When you think of the Department of Corrections you don’t usually think of us as a recruitment agency. But that’s one of the areas where we’ve expanded our reach, not just so we can employ the large numbers of staff required to manage the growth in the prison population, but also to help move offenders into jobs.
In Corrections Works this month you can read about Corrections’ award for Recruitment Excellence, which we won at the HRINZ Awards in February. Over the last year we’ve put significant effort into recruiting and training an additional 900 staff needed to safely manage the increasing prison population, which now exceeds 10,700. It was good to see this effort recognised at the recent awards.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of offenders having a job and gaining recognised qualifications that lead to a job. A job means an income, a chance to develop new skills, the opportunity to engage with others, a daily routine and a sense of pride and purpose. We know that having a job reduces the likelihood of someone re-offending, so we’ve also expanded our reach to match people serving sentences to jobs.

This month’s cover story features a joint effort by Corrections and the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to help people released from prison into work. We’ve tapped into MSD’s intensive client support service to help people take that first step onto the employment ladder, and the results so far have been encouraging.

We also have our own offender recruitment service, employing 13 recruitment consultants around the country who connect employers to much-needed, skilled workers. Part of the additional support our consultants can give includes money for work boots or safety gear, a bike to travel to and from work (refurbished in our prison bike workshops), and additional training.

As part of our Women’s Strategy, Wahine – e rere ana ki te pae hou, we’re looking at alternative job options that fit into the practical realities of women’s lives on the outside. This includes jobs in construction, engineering and barista training. On page 8 you can read about the work we’re doing with the Solomon Group to train women for infrastructure jobs such as labourers, traffic management, road works’ construction, machine operators and more specialised roles.

I wanted to leave you with the words of a woman who has a new vision for her future, “I want to take down old structures, so new housing can be rebuilt.” The fact is, these women can rebuild so much more than a much needed house. With these new skills, they can rebuild lives.

Ray Smith
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Ex-prisoners who are at risk of being long-term beneficiaries often find it incredibly hard to find and keep a job.

That’s why Corrections and the Ministry of Social Development have been working together since November 2016 to provide them with more comprehensive and long-term support.
The Supporting Offenders into Employment three-year trial aims to ensure prisoners with more complex needs have the right assistance to manage their barriers to employment such as problems with drugs and alcohol, work skills, and literacy and numeracy.

The trial has two different streams – a contracted service in Canterbury offered by Workwise and The Salvation Army, and an in-house intensive case management service with Work and Income case managers in 10 regions around the country.

Currently, 223 people are enrolled with the in-house service, which has a capacity of 400 clients. Ninety-nine of the 223 clients are now working. They’re receiving help with education, financial, health and housing needs – not to mention support to get a job!

We talked to Corrections Senior Case Manager Deve Simpson who’s been working with prisoners on the trial at Spring Hill Corrections Facility with Ministry of Social Development’s Intensive Client Support Manager Kay Te Huia.

How’s the trial going at Spring Hill?

Extremely well. Our case managers have a great relationship with Kay, and the men have been responding positively when interviewed for the trial. Out of the 38 people released from prison Kay has been working with, 20 now have a job.

Do prisoners have to meet certain criteria to take part?

Yes. We consider prisoners who’re being released to one of the trial locations, on parole or conditions, and are at risk of receiving a benefit from Work and Income long term. Because there are limited spaces, not all prisoners who meet the criteria will be able to receive the service.

How do Corrections and the Ministry work together?

After a prisoner is identified, Kay and I meet with him to go through what the service offers and discuss his pathway forward and commitment to it. Kay takes over from there, and we all keep in touch as we work towards his release. Kay continues working with him in the community providing support for up to a year. Closely linked with this is the important relationship with the probation officer managing their parole conditions.

