

Media Release

SENATOR THE HON. CHRISTOPHER ELLISON

Minister for Justice and Customs
Senator for Western Australia

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Breaking the cycle of crime and violence

Breaking the cycle of crime and violence that grips some families is the focus of a new crime prevention project announced today by the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison.

Senator Ellison said the Commonwealth Government had to date invested \$825,760 in the *Prisoners and their Families Programme*, which aims to provide practical support services to the children and families of prisoners.

“Children of offenders can become the innocent victims of their parent’s crimes. For others, particularly in indigenous communities, going to prison is perceived as a rite of passage into adulthood. This issue has been recognised in Queensland recently where a discussion paper launched by the Children’s Commissioner warned that in some Indigenous communities going to jail was seen as a ‘badge of honour’,” Senator Ellison said.

“Helping young people and their families to deal with the trauma and isolation of having a loved one in jail and the practical difficulties presented by an absent parent is the driving force behind this important crime prevention project.”

Senator Ellison said *Prisoners and their Families* will assist the children and families of prisoners by providing counselling, mediation and support, negotiating with family support agencies for state wards to see incarcerated parents, early childhood development training programmes for parents in gaol and providing transport for children who want to visit their parents in prison.

“These practical measures that offer hope to young people, and the type of practical support incarcerated parents need to break the cycle of crime and violence in their family, will contribute to a safer community in the long term,” Senator Ellison said.

Prisoners and their Families programmes are currently underway in Risdon Prison in Tasmania and Mobilong Prison and Adelaide Women’s Prison in South Australia. This month the Townsville Correctional Centre and Brisbane Women’s Prison in Queensland will sign on to the programme, with projects due to commence in September. Negotiations are also well advanced with the Northern Territory. In Queensland and the Northern Territory the programme will be tailored to meet the needs of indigenous offenders.

In addition, the scheme will include programs for prisoners who want to learn how to become better parents.

“An evaluation of the pilot program in Risdon Prison, Tasmania, found that prisoners who completed the parenting program exhibited less aggressive behaviour and gained increased communication and conflict resolution skills, confidence and a willingness to participate in parenting,” Senator Ellison said.

As one prisoner put it, “My whole attitude has changed due to this course. It made me realise that there’s nothing out there, not a thing, more important out there than my children.”

The project is being managed by *Good Beginnings* Australia Ltd, a community organisation with a long track record of assisting Australian children and their families.

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