MEDIA RELEASE: Female offenders abseil their way to a better future

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An innovative program for female offenders that sees them tackle their criminal behaviour through challenging outdoor activities is celebrating its 10th anniversary this month.

The Adventure Based Challenge, run at Oberon Correctional Centre in the Central West, sees women aged between 18 and 30 years engaging in intensive case management and tasks including abseiling, rock climbing and high ropes.

Member for Bathurst Paul Toole said the Corrective Services NSW program had produced excellent results over the past decade, with evaluations showing a significant reduction in reoffending.

“Following a case study involving 125 participants, the success rate for inmates who had not returned to custody for 12 months or more was around 73 per cent, compared to 62 per cent for the general female custodial population,” Mr Toole said.

Manager of the Young Adult Offender Program Dimity Geddes said the program was specifically designed for minimum-security inmates nearing the end of their sentences to prepare them for release back into the community.

“This is a life-changing program that takes the offenders out of their comfort zones: One day they’re developing problem-solving skills while navigating in the bush and the next they’re learning personal and social responsibility on the high ropes course,” Ms Geddes said.

“The outdoor activities help participants undergo a huge personal transformation so they leave custody with improved direction and confidence, control of impulsive decision making and acceptance and responsibility for their past actions.”

Governor of Oberon Correctional Centre Mick Dudley said the participants typically had histories of domestic violence, as well as emotional, sexual and physical trauma.

“This program is crucial in addressing problems with substance abuse, maintaining employment, peer pressure, accepting responsibility and communication,” Mr Dudley said.

“Participants engage in a variety of tasks including camping overnight in the bush, building a shelter from a piece of string and plastic, navigating with a compass, abseiling, rock climbing and completing a high ropes course. The Facilitators are assisted by two adult inmates who support program context, encourage hesitant offenders and lead by example.”

Governor of Dillwynia Correctional Centre Shari Martin said around 15 new participants embarked on the 40th program at Oberon Correctional Centre on 26 February 2018 and would graduate a week later at Dillwynia.
“The graduation ceremonies are incredibly moving. Participants reflect on their experiences in front of an audience, which includes their families. It becomes clear to everyone in the room that this program has a profound and positive effect on offenders,” Ms Martin said.

The Adventure Based Challenge was born from the highly successful Young Adult Male Offender Program, The Gurnang Challenge, which has been running since 1991.

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