Extra support for extra challenges

Supporting Offenders into Employment targets prisoners who’re at risk of being long-term beneficiaries, but this isn’t the only challenge they face. Many have low literacy and numeracy and therefore require education and training (65% of the general prisoner population has low literacy and numeracy skills), and many also have a mental health or substance abuse disorder (62% of the general prisoner population have had either a mental health or substance abuse disorder within the last 12 months).

What assistance does the offender receive?

They receive support to apply for a benefit, which is a huge relief as they’re able to deal with any pre-benefit activities prior to release. They get help setting up a bank account and finding health services. They also receive education and training assistance to move into employment, and ongoing support and incentives to stay in a job.

Can you tell us about one of your successes?

Mark* has done exceptionally well. He was introduced to the in-house service in April last year. Mark was happy to be selected and spoke to us about the plans he had for his release on 1 May.

Mark met with Kay in the weeks before his release and got a furnished flat very soon after his release – a massive achievement as he’d been in prison nearly five years. He was able to pay for some of his move-in costs such as food and rent in advance with money provided through the trial. He’d also been granted the Jobseeker Support benefit on release. Later in May, Mark got a job with a construction firm and received Transition to Work help with his work-related costs.

Mark proudly passed his restricted driver’s licence and bought a car to carry his work gear. He was assisted with work clothing, petrol, and bridging finance to get to his first pay.

Having transferred cities, Mark has been in steady employment for nine months and is living with his partner and children. He’s extremely grateful for the help and support he received, and says, “It’s everything I ever wanted.”

*Not his real name.

This Way for Work

Corrections has its own offender recruitment service. This Way for Work is a two-year pilot supporting offenders into stable employment (offenders don’t need to have been long-term beneficiaries to be eligible). Thirteen offender recruitment consultants work with offenders and employers around the country.
Corrections has developed a new policy and guidelines to enhance the management of prisoners who identify as transgender.

Rolled out in early March, the new guidelines enable trans* people to maintain their gender identity while in prison. Each trans prisoner has an individualised support plan.

“We are committed to preserving trans prisoners’ safety, dignity and privacy while in our care,” says Chief Custodial Officer Neil Beales.

“When putting the guidelines into effect, we received input from members of the trans community to provide expertise into the training package we developed for staff. Training includes education and information about trans people, and the new guidance and expectations for the management of trans prisoners.”

The guidelines bring New Zealand into line with international best practice and with NZ Police and Customs.

In parallel to the guidelines for trans prisoners, Community Corrections staff have recently commenced trans and diversity training to manage people released from prison and/or serving a community sentence.

Transgender prisoners who are eligible under the criteria may apply to be placed in a prison where they identify with the gender of the prisoners managed there. Currently, there are 24 people in prison who identify as trans. *In line with international best practice, Corrections’ guidelines use the word “trans” to reflect the diverse nature of the trans, genderqueer and gender non-conforming community.*
It’s not news that prisons are full of troubled people. Many prisoners have mental health and drug and alcohol issues*, and even without a diagnosed mental illness, some prisoners self-harm or try to take their own lives.

Our staff work to keep these people safe every day. We believe that no matter how challenging a prisoner’s behaviour, or how complex their needs, they deserve excellent care and to feel hope for the future.

Last year, Corrections received $11.6 million Budget funding to design and trial a new prison-wide model of care for prisoners vulnerable to self-harm or suicide. The trial will take place at three prisons over four years.

The model of care will transform the way all staff in a prison work with prisoners who are vulnerable to self-harm or suicide.

The model of care has a more therapeutic, less ‘rule-bound’ approach, and staff will use a professional decision-making framework to make smart decisions about individual prisoners. For example, currently, ‘at risk’ prisoners are moved to an At Risk Unit. However, we know that moving vulnerable prisoners can be distressing for them, so some prisoners may be able to stay in their ‘home’ unit with additional support, as long as it’s safe to do that.

All prisoner-facing staff at the three pilot sites (including custodial, health, instructors and case managers) will receive training in how to work with prisoners vulnerable to self-harm or suicide.

