, therapeutic learning of the self (Johnson 2008, 103-4).

The creativity and new ways of thinking fundamental to art making are complementary to rehabilitative needs (Clements 2004, 173). These characteristics help to

produce active citizens and develop a critical attitude in them. Such a manner is necessary in order to examine lifestyle, but this cannot be foisted onto prisoners...[it] has to be their choice and discovery.  
(Clements 2004, 173, my emphasis)

The satisfaction and empowerment inherent in the creative process (Heenan 2006, 182-185; Currie 1989 43-4, 81) has led, and will continue to lead, many inmates along journeys of continued education and self-improvement through arts participation (see McMillan 2003, 3-7; Johnson 2008, 115; Austin 2007, 1-2; Dean & Field 2003, 8; Peaker 1997). A study analysing the effect of a prison art program on participant inmates notes the fact that 'a low achiever could be motivated to both learn and reflect through less formal teaching methods is an important finding' (Currie 1989, 97). This demonstrates the link between creative education and personal learning, and personal learning and rehabilitation.

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## 2.2 Art is therapy or Art in therapy

Art as a necessary creative process that expresses and heals—art is therapy—and as a guided tool of a formal therapeutic process—art in therapy—both have demonstrated rehabilitative values (Johnson 2008, 103, 108). Prison art programs are generally implemented under the philosophical basis of ‘art is therapy’, though there are an increasing number of initiatives that use a form or forms of the creative arts as a mediated process of psychotherapy.

The benefits of the art is therapy approach are summarised in the preceding section and in the following section, discussing the benefits prison art programs deliver to individual participants. Johnson summarises the benefits of the art in therapy approach as:

Art therapy focuses heavily on healing processes. The making of visual images generates self-insights, brings suppressed feelings to the surface, and helps participants cope with the stress of prison life... it offers prisoners a non-destructive, therapeutic release for their feelings of distress associated with the deprivation of prison life as well as states of mental health extending beyond the incarcerated experience...art is the ‘ultimate hidden weapon’ because of its ability to ‘hide’ the therapeutic process (2008, 103).

While most of these benefits are also applicable to the art is therapy philosophy, they are more often associated with the art in therapy approach as there is a psychiatrist, psychologist or art therapist present to guide the directed creation of art and its interpretation. This approach is fixed within a medicalised, diagnostic/classification approach, though this is a not bad thing in and of itself:

the vast set-up to treat, correct, and hence, infantilize criminals as delinquents remains firmly embedded in the penal system as a normalizing technology. It serves to fix individuals via panoptic techniques (the documentary apparatus, psychiatric assessments, diagnostic testing, etc.) that lead to precise, objective codifications of the individual (Clements 2004, 171).

The medical model thus restricts the emancipatory potential of creative expression through its focus on objective and measurable performance indicators (see Parkes & Bibly 2010, 103-5; Heenan 2006, 180). It can therefore be argued that art in therapy is less spontaneous, more controlled and may consequently be experienced as less ‘authentic’ as it may ‘eliminate the necessary space for innovation and creativity’ (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 104). This said, there are notable contemporary initiatives in providing rehabilitative art therapy through the ‘scientific’ art in therapy approach (see Gussak 2004; 2006; 2007; 2009; 2009a). Although there may be philosophical reasons for advocating art is therapy over art in therapy programs, or vice versa, both provide benefits to participants that extend beyond the session.

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### 2.2.1 David Gussak's art in therapy research series

Between 2003 and 2009 art therapist David Gussak undertook several studies on the impact of art as therapy on inmate depression, behaviour and locus of control. Gussak's series stand out amongst the few publicly available literature that quantify the benefits of art activities in prisons. His method included follow-up studies as well as separate evaluative reflections on the cumulative results, reflecting on practice, shortcomings and future directions. His articles each contain a comprehensive literature review.

The first study occurred in 2003 in a medium-to-maximum security, adult male correctional institution in north-western rural Florida. Gussak hypothesised:

if prison inmates receive art therapy services, then they will exhibit marked changes in their behaviour and attitude and an improvement in their mood, socialization and problem-solving abilities within the correctional environment (2004, 246).

Forty-eight participants were given art therapy services, with 44 of these attending consistently and 39 attending all sessions. The four-week program comprised twice-weekly sessions with groups of six. The course was structured for:

Directives for the sessions [to] progress from simple to complex and from individually focused to group focused. This schedule facilitated the development of problem-solving and socialization skills. Some examples of these tasks included: name-embellishment (simple/individually-focused); white-paper sculpture (complex/individually-focused); draw-and-pass (simple/group-focused); group coloured paper sculpture of dream environment (complex/group-focused) (Gussak 2009a, 204).

All participants had an Axis 1 diagnosis such as major depression or manic bipolar disorder and fifty-one percent were on some form of psychotropic medication (Gussak 2004, 246). Two measurements were used to assess change. The first measurement tool was a 6-point Likert Scale survey specifically designed for the study, assessing impacts deemed important by facility staff. It was completed pre- and post-program by the facility's mental health counsellor taking into account feedback from correctional staff and her personal observations of participants' interaction with the general prison population. A score of 0 indicated poor compliance and expectations, with 5 indicating positive compliance and expectations (Gussak 2007, 448). Table 2 shows the mean results (Gussak 2004, 249)

For the second measurement tool, each participant was asked to complete a drawing of a person picking an apple from a tree (PPAT) at the first and last art therapy session. These drawings provided a pre- and post-project comparison assessed with the Formal Elements Art Therapy Scale (FEATS) rating guide. FEATS is composed of a 14-point scale with scores ranging from 0 to 5 that focuses on characteristics including logic, problem-solving, details, line quality and prominence of colour (Gussak 2007, 447). Although FEATS can be used

**Table 2**  
**Results of comparison of pre- and post-session survey results**

Title of category	Pre	Post	d.f.	t	Significance	Effect size
Compliance with rules	2.93 (.85)	4.66 (.57)	40	13.242	<.001*	4.19
Compliance with correctional staff	2.98 (.79)	4.66 (.58)	40	14.25	<.001*	4.51
Socializes with peers	2.13 (.68)	4.39 (.67)	40	21.207	<.001*	6.70
Optimistic attitude towards meds	2.59 (.68)	3.57 (.79)	37	6.532	<.001*	2.15
Compliance with meds	2.74 (.72)	3.61 (.82)	37	5.259	<.001*	1.73
Compliance with diet	2.49 (.98)	4.68 (.47)	40	14.338	<.001*	4.54
Regular sleeping patters	2.19 (.89)	4.50 (.60)	39	15.585	<.001*	5.00

\*  $P < .05$ .

to assess the presence of mental illnesses such as severe depression or schizophrenia through rating a combination of visual characteristics, it 'can also be used to assess change in the client over time' (Gussak 2007, 447). Significant change was measured in the post-test drawings (Gussak 2004, 249). Increased space was used and there was more detail and greater compositional integration, reflecting accepted awareness of their surroundings (Gussak 2007, 450). Prominence of colour, colour fit and implied energy of the drawing all also improved, 'supporting the conclusion that there was a decrease in depressive symptoms and an elevation of mood' (Gussak 2004, 249).

