Broken Hill Correctional Centre celebrates 125 years

Corrective Services NSW is celebrating the work of staff at Broken Hill Correctional Centre as the heritage-listed prison marks its 125th year.

The 90-bed prison opened in 1892 with just five prison ‘warders’ and now employs more than 60 staff, including community corrections officers, who work from a city office with offenders on parole.

Commissioner Peter Severin said Broken Hill Correctional Centre and its staff played an important role in keeping the community safe.

“Staff at the correctional centre on Gossan Street and the community corrections office on Argent Street do an incredible job in managing inmates and offering programs to reduce reoffending,” Mr Severin said.

“Theyir work often goes unnoticed because it occurs behind the prison walls, but it should not go unacknowledged.

“As we mark the 125th year of this important regional facility, I want to thank both our custodial and community corrections staff for their excellent work supervising inmates and parolees.”

When Broken Hill Gaol, as it was then named, opened on 8 November 1892, it held two female- and 19 male-inmates – including Patrick O’Heare, who managed to escape three days later during the confusion of the set-up.

The centre now holds up to 90 inmates, many of whom are employed by Corrective Services Industries in catering, maintenance and community work. Inmates are also offered a range of vocational and education opportunities to improve the post-release employment prospects.

Senior Correctional Officer Darryn Clifton joined CSNSW 15 years ago, following a career at Broken Hill City Council and NSW Fire & Rescue.

Mr Clifton said he loves being a correctional officer and said working for CSNSW has constantly developed his communication and problem-solving skills.

“Ninety-nine per cent of the time it’s about effective communication with the inmates to address their issues and help them make the right decisions to turn their lives around,” Mr Clifton said.

Mr Clifton also volunteers as a CSNSW peer-support officer providing staff support in times of need.

“This job can create stress for staff so it’s good to know that there are people to talk to who can understand,” Mr Clifton said.

“I’m there to listen to them in trying times and point them in the right direction.”
Broken Hill Correctional Centre and Community Corrections

- Broken Hill Correctional Centre employs 34 custodial staff, four Corrective Services Industries overseers, three offender services, education and programs staff and six administration people.

- Broken Hill Community Corrections has around 15 staff who supervise more than 200 offenders in the city and surrounding communities.

- In supervising offenders, Community Corrections officers can travel as far as Euston (400km away), White Cliffs (300km away), Dareton (285km away), Wentworth (275km away), Wilcannia (200km away), Menindee (110km away) and Tibooburra (330km by plane).

- Broken Hill Correctional Centre is the fourth-oldest operating-prison in NSW, after Berrima (1839), Goulburn (1884) and Bathurst (1888). It is older than Grafton (1893) and Long Bay (1909).

- The centre is also a “rare survivor”* of the NSW country gaols built in the latter half of the 19th century. There were over 50 country gaols listed as operating in NSW in 1896, now there are only three in use: Broken Hill, Cooma and Grafton.

- When it was opened it was the largest country prison in operation, after the five principal industrial prisons at Darlinghurst, Parramatta, Bathurst, Goulburn and Maitland.

- The centre cost £15,000 to build and was designed by the Colonial Architect’s Department under James Barnet, who was also responsible for the Australian Museum and Sydney GPO, as well as 169 post offices, 155 police stations, 130 courthouses, 110 lock-ups and 20 lighthouses across the state.

- Barnet’s office also designed Broken Hill Court House (1889) and Broken Hill Post Office (1892).

- The main contractors for the prison build were ‘Dobbee and Son and the bricks were produced at the firm’s brickyard. Dobbee and Son were also completing Broken Hill Post Office at the same time.

- There has been one inmate executed at the prison: On 11 June 1907, Peter Sadeek, who killed a woman at White Cliffs, was hanged.

- In 1942 the prison was vacated for exclusive use by the Commonwealth Government as a repository for Australia’s gold reserves during World War II. By 1944 when the repository was closed, the prison held at total of £AU44.8 million of gold for the Bank of England, Commonwealth Bank and De Javasche Bank.

- The centre is the furthest prison from Sydney and is an important facility for the Far West region because it allows inmates to remain close to their community and families, instead of being sent to other regional or metropolitan centres.

*Source: Broken Hill Correctional Centre Conservation Plan, 1996.