Additional teams of clinical staff will be recruited to ensure prisoners are supported by multi-disciplinary practice. These new teams will include clinical psychologists, a clinical manager, a registered nurse with expertise in mental health, an occupational therapist, and a cultural support worker.

Intervention and Support Learning Event

On 4 and 5 April, senior Corrections managers from around the country will convene at an Intervention and Support ‘Learning Event’ in Wellington. The event will enable them to hear from experts in the field, consider the latest self-harm and suicide research, and share good practice for keeping prisoners safe.

The Intervention and Support Project is about giving prisoners hope: not just keeping them safe in the short term, but working in new ways to improve their long term wellbeing.

The three pilot sites are Auckland Men’s Prison, Auckland Region Women’s Corrections Facility, and Christchurch Men’s Prison.

*62% of prisoners had some form of mental health or substance abuse disorder in the 12 months prior to imprisonment, and 91% had a diagnosis at some time in their lives (2016).

Help for prisoners vulnerable to self-harm or suicide: the bigger picture

Other key Corrections’ initiatives to support vulnerable prisoners include:

> We screen all new prisoners for mental health and drug and alcohol issues
> We screen for risk of self-harm and suicide
> We introduced mental health clinicians into 15 prisons and four Community Corrections sites
> We’re trialling counsellors and social workers in our women’s prisons (female prisoners are more likely to be victims of family violence and sexual abuse, and to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder)
> All prisons are improving the physical environments of their At Risk units.
Construction, infrastructure development, and engineering are no longer just for the boys!

Increasingly, media reports and industry organisations highlight the ongoing growth in these sectors, as well as accompanying challenges, including the need for more skilled employees (especially women) to ensure an inclusive and diverse labour force.

“At Auckland Region Women’s Corrections Facility (ARWCF), we’ve paid attention to these trends, and in collaboration with the Solomon Group, we have been training women to take up infrastructure jobs on release from prison,” says Principal Advisor Rehabilitation and Learning Gary Lepper.

“In fact, since the Solomon Group’s training programme in Infrastructure Works Level 2 started at the prison about 12 months ago, a total of 26 women have graduated. One graduate, who was released in November 2017, is now employed with a roading and infrastructure company.”

ARWCF has a specialist team supporting the women over a 12-month period as they are released and placing them into employment.

Job opportunities include anything from general labourer to traffic management at road works to machine operators, and more specialised roles.

Solomon Group Senior Tutor Gail Hosken delivers the infrastructure works course at the prison. She says when Solomon Group developed the course, they asked industry employers what they were looking for in entry level women employees.

“Across the board, industry employers indicated they needed employees with a Site Safe certificate in accordance with health and safety legislation, NZQA-accredited training in traffic management level one through the New Zealand Transport Agency, and training and practical experience in compaction.”

The curriculum includes maths, literacy, financial skills, CV writing, personal and professional goal setting, and general life skills covering reintegration into the community.

The course takes 14 weeks to complete and involves classroom work and self-directed learning.

How do the women feel about entering employment traditionally dominated by men?

“I think it’s cool that a lot more women are getting involved. We can hold our own, and I believe women are less of a liability; they work far more safely than men,” says Anna*.

Another graduate, Lucy* adds: “I prefer a more hands-on job, and when I get out of prison, I want to take down old structures so newer housing can be rebuilt.”

*Not their real names.
People who commit family violence will soon be attending programmes that are more responsive to their needs – and thus more effective in reducing re-offending – thanks to a partnership between Corrections and the Ministry of Justice.

Corrections and Justice both purchase family violence programmes for people who’ve been directed to attend by a judge or a court. Together, we’ve streamlined our contract requirements to give family violence programme providers more flexibility around programme delivery.

The new approach means that from 1 July 2018:

- Family violence programmes for low-to-medium risk offenders will be condensed, meaning more offenders will complete them within a shorter timeframe.
- Providers can tailor programme content and be more responsive to the needs of specific groups.
- Corrections and Justice will pay the same amount for the same programmes.