Participants were also asked to complete a survey upon completion of the project, asking for their thoughts on the art therapy sessions, what they had learned and how they thought the program could be improved (Gussak 2004, 248). Mark, a 21-year old serving the third year of a 15-year sentence—initially notable for a negative, aggressive demeanour and his surly distance—demonstrated a more positive attitude and disposition as well as greatly improved behaviour during the course of the program. On the post-program evaluation he 'indicated that he did interact well with others in the group and that he learned how to express himself through the art' (Gussak 2004, 254).

The survey results, combined with the observations of correctional staff, showed

an increase in mood, an improvement in attitude and greater cooperation with the staff and their peers. Based on the results of the two measures, and [that] the art therapy was the only new experience in an otherwise tightly structured environment, it can be concluded that the art therapy produced positive change (Gussak 2004, 252).

The program was deemed to be a success and Gussak received further funding for research. His follow-up study took place in 2004 in the same facility. This time a control group was used and, instead of the pre- and post-observation survey used in 2003, participants completed the Beck Depression Inventory-Short Form (BDI-II) before and after the treatment period (Gussak 2006, 190). The PPAT/FEATS measurement was again used. An announcement for volunteers was presented by the unit psychologist with respondents randomly assigned to the experimental or control group. Twenty-seven were assigned to the experimental group with 16 attending all sessions. Of the 16, 14 were taking medication for a mental illness. The



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control group included an equivalent number of people on medication and were not given art therapy sessions but completed the pre- and post-BDI-II tests.

BDI-II has been used successfully to evaluate depression in prisoners and the art therapy participants had 'significantly greater decrease from pre-test to post-test than the control group' (Gussak 2006, 191). Feedback from staff and observation showed an improvement in the participant inmates' socialisation and problem-solving abilities (Gussak 2007, 455). However, the results from the FEATS test showed no significant changes. Several factors may have contributed this result:

For one thing, unbeknownst to the researchers...several of the experimental participants for this study had also participated in the pilot study. It was not until the project had already proceeded that this was brought to the researcher's attention. Thus, they were already familiar with the drawing procedure...Familiarity with the procedure may have resulted in a practice effect. As it was, several of the participants joked about having to do 'yet another person and apple tree drawing', and even had fun with the procedure. Another factor may have been that those who volunteered and completed the entire procedure, did so because of an overriding interest in art making. Some of them may have already had some skills, which may have resulted in little change between the drawings; developed schemas and style may have prevented much change between the two drawings. Another factor may have been the low participatory numbers...It seems that the measurement tool may not have been sensitive enough to measure minute change in small groups (Gussak 2006, 192).

The research was expanded in subsequent years—including 'testing' of female prisoners—and also included measurement of the locus of control (LOC), the degree of control one feels they have over their environment (Gussak 2009, 6). While both male and female participants recorded positive results, 'women were more affected by the art intervention than the men in both depression and locus of control' (Gussak 2009a, 205). This may indicate that women were more responsive to the group dynamic inherent in group art therapy or that women may prefer alternative therapies and thus may be more responsive to them (ibid, 205). Men 'seemed to focus on the final product; their natural competitive tendencies compelled them to produce good art' (ibid, 205). The women 'used the art-making process as a catalyst to facilitate discussion and empathetic interaction...Drawing energy from the group cohesiveness and socialization' (ibid, 205).

The participants were also reluctant to end their art therapy experience, with one stating 'this has changed me in so many ways' (Gussak 2009, 11). Further, improved behaviour and interpersonal interactions with participating inmates was noted by the correctional staff of both facilities (ibid, 9-10).

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Gussak concluded that art creation is inherently validating and through it participants are able to gain mastery of self-expression and, as inmates learnt to manipulate the materials to achieve their desired effect, learn cause and effect through the creative processes. This knowledge became internalised leading to more responsible, aware and controlled individuals (ibid, 10).

Overall, Gussak's work provides an evaluation model for impacts on mental illness, inmate wellbeing and the effects of art in the prison environment. The success reported in Gussak's research led to the development of the statewide Florida Arts in Corrections Program by the Department of Corrections.

### **2.3 Art is beneficial to the individual**

At a common-sense level it is apparent how prison art programs benefit individual participants: art is recreational and is enjoyable, particularly within the penal context of enforced and sustained deprivation (Johnson 2008, 103). Prison art programs are also beneficial to individuals as participation in educative or rehabilitative art programs is assumed to be more beneficial than non-participation (Gussak 2004, 252; Gussak 2009, 10). In fact, prison art programs provide numerous practical and psychological benefits that 'strengthen cognitive abilities and help students integrate knowledge, feelings and manual skills' (Johnson 2007, 72).

Contact with prison art programs may give many inmates their first experience of a positive, absorbing activity (Dean & Field 2003, 2) and participation in such programs offers a non-threatening way for inmates to demonstrate that they are engaging in educative or therapeutic programs, allowing them the possibility of obtaining privileges or accessing parole (Benton & Barclay 2008, 8). Participation in art programs can also help maintain and improve relationships between inmates and their families (Benton & Barclay 2008, 16) as inmates use artworks to provide gifts or as a means to convey thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to express verbally (Johnson 2007, 71). Additionally, this exposure to a positive and productive experience that can be enjoyed as recreation can enable inmates to cope with the unemployment stretches that most will face upon being released. This benefit cannot be understated when considering those who carry the 'stigma' of 'the formerly incarcerated' (Clements 2004, 173; Peaker 1997).

Engaging in prison art projects results in increased self-esteem (see Gussak 2004, 2007, 2009; Dean & Field 2003, 4, 8; Currie 1989, 44, 81). There is broad consensus within the literature that positive self-esteem is crucial to mental and social wellbeing as it influences choices, aims, goals and the ability to deal with life's difficulties (Heenan 2006, 185). Engaging in the creative process has been shown to decrease depressive symptoms (see Gussak 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2009a; Benton & Barclay 2008, 19-20, 28; Currie 1989, 44-5) and provides inmates with the opportunity to construct and anchor an identity based around positive achievement (see Dean & Field 2003, 8; Currie 1989, 43-5; Schrift 2006, 273). Although prison culture does not permit any expression of weakness or depression (Currie 1989, 22-3), these feelings are pervasive (Gussak 2004, 246) and art not only alleviates them through enabling

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escapism from the immediate surroundings (Benton & Barclay 2008, 18-20), but also alleviates them through the very process of creation by externalising them and thus making them more manageable (see Austin 2007, 1-2; Dean & Field 2003, 8).

