

# JUST IN TIME



CLRI  
NSW



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## Mental health and the justice system

*People with mental health disorders and cognitive impairment are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system, which reveals flaws in the way we currently deal with mentally ill people who are brought before the courts. In sending these individuals to prison, we risk irreparable damage to their mental and emotional wellbeing and, in many cases, a lifetime in and out of state facilities at a huge cost to taxpayers. Is it time to try a different strategy?*

TOTAL PRISONERS IN NSW:

10,000

800

HAVE AN INTELLECTUAL  
DISABILITY

4,900

HAVE SUFFERED  
A BRAIN INJURY

7,700

HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH  
CONDITION

900

SUFFER FROM A  
PSYCHOTIC DISORDER

*NB: Many patients suffer multiple diagnoses.*

People with mental health disorders and/or cognitive impairment are up to

**9 TIMES MORE LIKELY  
TO BE IN PRISON**

than their non-disabled counterparts in the general NSW population.



Without early support, the costs to individuals with mental health disorders and cognitive impairment, to their families and communities, as well as the costs to government can be **extremely high**. Such costs increase over time, as people with mental health disorders and cognitive impairment become entrenched in the criminal justice system.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has shown that a lifetime of prison and crisis support can cost as much as

**\$1,000,000  
PER PERSON  
EVERY YEAR.**

But there are more beneficial cost-effective options available...

# IF PRISONS AREN'T WORKING... WHAT IS?

## Justice Reinvestment can save millions

**Justice Reinvestment is a circuit-breaker.** It aims to address the underlying causes of crime redirecting taxpayers' dollars from incarceration to investment in communities. The process hands responsibility and a sense of self-determination to communities, and has been proven to work in the USA and UK.

In the case of people with mental health or cognitive disability, it is more cost-effective to offer early intervention in the form of housing or disability support (among other possibilities) than to pay for court costs, prison days and hospital admissions over a lifetime. It would also reduce the significant personal difficulties of people cycling in and out of the criminal justice system.

A study published by the Australian Human Rights Commission estimates that NSW

**COULD SAVE UP TO \$2.40 FOR EVERY \$1 SPENT**

on Justice Reinvestment in the form of early support for those with mental health disorders and/or cognitive impairment.

## Cana Communities & Farm

“ **Strong, productive partnerships can transform the lives of people with special needs and strengthen sustainable communities.** ”

Cana Farms, located at Orchard Hills in Western Sydney, offers a working alternative to the criminal justice system that has a multitude of long-term benefits. The Farms provide an environment in which people living with addiction, homelessness and mental health issues as well as ex-offenders and refugees can live free of charge, build relationships and develop skills. By offering TAFE and other courses, the aims of this initiative are entrenched in facilitating a level of confidence in students that allows them to feel in charge of their lives. Cana Farms have enjoyed great success in their initiatives by taking a community approach which includes job agencies, educators and local groups to help fulfil the goals of their members.

Of those enrolled in courses over the last few years,

- **90%** of Cana's students have completed their learning, and
- **75%** have moved on to higher level courses and/or employment.

**Learn more by visiting the farm on one of their occasional Market Days, or the Cana Cafe from Tuesdays to Thursdays.**

Their website, [www.cana.org.au](http://www.cana.org.au), also offers many opportunities for volunteers.

### REFLECTION

***On Holy Thursday last year, Pope Francis kissed and washed the feet of juvenile prisoners in Rome, saying: "I do it with my heart because it is my duty as priest and as bishop; I have to be at your service".***

Lord, help us to take these actions as an example in our dealings with and attitudes towards those caught in the justice system. Let us never give up on a human being's capability for change. Amen.

*Just in Time* is an occasional publication of the Conference of Leaders in Religious Institutes in NSW.

### TO-DO LIST

- **Follow** the Social Justice Committee of CLRI (NSW) on Twitter for news and opportunities for action: [www.twitter.com/clrinsw](https://www.twitter.com/clrinsw)
- **Join the Community Justice Coalition** to help strive to keep our justice system fair for all people with and without mental health concerns: [www.communityjusticecoalition.org](http://www.communityjusticecoalition.org)
- **Volunteer with Cana Communities** to make a real, practical difference to individuals with few alternatives available - and maybe even to your own life! [www.cana.org.au/getinvolved/](http://www.cana.org.au/getinvolved/)