Earlier in the year, Corrections and Justice completed a series of roadshows around the country explaining in detail to providers what the changes will mean, allowing them to ask questions, and encouraging new providers, especially Māori providers, to tender.

“Providers were very positive about the roadshows. They’re pleased to see us aligning with Justice and welcome the increased flexibility and streamlined processes. This will enable them to do better for the families in their communities,” says Corrections Principal Adviser Family Violence Victoria Nicholson.

The new programmes will be delivered from 1 July 2018.
A former Corrections instructor has been helping the men at Hawkes Bay Regional Prison grow produce for local charities for nearly four years.

Retiring after 12 years as an employment instructor, Dene Thomas is now a volunteer horticultural adviser. Dene teaches the men how to plant and harvest vegetables at the Te Whare Tirohanga Māori unit, just one of the prison’s gardens that grow food for Women’s Refuge.

Dene shares his horticultural values and practical knowledge with two or three students for a few hours fortnightly, and also covers NZQA Unit Standard material.

“My professional life has been about increasing education and sharing what I know,” says Dene. “I see the men develop positive self esteem and a personal responsibility to the whenua (land).”

Dene and his students have grown many varieties of fruit and vegetables including leeks, tomatoes, kamo kamo, kumara, watermelon, strawberries and grapes. They also have a thriving herb garden, worm farm and grow a range of native plants.

Regional Volunteer Coordinator Karyn Teddy says, “Dene’s very committed to his work, and we’re proud of the support provided to the community through the garden produce.”

A passion for Māori performing arts and giving back to their culture led two wahine (women) to volunteer at Auckland Region Women’s Corrections Facility.

Ariana Williams has been helping Letitia Taikto with the kapa haka programme for about a year as Letitia, who started six months prior, needed an assistant.

“I’ve always been passionate about giving back to our Māori people,” says Ariana. “It was Letitia and her passion for supporting our wahine in prison that led me to volunteer in the Mirimiri Te Aroha unit.”

The pair encourage the women to engage in and learn Te Ao Māori customs, language and culture. Up to 22 women attend the weekly sessions.

“We mostly use Māori performing arts to deliver a basic overview of Māori culture,” says Letitia. “This involves teaching kapa haka, which includes learning and understanding Māori waiata (song), haka, poi and waiata-a-ringa (action songs). We also incorporate mihimihi (speech) and basic te reo Māori.”

“Mirimiri Te Aroha wahine are often asked to perform kapa haka for guests, at events and for competitions. We support them in the lead up to each performance, discuss their expectations and goals, confer, and design timetables and weekly targets,” says Letitia.

“The wahine have grown their confidence in public speaking, performing and leadership throughout the year. Many now follow through with what they say they’re going to do and are a role model to others inside and outside the unit.”

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From our Minister

There’s no doubt these are trying times for Corrections staff. There has been a bit of media coverage recently about the growing prison population and the pressure this is putting on our people.

I just want to take this opportunity to thank them for the work they do, in what can be an increasingly difficult environment.

The Government is looking at ways across the justice sector to reduce the muster and the impact on staff.

In my ongoing travels around prisons and other Corrections sites, I’m heartened by their efforts and dedication to making a difference in offenders’ lives.

For example, in a recent visit to Rolleston I was really impressed with the work being done to restore quake-damaged homes. There was superb quality and workmanship on display and those skills will be in demand as we ramp up the KiwiBuild programme.

I was similarly impressed by the prison’s orchards, gardens and nurseries. The nursery, where around 160,000 trees are propagated each year, was very professional. The Government is committed to planting a billion trees in 10 years, to create good jobs for our regions and to help reduce our CO2 emissions. I am talking to my colleague Forestry Minister Shane Jones about how Corrections can help, and I want to see how training for prisoners can translate into jobs on release.