The scope of the potential rehabilitation that can take place is, in large part, dependent upon the delivery of the specific program (Johnson 2008, 114). The anti-hierarchy, teacher-as-creative-facilitator model has received the most validation as the ideal way to implement art programs in prisons (see Currie 1989, 41; Iyer 2008; Dean & Field 2003, 7; Durland 2002). Not only is the expertise of artists and art teachers appreciated by inmates, but the non-authoritative connection to a 'real' person from the outside world is experienced as both valuable and validating (Dean & Field 2003, 7; Heenan 2006, 183). Prisoners are denied the opportunity to be responsible for 'large portions of their life. The most obvious implication for prisoners is that they can become institutionalized' (Dean & Field 2003, 3), so in order for dependency to be avoided, 'prisoners need to be empowered to take some degree of responsibility over their daily lives' (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 101). Art programs offer an engaging and humanising option for inmates to engage in the rehabilitative process (Peaker 1997; Austin 2007, 2).

Many would argue that inmates do not deserve the escapism and enjoyment of 'free' art classes (see Durland 2002,; Kornfeld 1997, 77-8; Austin 2007; Peaker 1997). But as the vast majority of those imprisoned will be released back into the community at some stage, it is in the public interest to ensure that inmates are given opportunities to improve themselves and, upon release, are motivated to make a positive contribution to society (Dean & Field 2003, 9; Johnson 2008, 115; Peaker 1997). Art programs offers inmates 'a way to take some control and responsibility in an environment that otherwise controls and directs' (Dean & Field 2003, 3) and are a method of encouraging inmates to break the cycle of institutionalisation and recidivism that characterises the lives of many who enter the prison system (Austin 2007, 1).

## **2.4 Art is beneficial to institutional management**

Beyond impacts on individual inmates, it is important that the institutional benefits of prison art programs are demonstrable to institutional management as managerial support is vital for a program to operate within a prison (Currie 1989, 5; Dean & Field 2003, 4, 6; Schwadron 2009; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314). The literature articulates a number of benefits that 'serve a managerial function by improving the quality of life for both prisoners and staff' (Johnson 2008, 108). Firstly, the need for disciplinary control can be reduced when artistic activities are available as an outlet for emotional ventilation (Benton & Barclay 2008, 27; Day & Onorato in Johnson 2008, 106). In the words of a prison officer working in an Australian prison with a comprehensive art program, 'prisoners are easier to manage if engaged' (Benton & Barclay 2008, 27). Even the *possibility* of creative activity has reduced inmate offences, as in programs where inmates must conform to particular level of behavioural standards in order to have the privilege of participating (Currie 1989, 48; Johnson 2008, 108; Zolberg 2001, 3097). Therefore:

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as a management tool, [prison] art programs can reduce violent behaviour and harmful stress [to staff] and the financial costs of responding to such matters (Johnson 2008, 106).

In addition, the cost benefits of prison art programs includes money saved on resourcing responses to self-harm, drug and alcohol use, suicide, and psychotropic medication to alleviate mental illnesses and inmate distress (Gussak 2006, 189). An important, early study from the California Department of Corrections in the 1980s found that institutions with prison art programs produced a saving of around \$100,000 per annum (quoted in Brune 2007). Happier inmates are cheaper inmates. Counter-intuitive as this may seem, the promotion of art programs in prisons, thus, sits happily within a capitalist discourse of resource efficiency and profit maximisation as benefits for the inmates result in benefits for the security and cash flow of the institution, ultimately benefiting tax-paying society (Andriello 2009).

## **2.5 Art is beneficial to society**

The prison population constitutes 'the socially and economically disadvantaged stratum of society...caught in vicious cycles of deprivation, substance abuse, social and psychological dislocation, and alienation from the wider values of society' (Kellam 2006, 18). Further, 'contrary to the ideal that it is possible to achieve rehabilitation in prison, imprisonment actually induces negative changes in the individual' through a debilitating environment that 'only makes inmates worse, more filled with hate, violence and anger' (Currie 1989, 30; 31). It is therefore important to have enjoyable, expressive and reformative activities available—such as prison art programs—that serve as a counterbalance to the pervading negativity and hostility of the prison environment (Currie 1989, 97; McMillan 2003, 6; Dean & Field 2003, 1).

It is common practice for institutions operating visual arts programs to offer opportunities for inmate artwork to be displayed or sold (see Schrift 2006, 260-2; Dean & Field 2003, 6-7; Iyer 2008). Displaying or selling artwork gives inmates the chance to engage in "productive exchanges with the community before and after release" (Johnson 2008, 107), which is an important element of any genuine rehabilitation attempt of the incarcerated as:

While a prisoner is often out of sight and out of mind it is wise to remember that the vast majority of prisoners will eventually be released back into the community. Surely, it is more cogent to release people who have become better people, who can be productive and useful members to society.

We need art-based prison programs to contribute to the sustained development of human dignity...Their voices are ignored or excluded from the community's larger social conversations...this act of expression and reflection can act as signal to the community that they are part of it. If they achieve this then art-based programs must help towards the successful re-integration of prisoners and the ultimate reduction in re-offending (Dean & Field 2003, 9).

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Though it may be easy to demonise those who have been imprisoned, it is important to not only advocate for their essential 'humanness', but to also advocate for opportunities for ways to heal and improve it, so that all of society is happier and safer (Austin 2007, 2).

## 2.6 Challenges to implementing art programs

Prison art programs are not widely accepted by government and corrective services decision-makers as having merit, rehabilitative or otherwise. Alongside the government's reluctance to fund programs is a pervading socio-punitive attitude to 'stop coddling prisoners' (Durland 2002), as they do not 'deserve' art classes (Currie 1989, 79; Kornfeld 1997, 78; Durland 2002). Each prison is a 'law unto itself' in regards to perceptions about what works and what does not (Peaker 1997), so inmates of a particular institution may be denied the chance for expressive rehabilitation simply because management cannot be convinced of the effectiveness—or necessity—of creativity. 'Arts as rehabilitation' is therefore a difficult concept to bring into a prison:

Art in prison is best seen as a hobby to keep people occupied and at worst a total waste of time. The idea that art has an intrinsic value for both individuals and the community is not understood; nor that art can be a means of skilling people with generic job skills or that creativity can change and heal people (Dean & Field 2003, 6).

A primary motivation for institutional management to support an art program is to improve or maintain institutional security (McMillan 2003, 6; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314). Inmates can only 'gain access to the possibility of creation when it is offered by their keepers' (Zolberg 2001, 3097) and while this threat may make inmates better behaved, it perpetuates resentment and hostility between inmates and corrections staff and the goal of improved institutional order remains unreached (Currie 1989, 98). Indeed, the support of institutional management does not predicate custodial staff support (Currie 1989, 52-3, 94-5); which is critical for prison art programs to operate successfully (see Currie 1989, 99-100; McMillan 2003, 6). To inmates, custodial staff 'embody everything that is negative in the penal system' (Currie 1989, 27), while welfare staff are 'perceived as working in the interests of Correction Services' (Benton & Barclay 2008, 22). Likewise, many custodial staff have an entrenched and negative view of inmates (Currie 1989, 63), leading to art programs not getting timeslots adhered to (Currie 1989, 5, 52-3; Dean & Field 2003, 5; Gussak 2009, 11) or the continuity of participation they need in order to be truly rehabilitative (Gussak 2009, 11; Dean & Field 2003, 5). A common perception amongst custodial staff has been that rehabilitation within the prison environment is not possible (Currie 1989, 63, 74), an attitude that will inevitably hinder the successful implementation and day-to-day operation of art programs. If prisons are to maintain their role in the rehabilitation, not just incarceration and punishment, of offenders, 'the occupational culture of custodial staff must accept that the institution and its staff have a multi-faceted role' (Currie 1989, 100).

