



Catholic Social Services  
**Australia**

**SPEECH**

**2010 AWARDS**

**EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL (MEMBERS)**

**CANBERRA**

**8 FEBRUARY 2010**

**Presented by**

**MICHAEL REUTENS**

**BOARD MEMBER, CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES AUSTRALIA**

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**THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL (MEMBERS)**

It gives me great pleasure this evening to announce the winner of the Award for Excellence in Service for a member organisation.

This award is presented to the program which is most successfully meeting local community need.

**Tonight's winner is:**

**Centacare Brisbane's Catholic Prison Ministry**

From humble beginnings in 1985 in St Mary's Church in South Brisbane, this program for prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, has grown to a comprehensive service that helps more than 50,000 people each year.

These clients are some of the most highly disadvantaged and marginalised people in the community. They experience high levels of mental health problems, homelessness, abuse, discrimination and unemployment.

The Queensland prison population is overwhelmingly male and about a quarter are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Over half were unemployed and almost 90 per cent were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they were arrested.

Ninety per cent had not completed Grade 10.

Sixty per cent had spent time in foster or residential care and a third had been wards of the state.

Almost a quarter had no fixed address when they were arrested and 20 per cent had a history of psychiatric hospitalisation.

Low self esteem is clearly an issue. These people have struggled with numeracy and literacy skills. They have historically come from dysfunctional families and lack positive role models. They have limited employment histories and have often experienced intergenerational unemployment.

They have underdeveloped problem solving and decision making skills and limited financial management skills. They have trouble resolving conflict.

They experience poor physical and mental health, high rates of drug use and often have high rates of dual and triple diagnoses involving chronic mental health issues, drug use and chronic physical illness.

Catholic Prison Ministry is a case management model which actively works with up to 400 prisoners and ex-prisoners and 900 court attendees and family members at any one time.

Over 100 volunteers support and advise families, defendants and victims in 9 courthouses in south east Queensland.

The Family Support Program provides counselling, advocacy and practical support for the families of people in prison and Liferaft is a peer support program for families and friends of prisoners.

Prison Visitation Services are extended to all prisons in South East Queensland and the Offender Reintegration Support Service helps prisoners with pre and post release needs.

Significantly, the Reintegration Support Program helps overcome the vocational and non vocational barriers faced by prisoners and helps them back into employment. Seventy per cent of participants are placed in paid employment and 75 per cent of those stay in work for

at least 3 months. Of these 75 per cent of these maintain work for a minimum of 6 months.

For Catholic Prison Ministry clients the reoffending rate is substantially lower than the 60 per cent that currently exists throughout Queensland.

The service depends heavily on the partnerships it has developed with industry, community and government.

Benefits to the community include reduced welfare payments, significant reduction in the cost of the justice and penal system and savings in physical and mental health costs.

Catholic Prison Ministry has been acclaimed as best practice by a broad range of people and organisations including the Queensland Corrective Services commissioner Kelvin Anderson, Prisoners Legal Service, the Open Minds Mental Health Services and the women's prisoner support group – Sisters Inside.

Catholic Prison Ministry believes prison must be an absolute last resort, that the criminal justice system must aim to bring about reconciliation and restoration – not incrimination and retribution.

It believes justice is a community responsibility – that social inequalities and injustices give rise to crime, and that people will usually make the choice to live a lawful lifestyle if they are supported

in an environment that provides for their basic needs and affirms their self worth.

Here, this evening to accept the award, Glen Halloran Centacare Employment Brisbane.

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CONTACT Judith Tokley 0408 824 306 / 02 6285 1366