We all know that equipping prisoners with useful skills is a big part of their reintegration back into the community. It means they can find jobs, which is important to building their self-esteem and living crime-free.

It’s the staff at Corrections who make all this trades training possible. On my recent travels to Rolleston, Invercargill, Otago Corrections Facility, Christchurch Women’s and Christchurch Men’s, the efforts they go to for prisoners was clear.

Things can get tense in the prison environment, but I saw staff taking the time to build good interpersonal relationships. This was truly noticeable in Christchurch Men’s Youth Unit, where the prisoners had been encouraged to run a marathon. Having that encouragement and support is crucial if we are going to turn around the lives of our young men and women.

Hon. Kelvin Davis
MINISTER OF CORRECTIONS

Thank you to everyone who follows us on Facebook and Twitter!

Thanks to our supporters, our Facebook page has now reached over 11,000 likes.

It’s a big step forward from the 2,600 likes we had this time last year and means even more people now have the chance to hear about what’s happening at Corrections.

While social media is just one of the ways we highlight the work our staff and volunteers do every day to change lives and keep the public safe, it gives us the unique ability to connect with people right across the globe 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That makes it a valuable tool for sharing our stories, answering people’s questions, and having conversations with those wanting to learn more about what we do.

If you don’t follow us already you should! By following our pages, you can see the work we’re doing in prisons and communities across New Zealand to reduce re-offending, celebrate the achievements of our graduates and long-serving staff, and stay updated on upcoming events and major announcements.

You can find us on Facebook by searching @CorrectionsNZ and on Twitter @CorrectionsNZ.
WORK AND CULTURE COMBINE

Offenders on community sentences in Manurewa, Franklin and Papakura are working hard and learning more about other’s culture. “Our community work teams regularly work at the community garden of the Takanini Sikh Temple, which provides fresh produce to about 3,000 people who visit the temple weekly,” says Senior Community Work Supervisor Gael Paki.

“Our contribution to the garden’s upkeep has had the unexpected, but most welcome, spin-off effect of people from different cultures getting to know each other’s beliefs and protocols.”

An initiative of the Shri Kalgidhar Sahib Gurudwara Sikh Temple, the ever-expanding community garden of about five hectares was opened in August last year. Community-based offender work teams were welcomed at the temple to help with cultivating the fresh produce and to enjoy a meal with temple visitors. They contribute at least 96 hours of work over two days a week to the community gardens.

“Corrections’ contribution is invaluable in producing food for struggling families and the homeless,” says Supreme Sikh Society of New Zealand spokesperson Daljit Singh.

PORTACOM PROJECT BENEFITS PRISONERS

Collaboration between Auckland Prison and Castle Portable Buildings is seeing prisoners constructing portable office units for use at major road construction projects.

“The first unit is nearly finished, and the men are learning invaluable building skills that will help them secure employment upon their release,” says Manager Industries David Grear.

There are currently five prisoners working on the project, and Castle say they’ll provide jobs and ongoing training to a number of prisoners once they are released.

Castle is a local company in Auckland, manufacturing a vast array of portable buildings from large temporary office space to small sleep-outs.

“The opportunity Castle is giving the men is fantastic, and they’re genuinely motivated to deliver their best work,” says David.

The contract with Castle is open and the prisoners will build as many portable units as are needed.

One of the men involved in the project says he’s had no prior building experience, but has discovered he has a real knack for construction and an eye for detail.

“I’m looking forward to learning more, and have already put my hand up for a potential job opportunity with Castle. It will be a chance for me to make a fresh start and do something that I really enjoy.”
A NEW LOOK FOR SAILI MATAGI

The long journey “searching for winds” for Saili Matagi has reached a new horizon. With collaboration from Dr Siautu Alefaio of Massey University and our Pasifika community, the review of the programme by our national team has successfully reached conclusion.

A relaunch on 19 February 2018 opened the programme to a cohort of 11 prisoners at Spring Hill Corrections Facility. A medium intensity programme, the rehabilitative content has a strong Pasifika cultural component through the use of Pasifika language, proverbs, stories and images.