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## 2.7 Limitations of evaluations

While it is difficult to find evidence that prison art programs fail in meeting treatment and institutional management objectives (Johnson 2008, 104), it is difficult to prove that they *do* work when much of the evaluation of arts in criminal justice rests on 'anecdotal evidence, personal accounts and subjective reports of the positive short-term benefits for offenders engaging in arts projects' (McMillan 2003, 5), perhaps not yet enough to convince taxpayers or management that this is a worthwhile investment of funds.

Art programs 'do not lend themselves to investigation via traditional evaluation methodologies' (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 104) and it is hard to prove they are 'cost effective' or 'successful':

limited empirical evidence exists in relation to their outcomes. This may be partly due to the ideological conflict between the arts and sciences but, equally, as a result of government funding prioritizing (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 97).

Further, most of the evaluation research conducted has examined short-term, pilot or experimental art programs with small participation numbers (Dean & Field 2003, 4; Gussak 2004, 2006; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314). So while encouraging results have been obtained, they may not be widely applicable. Further, numerous studies describe a 'selection-for-success' process for participating in arts programs (Currie 1989, 5; Gussak 2007, 452; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314) such as 'the participants were not randomly assigned to participate and most of the participants were chosen by the mental health counsellor because of her prior work with them' (Gussak 2007, 452) and 'inmates were selected by the institution's classification officer and chief psychologist, based on the inmates' history of successful programming' (Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314). When potential future programs rely on the demonstrating the 'success' of these pilot programs, there is clearly pressure to succeed (Dean & Field 2003, 6), particularly when funding comes from donations or sponsorship from universities and nonprofit organisations (Austin 2007, 1; Dean & Field 2003, 4; Brune 2007).

In lieu of formal, government sanctioned delivery and operation standards, prison art programs are being implemented according to the dedication and motivation of 'individual artists, nonprofit organizations and university professors' (Brune 2007), with the university sector accounting for a substantial amount of the interest in the arts in corrections field (see Brune 2007; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 313). Although this burgeoning interest is something to be encouraged, whether or not there is a national strategy in place, its experimental-academic nature results in validity issues, which inevitably affects the authority of evidence available to advocate for arts in corrections.



## 3.0 CASE STUDIES OF PRISON ART PROGRAMS

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This section reviews some relevant English-language information available on prison art programs in Australia, the United States and New Zealand.

### 3.1 Australia

The Australian prison population—like prison populations around the world—is severely disadvantaged and growing (Kellam 2006, 1; Iyer 2008). From June 2008 to June 2010 it increased by 7% from 27,615 to 29,700 prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). In a 2003 study, 76% of inmates in New South Wales were recorded with a psychiatric disorder compared to 22% in the general population. Common disorders included psychosis, anxiety, affective disorders, substance abuse and personality disorders (Kellam 2006, 5). A 2002 study on female inmates in Queensland showed that more than 70% had two or more diagnosed psychiatric impairments (Kellam 2006, 6) and a 2006 study on South Australian inmates found that

75% of male prisoners have alcohol and other drug problems, 50% have an anti-social personality disorder, 30% are pathological gamblers and 25% have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. For female prisoners, 81% have posttraumatic stress disorder, 75% have been physically or sexually abused, 39% have attempted suicide and 38% have drug related problems (Kellam 2006, 6).

These statistics highlight a need to provide appropriate and empathetic treatment in correctional facilities in order to halt the cycle of ‘catch-repeat-catch’ characteristic of individuals with or without mental illness who are incarcerated (Austin 2007, 1).

Two pieces of relevant Australian research are considered in detail below: Belton and Barclay’s 2008 evaluation of the J Block Women of Art Project in Darwin and Dean and Field’s 2003 case study of their own arts program in Tasmania, Create.

#### **J Block Women of Art Project**

Dr Suzanne Belton and Professor Lesley Barclay’s 2008 report on Darwin Correctional Centre’s J Block Women of Art Project is one of the few publicly available evaluations of an Australian prison art program. It describes the nature and experience of the project and examines how it acts as community education for its participants, specifically around issues of domestic and sexual violence.

The J Block Women of Art Project has been in operation since November 2003, when staff from Dawn House Inc—a community organisation providing services to women and children escaping family violence and/or sexual violence—began visiting the Darwin Correctional Centre on a weekly basis to run informal arts and crafts sessions with female inmates. In 2004 Ruby Gaea, a local sexual assault service, joined Dawn House in providing art services to J Block inmates. Their 2007 Memorandum of Understanding describes the project as:



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**Purpose:** To provide a safe, inclusive and creative space where women in Block J Women of Art have an opportunity for open communication and self-expression through art; to deliver informal community education on domestic violence/family violence (DV/FV); and to encourage women to access services they are entitled to

**Scope:** Semi-structured visits; discussions regarding DV/FV, provision of art supplies for creative expression; individual discussions between facilitators and the women

**Principles:** Do no harm; service provision in line with feminist principles; safe and open communication; working towards empowering women to recognise their potential to be self-determining (Belton & Barclay 2008, 35).

Women of Art runs for two and a half hours once a week with participants able to elect to come from the low security section into the maximum security section to participate in the program. However, not all women access the program as access depended on their prisoner status—e.g. ‘on remand’, ‘awaiting sentence’ or ‘high security’ (ibid, 18). They ‘freely and spontaneously decided the activity they wished to do, which at the time [of the evaluation being conducted] included beading, knitting, card making and painting on canvas or walls within the confines of maximum security’ (ibid, 17). They ‘assisted each other with new skills, chatted, smoked cigarettes...and assisted with un-packing and packing up duties’ (ibid, 17). Project workers facilitated the activities and engaged the women in conversation.

Project workers interviewed for the report felt art and craft is a suitable medium for therapeutic interaction and reflection. One said: ‘art has the ability to channel emotions into manageable places which are then externalised in the form of a creation which is tangible and an achievement...it is not an intrusive method to enquire about mental health states’ (ibid 16). The women enjoyed the creative activities—feeling that they were in a different head space from the normal prison routine. An unsolicited comment from an inmate was: ‘this is therapeutic. You calm right down when you do it’ (ibid, 18). A facilitated discussion about the purpose of the project and how it functions took place with five participants:

When asked what they liked about the Art Project they said: chance to try something new; liked doing the painting; liked doing the beads; we can make the walls look better.

