



Older Women's Network

8th March 2013



Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

We are writing to support Justice Reinvestment as a crucial approach to criminal justice in Australia. Every state election campaign brings out the old "law and order" rhetoric encouraging voters to believe that locking people up is somehow good for the community, when all the research shows that the behaviour of young offenders is only exacerbated by contact with other criminals, and imprisonment has been proved not to be an effective means of rehabilitation or deterrence. While there will always be a need for traditional correction facilities for serious and dangerous offenders, there are smarter ways to address lower level offenders who tend to make up the majority of the prison population.

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Why waste millions of dollars on building and staffing prisons that could more profitably and humanely be spent on interventions that give disadvantaged youth the chance to broaden their outlook, to gain education and life skills and experiences that open the way to a healthier and more profitable future.

We are particularly concerned about the effects of current policies on the huge level of incarceration of Indigenous Australians, especially Indigenous youth. We have supported a diversionary programme in La Perouse which has made an important difference in the lives of children and young people in the area, but has lost state government funding. There needs to be continuity and security of long term funding for such programmes, to maintain the employment of trained and experienced workers who have put their hearts into their work and know the children, and to keep faith with the young clients.

In Redfern, when the local Police Commander joined forces with Shane Phillips, the Australian Local Hero Award winner in this year's Australia Day awards, an inspiring leader in the local Aboriginal community, in a programme to build relationships with groups of young people, the local robbery statistics

went down by 82%, from 114 to 14 per month.

Diversionary programs work. Imprisonment does not. Please work to have all governments divert taxpayer's money from incarceration into supportive, confidence building, culturally appropriate mentoring and training programmes.