Spring Hill is the only site to hold a Pacific Focus Unit. Prison Director Chris Lightbown says, “This is a unique programme targeting our Pasifika male population with serious or violent offending. By changing the format, we’re able to extend opportunity to a higher number of men.”

Family members and guests attended the relaunch. All recognised that none of this could have been possible without the engagement of the Pasifika community, Massey University and our partners at Auckland South Corrections Facility (Serco).

“Their ongoing support in ensuring the programme’s success demonstrates the commitment to navigating the winds of change,” says Chris.

Ministerial Recognition for Tai Aroha

Minister of Corrections Hon Kelvin Davis delighted staff and residents at Tai Aroha with a visit to the whare on his journey north for Waitangi celebrations.

Drawn by its focus on supporting tāne (men) through rehabilitation and reintegration activities in a community environment, the Minister spent time with both tauira (students) and kaimahi (staff) to better understand the programme content – and its success.

With tāne leading the whakatau (welcome) and sharing their experiences, they demonstrated how the programme was changing their approach to the challenges of life. The anticipated one hour visit extended to two hours as the Minister engaged through whanaungatanga (kinship) and manaakitanga (support), participating in the end of day reflective session.

Programme Manager Rob August says, “Having the Minister at the whare meant so much to us all. It acknowledged the hard work of everyone here.”
NEW LEVIN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS SITE OPENS

A new purpose-built Community Corrections site in Levin was officially opened on 16 March 2018.

Chief Executive Ray Smith says, “Levin staff now have a workplace that’s fit-for-purpose and would better serve people the site works with. It creates a more open, welcoming environment, while ensuring the safety and security of our staff and visitors.”

Security features include CCTV monitoring, controlled entry to the main entrance, an anti-climb reception counter, interview rooms fitted with duress alarms and two points of entry/exit.

“The new site’s part of Corrections’ nation-wide renewal programme to make Community Corrections sites more secure for staff and those who visit them,” says Ray. “In 2013 we committed to upgrading 70% of our community sites, Levin being one of them.”

The 30 staff who work there now have modern facilities to manage community-based offenders, provide meaningful community work projects, deliver rehabilitation programmes and psychological treatment.

Last year, offenders managed by Levin Community Corrections contributed to nearly 21,500 hours of community work projects across Horowhenua.

CHILDREN’S DAY IN AROHATA PRISON

There were superheroes and silver ferns at Arohata Prison on Sunday 4 March. Children visiting their mums on Children’s Day were able to have their faces painted in a range of designs with Spiderman and Batman proving most popular.

“The visits centre was buzzing with happy children,” says Arohata’s Deputy Director Matire Kupenga-Wanoa.

“Around 25 children came to spend an afternoon with mum, doing activities together they wouldn’t normally do.”

Colouring-in, hand-painting, a photo with mum, and a slice of a special Children’s Day chocolate cake rounded off the activities that were organised by the prison’s social worker.

“Arohata’s social worker is a vital link between the women, their whānau and other agencies. Women separated from their children have a high level of anxiety and our social worker can help ease that,” says Matire.

Introducing innovative ways for mothers to connect with their children during visits is included in Corrections’ Women’s Strategy.

“Our Women’s Strategy encourages women to grow healthy relationships with their children, whānau and partners. Recognising Children’s Day is just one way the team at Arohata are doing this.

“It’s the second time we’ve marked Children’s Day at Arohata and we’ll be looking at doing it again.”

Children’s Day is an Oranga Tamariki initiative that celebrates tamariki and encourages everyone to help youngsters thrive.
MARATHON A NEW ZEALAND FIRST

Early one January morning, 25 young offenders at Christchurch Men’s Prison Youth Unit prepared to run a marathon – believed to be a first in a New Zealand prison.