And when they were asked what they felt while they were doing the art work they said:

we think about the art and not about our problems; your mind is on the canvas and the paint and not on everything else; it breaks up the week and is something to look forward to; it makes you feel happy and brightens up the area (ibid, 19)

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A prison officer interviewed stated that 'prisoners are easier to manage if engaged' (ibid, 27), with the art programs providing opportunities for engagement and emotional ventilation.

However, the prison officers also stated that there was more emphasis on the art than the issues of domestic or family violence and that more focus on community education was needed (ibid, 23). Due to the deliberately informal nature of the program, this is unlikely to change unless more time is put aside for planned discussion about violence issues. Further, it was noted that:

clients do not initially identify as survivors of domestic and family violence until discussion within the group touches on aspects of the subject...The Project Workers report that the cases they dealt with in prison were highly complex and women displayed symptoms of trauma and institutionalised behaviours...Many women also had diagnosed mental health problems and some were medicated...They wondered at times if unintentional harm might be caused by the informal approach. The ability for women to care for themselves while they were in prison was difficult (ibid, 21).

However, a prison officer said: 'this is important for women coming up on parole. If they can't demonstrate addressing their problems they are disadvantaged' (ibid, 27). Though there may be potential for harm by women having conversations or receiving information—such as pamphlets—they are not ready for. The informal nature of the Program does not force participation and gradual exposure over time may encourage the women to participate in this part of the program when they feel able to. Belton and Barclay conclude that the J Block Women of Art Project is a

popular and appreciated activity by all parties in Darwin Corrections Centre...The arts/craft focus is enjoyable, calming, engaging and appreciated by prisoners (ibid, 28).

For the evaluation component of their report, Belton and Barclay found few internal documents available to assist with the evaluative process and, despite the project being monitored over five years of operations, it had not previously been formally evaluated (ibid, 10). In the Dawn House Strategic Plan for 2007-2010, key performance indicators for the project were the 'art generated' and 'an increased understanding of DV/FV' (ibid, 13). For their evaluation, Belton and Barclay interviewed 18 inmates, seven project workers and four prison staff. The Project evaluation:

decided specifically not to interview women prisoners individually or use any psychological metrics...The research design aligns with feminist research principles about including and reflecting on a range of views from a number of perspectives... Findings are based on a range of personal experience and opinion, discussed and

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contrasted with information from independent sources. This process of triangulation is used by qualitative researchers to overcome problems of validity and bias (ibid, 10).

Generally, there is scant information about what works from the perspective of the actual participants and prison authorities are often reluctant to invest in projects that have not demonstrated results in formal ways (ibid, 4). Through a qualitative process that focused on the project as experienced by the participants, the evaluation did not 'force' information about DV/FV education from women who may not have been prepared or ready to discuss these issues. So, the education and information achievements of the art project receive little attention in the final evaluation (ibid, 13, 21).

### **Risdon Prison's Create Program**

Caroline Dean and Jonathan Field's 2003 case study of Create, their own arts project in Tasmania's Risdon Maximum-Security Prison, describes a correctional facility home to a 'captive and bored audience' where 'very few interesting and/or rehabilitative programs happened' (Dean & Field 2003, 3). Previous to the Create program, art classes had been held but they were sporadic without a structured approach or underlying philosophy (ibid, 2). At the time, Dean and Field were employees of Offender Services in the Department of Justice Tasmania and felt Risdon was 'ripe for a community arts program and would have much to gain from one [as] the prison population could do with some healing, empowerment and expansion' (ibid, 3). Their advocacy for the development of such a program was based upon research stating that 'an arts-based program is able to address offending behaviour as well as heal and promote self-change and self-discipline' (ibid, 1). With approval from prison management, in 2003 they successfully applied to the Australia Council for a \$23,000 Skills and Development grant to run a six-month creative arts program called 'Create' that consisted of two sessions per week of a two-hour duration. Eight inmates attended these sessions consistently over the six months (ibid, 4).

Create was intended as a way for the prisoners to take some responsibility and control in an environment that denies this opportunity and can lead to 'institutionalisation'. The program aimed to be 'a skilling up and development of creativity' (ibid, 3) that would be achieved through a 'start and depart' model underlined by a philosophy of self-help and self-management and autonomy and independence (ibid, 5). Professional artists were employed to conduct the various sessions within a 'non-hierarchical structure' (ibid, 4). However:

it became clear very quickly that the 'start and depart' model would not work. The prison population was unlike any group we had worked with before. They had very few emotional or social skills and almost without exception see the world through a narrow and fatalistic vision. Many had never started and completed anything in their lives... [and] most had low literacy and numeracy skills with long periods of unemployment (ibid, 5).

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The project was also hindered by zealous security procedures (ibid, 5). Initially, prison management did not consider that the project was producing 'real' art so a few public events were organised to 'show that the work being produced was excellent and of value' (ibid, 6). Through the 'democratic' creation, production and completion of these events, individual concentration levels increased as the men worked together on fixed outcomes and definite deadlines (ibid, 8). Perhaps more importantly, 'each member of the group put themselves on the line by publicly voicing their own stories and giving themselves reasons to be proud' (ibid, 7).

For the case study, the group was asked what motivated them to turn up to the art sessions every Tuesday and Friday morning. The response was that:

the group created a sense of belonging and it didn't matter where we were from and/or what we had done; the group was a safe place to explore ideas; the group was based on the sharing of ideas and experiences, not the shared environment; it was something to look forward to ('and kept me sane' as one person put it); it was doing something useful and with purpose; getting to know someone from 'the outside' who treated us as equals; developing a relationship inside that did not represent power and authority; learning to trust in ourselves and our abilities; doing something enjoyable; working with an artist who saw our usually negative experiences as positive fodder for art; and working with someone from the 'outside' to create a link to the 'outside' world (ibid, 7).

Further benefits from participation were the realisation that there may be other life paths to choose; the learning of self-discipline; learning to self-reflect; the gaining of self-respect; learning commitment to self, others and a project; experiencing group success; learning to deal with frustrations and obstacles; and learning alternative ways of dealing with conflict and anxiety (ibid, 8).

Another outcome of the Create program was that a senior manager in the Justice Department came to support the idea of art as being a valid form of rehabilitation contributing to a reduction of re-offending and the program continued after the expenditure of the initial grant money. This 'need for sponsorship by and through senior management cannot be understated when negotiating over programs' (ibid, 7).

Although their report was written soon after the conclusion of Create—when it was 'too soon to evaluate the success of the program' (ibid, 8)—of the eight participants, one learnt meditation to manage his anxiety whilst in prison and joined an art group on his release, two enrolled in further education, one decided to be a writer and was being tutored by a professional writer and one decided to concentrate on his Aboriginal art and enrolled in an art course aiming for a degree in Fine Arts (ibid, 6, 8).

