

Acacia's business graduates create brighter future

October 28, 2009 will be a day 35 Acacia prisoners will never forget – 9 will graduate with a Certificate IV in Small Business Management from the C Y O'Connor College of TAFE in Northam, while 26 will receive individual Certificates of Attainment.

The Director of Acacia Prison, Andrew Beck, said the graduation ceremony is the culmination of months of hard work and vital to breaking a prisoners' cycle of offending. The quality of the work completed by the prisoners is first class and the behaviour and attitude of a number of the prisoners changed as they worked their way through the course.

Acacia Prison, Western Australia's only privately run prison is operated by Serco. "Serco strongly believes that education is a key factor in a prisoner's rehabilitation, that's why we offer a number of courses from university and TAFE level qualifications to nationally recognised trade skills," Mr Beck said.

"While this is the first graduation ceremony held for prisoners within Acacia Prison, I am confident it won't be the last. A number of prisoners have already asked about gaining more business qualifications. It was like a light was switched on inside them. All of a sudden their aspirations grew and they became more confident and proud.

"Like all students the prisoners had to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to gain these qualifications with ten hours class time each week and twice that undertaking independent research, and completing homework and assignments. They also had to pay for their study, which is a substantial financial commitment for anyone, particularly a prisoner."

Mr Beck said finishing the ten units as part of an external course was not only an important part of each prisoner's rehabilitation but will also help with their resettlement and employment opportunities once they are released into the community.

"This nationally recognised certificate will also help prisoners take the first steps to being able to set up their own business. One prisoner is already planning to set up his own mobile Chinese kitchen when he is released, catering for parties and functions, and teaching cooking classes."

Many of the prisoners graduating have family members attending the ceremony. Relatives have travelled from as far away as Melbourne to see their loved ones graduate.

"Some of the prisoners feel they have let their families down, so by finishing this course they hope to show their loved ones they do have something positive to offer and they are working towards a better future," Mr Beck said.

Dr Sak Sarangapani, the Advanced Skills Lecturer from the CY O'Connor College of TAFE, believes the success of the course has cemented a solid and mutually beneficial relationship between the Acacia Prison and the College.

"I'd like to thank Serco for being very proactive in establishing the right academic environment for these prisoners to be able to better themselves and because of that the prisoners' level of interest and quality of their work has increased," Dr Sarangapani said.

Media Release (continued)

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