Joshua Foundation’s Chris Allan, who runs the Duke of Edinburgh’s Hillary Award programme in the unit, came up with the idea and Principal Corrections Officer Gary Smallridge made sure it happened.

The Hillary Award has three levels, and Chris suggested the young men complete a marathon for the physical recreation component. They quickly became competitive and challenged each other running the 2.2km loop inside the secure prison perimeter.

‘Marathon man’ and volunteer coach Olivier Lacoua spoke to the youth about his own experience having run 79 marathons. Olivier, Gary and other prison staff have been running alongside the young men ever since.

Rain on the day was no dampener. Twenty-five prisoners and 14 staff took part in both the half and full marathon, with the marathon being won in 4:13 hours by a prisoner.

Tom* is one of the young prisoners who completed a full marathon. In prison for drug related offending, he says the morning runs are helping him to get his life back on track.

“It’s great to get up in the morning and do something physical,” he says. “It’s so much better than drugs and I’m making my family proud of me again.”

*Not his real name.

COMMUNITY WORKERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The South Island’s West Coast is a unique environment. An area the length of the North Island, squeezed between the Southern Alps and the Tasman Sea, the ‘Coast’ has a small widely-spread population including around 170 offenders on community work sentences.

To manage this small group of offenders over such a large area, Corrections staff are innovative building strong agency partnerships to deliver local solutions to local problems.

In 2017, offenders completed 14,072 hours providing support following local weather events, maintenance of run down and abandoned historical sites, and development and maintenance of tourist sites and bike tracks.

Blackball Residents Association volunteer Stewart Johnston supports two local offenders, including providing transport as neither have a driver licence. They have completed nearly 60 hours community work between them.

“In a small town everyone knows everyone’s business,” says Stewart, "so there are no secrets and the wider community can fully support people on sentence."

This support plays a crucial part in the success of these projects, the work of Corrections, and of the local offenders for a future without crime.
Age no barrier to learning

A prisoner at Mt Eden Corrections Facility who learned to read fluently for the first time at 64 years of age has achieved 100% in the learner driver’s theory test, along with six others.

The men graduated from their respective Howard League literacy and driver’s licence courses just before Christmas. Hon David Parker, Minister for Economic Development, Environment, and Trade and Export Growth, presented the certificates, and celebrated the achievements not only of the prisoners, but also of the New Zealand Howard League’s 90 years plus of supporting offender education and rehabilitation.

Minister Parker emphasised the importance of prisoners taking advantage of the educational opportunities made available to them.

“There are too many people in prison and too many people coming back to prison,” said Minister Parker.

“However, all of us in this room today want to help you succeed in life, lead non-violent lives and get good jobs, so you can be proud of yourselves and your families can be proud of you as partners, fathers, brothers and friends.”

About 71% of prisoners lack basic literacy skills and the majority start a prison career with a driving offence. New Zealand Howard League for Penal Reform Chief Executive Mike Williams emphasised the importance of literacy and driver’s licence training.

“To get a job, one needs to be able to read and write. If you can’t read the Road Code you can’t get a driver’s licence. The two go hand in hand and are vital to keep people out of prison.”

For prisoner John*, his inability to read and write properly caused him years of shame, guilt and fear. But that all changed after Howard League volunteer and retired school principal Janice Anderson became his “lifeline”.

It was noticed John was unable to read or write when he asked for help filling out a form.

“I had to get that form filled out because I wanted visitors. It was a big embarrassment,” says John.

John began attending weekly sessions with Janice and had two goals; first, to read the much-loved children’s book The Very Hungry Caterpillar to his four-year-old granddaughter on his release, and second, to write his autobiography.

After about six months John achieved his goals and more.

“John now reads fluently,” says Janice. “He has completed volume one of his autobiography and is about to start on volume two. What a fantastic milestone, thanks to John’s brave decision.”

*Not his real name.

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Private Box 1206, Wellington 6140, New Zealand
Phone 04 460 3365 Email commdesk@corrections.govt.nz

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