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## 3.2 United States

The United States has a long history of arts in correctional centres and almost all the information on arts program available in English is from that country. Although there is no national strategy for prison art programs, there have been several unified state approaches and substantial activity from charitable and not-for-profit agencies and universities (see Brune 2007; Buseman 2009; Andriello 2009; Iyer 2008; Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 313). The majority of American-based information is written by these various stakeholders, advocates and practitioners.

### **Angola Prison Arts and Crafts Festival (Louisiana)**

'Free time', hobbyist or recreational arts practice in prison receives the least amount of attention in the literature but is, of course, the most common form of art making in prison.

The biannual Angola Prisons Arts and Crafts Festival in Louisiana's maximum security state penitentiary offers handmade arts and crafts for sale; popularly referred to by the inmates as 'hobbycrafts' (Schrift 2006, 260). Sales generate tens of thousands of dollars with a percentage going to the Inmate Welfare Fund and the inmates able to keep the rest; often using the money to purchase supplies for making more arts and crafts products (ibid, 262).

This 'outsider art' event 'conflates consumerism, voyeurism and incarceration' (ibid, 260). The Angola Prison Arts and Crafts Festival allows

the assumption of any number of roles typically unavailable after incarceration—artist, artisan, provider, entrepreneur, salesman, inventor. In this way, inmates embrace the consumer-contaminated realms of kitsch and craft to sustain a social integrity that, to some degree, neutralizes a status tied solely to incarceration (ibid, 273).

Recreational arts practice in prisons and events like the Angola Festival enable individuals who participate to assert a 'commercial usefulness' necessary to feel inclusion in the wider community and to offer the prospect of constructing an anchoring identity as a creative worker (ibid, 273). Transformation can occur over the years as inmates funnel their creative urges into increasingly satisfying and profitable outcomes (ibid, 265-6).

### **Prison Creative Arts Project (Michigan)**

The Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) is a volunteer organisation founded in 1990 that facilitates visual arts and creative writing workshops in Southern Michigan Correctional Facility. The organisation aims to engender "a sustained passion for the humanity of the citizens [they] work with by promoting their innate drive toward self-expression" (Iyer 2008). PCAP's focus is on 'self-redemption through art. Art is necessary for all and should be accessible for all' (Iyer 2008). The project hosts annual inmate art exhibitions, demonstrations and a variety of events publicising issues concerning incarceration to raise awareness in the broader public.

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PCAP's workshops with inmates are designed to dispel expectations of and relationships with authority, with round-table seating arrangements and volunteer art teachers facilitating art making while encouraging inmates-participants to also facilitate the workshops:

Within weeks, the classroom began to feel like a studio. Within a couple of months, it felt like a hang-out spot. PCAP facilitators wield a vision of a dynamic and democratic workspace, one that invites questions instead of bringing answers (Iyer 2008).

PCAP holds fortnightly meetings with its workshop facilitators to foster dialogue among people working in corrections. One of the PCAP facilitators said:

I feel the art we created there wasn't important just because of what it was but because of the process of creating it. The weeks upon weeks that we laughed and mused over our scribbles and questions fused our creations with our personalities...in the end that was why each of us kept returning—to see each other and to talk (Iyer 2008).

In addition, PCAP is a college-affiliated program partnering with the University of Michigan to provide intensive English or Visual Art courses.

The project exists within the 'art as therapy' framework. Iyer's account of the project is not analytical or evaluative but it is a very useful description of a long-term, grassroots and successful program; one based on the philosophy that creativity is 'empowering' and 'rehabilitative'.

### **Philadelphia Mural Arts Program**

The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program (MAP) is a long-term accessible arts program that works with disadvantaged and marginalised communities, including prisoners. The program is based around restorative justice concepts and uses mural-making and arts education to combat and prevent crime, 'clean up the community' and enable citizens to see 'offenders' in a positive light (Buseman 2009). Philadelphia has been gifted with over 3000 murals since the program began as an anti-graffiti program in 1984. Two recent mural projects had the theme of 'restorative justice' (Buseman 2009).

MAP now works in six Philadelphia prisons, a state prison and a youth-detention centre. The program has placed increasing emphasis on the re-entry of criminals into the community (Buseman 2009). In 2008, with the support of the Philadelphia Prison System, MAP was able to start a re-entry jobs program. Inmates in Philadelphia County Jail are now able to participate in art instruction and mural-making classes and, upon release, can be hired to work on murals. So far 15 ex-inmates have been hired, with only one re-arrest (Buseman 2009). MAP continues to seek funding to expand this program.

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### **Inmate Mural Arts Program (Florida)**

The Inmate Mural Arts Program (IMAP) took place in 2008 as an extension of the Florida Arts in Corrections program (see also below). Two students, Julie Argue and Jacquelyn Bennett, undertaking a Masters in Art Therapy at Florida State University developed the project as part of their research. Inspired by another MAP project where inmates completed a mural on parachute cloth which was subsequently attached to a wall in Philadelphia, Argue and Bennett felt it would be more empowering for the inmates to paint their mural directly onto a wall (Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 314). The Department of Corrections Deputy Secretary supported the project being conducted at Wakulla Correctional Institution, 'a faith and character based facility' (ibid, 314) in rural north Florida. This institution had an established history of accepting graduate art therapy interns and had a particular focus on rehabilitation programs (ibid, 314).

The goal of the project was to 'design and execute a large community mural with prison inmates, which in turn would facilitate problem solving and socialization skills' (ibid, 314). This activity evolved out of established theoretical principles for art and inmates, that art provides a means to re-humanise those that are dehumanised within the repressive and punitive prison environment which 'can build self-respect and decrease an inmate's ennui and acting-out behaviour' (ibid, 313). Creating art fosters frustration tolerance, which further serves to reduce violent energies and outbursts (ibid, 313). After discussions with the facility's administration to assure them that improving institutional safety and security was a main priority, the project proposal was 'enthusiastically received' (ibid, 314).

Fourteen participating inmates were 'selected by the institution's classification officer and chief psychologist, based on the inmates' history of successful programming and psychological needs' (ibid, 314). The mural design emerged over four weekly one-hour sessions where a 'democratic collaboration' amongst inmates and the student facilitators eventually produced a design, based around the theme of 'transformation' that all were pleased with. (ibid, 315). As the project progressed into painting the mural, inmates became so engrossed that security staff had to force them to take breaks or cease work during wet weather (ibid, 316). Working in groups can facilitate transformation for inmates:

the experience of working as part of a team, recognising and fulfilling your responsibilities, being valued for your contribution and depending on and valuing the contribution of others, are part of the experience required to become a responsible citizen (Johnson 2008, 104).

During the painting, participants would often step back from the mural to assess how it looked, then they would usually

grab a peer and ask him questions on how it worked or needed improvement. They learned through this process how to work as a team and value the interaction; they learned to negotiate with one another to accomplish the result, while simultaneously learning the value of reflective distancing (Argue, Bennett & Gussak 2009, 317).

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In fact, the 'humanising' ideology behind this project was so successful in practice that due to that and the 'inmate/artists' joyous attitudes while working, it was difficult at times for the facilitators not to be drawn into the camaraderie' (ibid, 317). This was not necessarily a desirable outcome as the facilitators wished to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the art therapist-patient relationship (ibid, 317).

All inmates 'that took part in this project emerged with a greater sense of self and accomplishment, feelings necessary to facilitate healthy ego development' (ibid, 318). As a result of this success the IMAP team was commissioned to work with inmates in a South Georgia prison and another IMAP team was developed for a project in a women's prison in rural north Florida.

### **Arts-In-Corrections (California)**

Arts-In-Corrections (AIC) is state-wide prison arts program initiative of the government of California that has been in operation since the 1970s. Steve Emrick has run the AIC program in San Quentin State Prison, on the north shore of San Francisco bay, for more than twenty years. Despite state budget cuts in 2007 that eliminated virtually all funding for prison art programs, Emrick was able to maintain his chapter of AIC through private funding (Austin 2007, 1). The AIC program serves around 300 of the 2500 'mainline' San Quentin inmates, offering classes in painting, drawing, printmaking and other creative media, and was one of only two programs in California's 33 state prisons that used outside instructors—i.e., artists—to work with inmates. These teachers, either as volunteers or grant recipients, lead weekly classes in the arts (Austin 2007, 1). The model is based on one advocated by influential American prison art pioneer Grady Hillman and practised worldwide. In a 2002 interview, Hillman stated that:

the model that I promote...[is the] established, proven...professional artist and the artist-mentor relationship...what they [inmates] want from you is to show them what you do (Durland 2002).

In the prison system,

the emotions that cause people to end up in corrections—fear, detachment, hatred, anger—are often further fed by incarceration. Instead of a respite from these destructive feelings, prison tends to create a supercollider for them (Austin 2007, 1).

Steve Emrick's funding 'sales pitch' for the AIC program is that it helps people come out as 'better human beings':

Life in San Quentin offers numerous chances to be sucked into the cycle of violence and revenge. Being part of the program gave McKinstry [an inmate], who had never made art until he was several years into his fifty-one-years-to-life sentence, a chance to free himself from that malicious eddy: 'I bit into the prison politics. I was violent. I dealt with issues of disrespect or disagreements through violence like



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most all of us do. I don't do that anymore...From what I'm doing now, in expressing myself, my anger level has fallen way down...Even if it's frustrating and it doesn't come out right, I still got it out in a positive way. It still may be aggressive, but it's between me and an inanimate object, not between me and someone else.'...[Inmates'] choices, hideous as they may have been, were not made in a vacuum. It is just as valid to claim that society fails certain people (ibid, 2).

In a California Department of Corrections (CDC) study assessing the impact of the AIC program from 1980 to 1987, it was found that parolees who had participated in the AIC program had a 'favourable outcome' rate of 74.2%, compared to 49.6% for those that did not (ibid, 1). Participants' recidivism rate was 27% lower than non-participants and while in prison they recorded 75% fewer disciplinary actions (Andriello 2009). That 'translates into reduced costs to the public [and] improved human lives' (Andriello 2009). The CDC research is one of the few pieces of research to quantify outcomes from prison art programs (Brune 2007).

### **3.3 New Zealand**

Since 1995, New Zealand's Arts Access Aotearoa has advocated to increase artistic opportunities for the socially marginalised and sees the arts as a tool for change in prisons. The organisation is currently working in partnership with the Department of Corrections to develop the Prison Art Strategy for New Zealand (Arts Access Aotearoa 2011). Although the New Zealand evaluation included here is not recent, it was a seminal qualitative study on the impacts of art in prison programs.

#### **Arts Access Program in Waikeria**

In 1989, the Institute of Criminology published Cathy Currie's evaluation of an eight-week experimental creative arts program that took place in Waikeria Prison. The evaluation was designed to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the role of cultural, recreational and creative programs in mitigating the negative effects of the prison environment.

In early 1988, an eight-week multi-modular creative arts program in Waikeria Prison was run by the Arts Access Program that included several distinct arts activities: a community mural, a stone-carving workshop, a music workshop, a role-play workshop and a Haka group (Currie 1989, 5).

Waikeria Prison was chosen because the prison already had a Cultural Unit facility, providing inmates with the opportunity to become involved in creative expression through bone and wood carving. Management had expressed 'considerable enthusiasm and support for the program' (ibid, 5). The artists were:

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carefully selected by the Arts Council not only for their artistic skills, but also for their personality, in particular their ability to establish rapport with the inmate and staff population within the prison, and for their experience within institutional environments (ibid, 5).

Inmates from the prison's West Wing North participated in the arts program, while inmates from West Wing South acted as a control group for the evaluation as they did not participate in the arts program:

In relation to the individual inmate it was hypothesised that self-esteem could be improved and cultural identity enhanced. It was also expected that inmates would not only learn new artistic techniques, but also be stimulated by the 'hands-on' learning experience into further learning. In relation to inmates' relationships with others, it was hypothesised that by providing alternative forms of communication, inmates should be enabled to form more positive relationships with other inmates as well as prison staff. Such new communicative skills might also lead to inmates discovering alternatives to violence for conflict resolution. In addition, it was expected that the interpersonal co-operation required by some creative processes would precipitate more positive relationships between inmates, further serving to reduce the incidence of violence (ibid, 9-10).

In order to test these hypotheses, a 'before' and 'after' effect was gauged by examining inmate and staff perceptions of Waikeria prior to the program beginning, and then re-examining the same individuals upon completion of the program (ibid, 12). Due to the abstract nature of many of the hypotheses being tested, it was decided that such information was best obtained through relatively informal interviews, as past research 'had pointed out the problems in using questionnaires and structured interviews in the prison setting. It was, therefore, decided that semi-structured interviews were more appropriate, with emphasis on active listening' (ibid, 12). Access to Waikeria's record of inmate offences within the prison was granted to allow a quantitative check of levels of inmate offending (ibid, 12).

The inmate interviews conducted prior to the program were characterised by negativity (ibid, 45, 97). The need for a 'tough' image—both as a means to protect oneself against violence and acting as a rule within itself—resonated throughout the comments and in the interview process itself. One inmate stated that: 'no-one talks about their feelings, only broken arse people who can't hack it, like the suicides' (ibid, 22). The prison psychologist was:

viewed with a great deal of suspicion...'I asked to see the psycho last September. I saw him last week [February]. I didn't get anything out of it. I was just told I was mixed up. I didn't want to say too much...in case he thought I was looney' (ibid, 29).

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There were hostile, antagonistic relations between the inmates and custodial staff, and between the inmates themselves as the West Wing was rigidly stratified by gang allegiance (ibid, 98).

Post-arts program interviews with inmates who had participated from West Wing North revealed a brighter attitude. One inmate said: 'I felt peaceful...it was excellent...It blew my mind. The first three days you could tell just by the atmosphere it was changing us' (ibid, 43). These inmates also asserted that trouble in their wing had decreased (ibid, 48) and that they felt a sense of achievement and were surprised at being able to successfully participate (ibid, 37). They noted that they and others spoke more readily to those in rival gangs as the art program had created common ground (ibid, 98). Management felt the inmates' self-esteem increased and the fact that they 'were able to contribute their talents to something positive... helped bring them out of themselves' (ibid, 81) and ultimately praised the collective benefits of the arts program for both inmates and staff (ibid, 94-5). However, despite West Wing North inmates' claims that trouble in their wing decreased during the art program, the Punishment Book revealed that there was in fact no decrease in the number of charges levelled against this group of inmates (ibid, 51).

In addition, 'some custodial staff were reported as being openly verbally hostile to both the inmates and the artists involved in the program...inmates also observed that some custodial staff obstructed the smooth running of the arts program by deliberately delaying escorts of inmates to workshops' (ibid, 52-3). While some custodial staff had positive comments to make about the program on inmates, most took a negative view: 'You can't turn dog shit into honey...They'll forget about it when they come out...there's plenty of unemployed art school graduates' (ibid, 63, 74). They also believed that inmates used the program to 'play the game' and not for motives of self-improvement, and that art activities were a luxury that criminals did not deserve (ibid, 79).

For arts-participant inmates, the negativity and cynicism expressed during their first, pre-participation interview were replaced with enthusiastic descriptions of achievements throughout the program. They also seemed more animated and more articulate (ibid, 44-5). Through creating this measure of positivity in the West Wing North inmates, the program did manage to counteract the negativity of the prison environment, achieving one of the program objectives (ibid, 97). In addition, the increase in cross-gang socialisation met another objective. However, 'there were no positive changes to inmate-staff relations as a result of the arts program...if anything...relations deteriorated' (ibid, 98). There was also no quantifiable decrease in disciplinary actions. In fact, custodial staff viewed the program as having a negative impact upon inmate troubles and staff workload (ibid, 63, 94-5).

Currie's work may be regarded as a seminal qualitative study with many of its findings replicated and its analysis and theoretical background have been reproduced in later evaluative literature. Her critical reflections on the responses of the custodial staff are preceded by a theoretical investigation into their working conditions and low socio-economic lifestyle. This focus on custodial staff was innovative and establishes a context in which inmate access to prison art programs occurs and their successful operation.

## 4.0 TOWARDS A NATIONAL PRISON ART STRATEGY

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It is clear that there are gaps in knowledge on prison art programs in Australia and more work needs to be done on methods for evaluating the impacts of these programs which 'do not lend themselves to investigation via traditional evaluation methodologies' (Parkes & Bibly 2010, 104). Work is also needed to case study best practice and, in light of the success of David Gussak's US research, in securing government interest in art in corrections. A series of quantitative evaluations of an existing art programs in Australia would contribute important information about the value of prison art programs as 'evidence-based practice is the key to impressing skeptics' (McMillan 2003, 4). In addition, the existing literature focuses almost solely on 'art therapy' rather than an 'arts access' approach informed by human rights.

Literature may be limited, but it does articulate the many positive benefits of arts programs. But advocates are losing financial battles against other correctional services deemed more 'essential' (Clements 2004, 172). Counteracting this may best be achieved by treating the arts 'more educationally or within a paradigm of play or leisure, not one of work, social utility or therapy, where they too readily become lost in their instrumentality' (Clements 2004, 173). In addition, more effort should be concentrated on improving implementation of programs, including greater collaboration and sharing of expertise and experience (Brune 2007), as correctional programs fail when they are not properly implemented (Johnson 2008, 114).

In 2007 American researcher and arts in prisons advocate Krista Brune wrote of her experience in this field:

My only experience with arts in corrections before this project was the rejection of a proposal to facilitate creative-expression workshops at the women's prison in New Jersey. While attempting to start these workshops, I did not know whom to talk to, what was already out there, or how to go about gaining access. I assumed that there must be other individuals or organizations providing arts programs in correctional settings; I simply had not discovered them yet. I longed to transform my frustration from that experience into a resource for others working in the field. With the help of Victoria Sammartino, I developed a proposal for the ReachOut56 fellowship, a grant from Princeton's Class of 1956 that funds two graduating seniors each year to complete an independent, self-designed project in affiliation with a small nonprofit organization.

There is no shortage of passionate individuals, artists and non-profit and academic organisations with the desire to affect a positive change for people who are incarcerated. Yet there is no clear path for affecting that change (Brune 2007; Dean & Field 2003, 2-4). Traditional correctional strategies, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy and basic skills education, are yet to prove their effectiveness in reducing re-offending (Johnson 2008, 100). And with an increasing prison population it is essential that inmates can access proven rehabilitation options, including prison art programs. Access to art programs can positively affect the quality of inmates' lives but current schemes are over-subscribed, under-funded, *ad hoc* and marginal (Heenan 2006, 189).

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Given the limited amount of funding allocated by federal and state governments to the arts in general, and specifically to arts in corrections, non-profit actors have become indispensable for the implementation of prison art programs and despite the 'difficulties of access, funding and recognition, people wanting to provide creative opportunities to incarcerated populations have found a way to do so' (Brune 2007). An additional obstruction is the increasing privatisation of the Australian prison system, which has created a competitive climate of secrecy and insularity that adversely affects the welfare of prisoners (Freiberg 2000, 131). A 1999 report from the Victorian Auditor General states that prison privatisation has also 'contributed to the isolation of program staff within individual prisons. There is now...limited integration of programs across public and private prison operators' (quoted in Freiberg 2000, 131), further complicating efforts to convince decision-makers of the importance of arts in prisons.

In Australia the dispersed individuals and organisations that advocate and operate these programs would benefit from sharing models and pedagogical approaches and discussing operational issues. Alongside knowledge networking, national standards of training, education and implementation would create a rich body of knowledge and high standards of operation. Further, improved access to funding through a legislated prison art program budget would mean that more inmates are given the opportunity to use their time in prison for positive change in their lives.

The necessity of rehabilitative programs being available in our prisons is perhaps best expressed by those who are imprisoned. Spoon Jackson, an inmate in San Quentin since the 1980s, said:

If the word 'rehabilitation' is to be more than a meaningless string of 14 letters, the state must muster the resources and will to offer again a wide range of programs such as those offered in California 20 years ago. These are the programs that allowed many of us to change ourselves. For ultimately, rehabilitation is always self-rehabilitation... I had to till the endless gardens in my mind, heart and soul. I had to become anew, despite being in prison (quoted in Brune 2007).

There is value in prison art programs for educating, improving and reforming individuals while contributing security and cost benefits to correctional institutions and, ultimately, to the society they will return to.

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