ACT Computers in Cells Report

The Community Justice Coalition (CJC) resolved to arrange a visit to the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), Australian Capital Territory. This visit intended to extend the work into the Computers in Cells program.

The insights of the ACT experience with in-cell technology would also promote further discussions in other jurisdictions.

That experience of internet-connected computers in cells indicates that there are many key benefits including communication with families, access to education and information. It also reduces boredom.

Recidivism within the ACT has been on the decline, while in NSW and Australia in general it has been increasing. Only 39% of ACT prisoners return to prison within 2 years, compared to NSW at 50.7% and the national average of 44.3%[i].

Education participation in the ACT prison stands at 76.3%, which is more than double the national rate of 31.6%[ii].

VISIT

John Dowd and Brett Collins visited AMC on Monday 31st July from 1pm until 5pm. They were met by the Executive Director Jon Peach and three of his staff, Peter Robertson (Intel Officer), Paul Rushton (Deputy General Manager) and Jenny West the Compliance Officer.

John Dowd introduced the CJC and his particular involvement as a former Supreme Court judge in a case for computer access in NSW. Jon Peach said they were pleased to show us what they had accomplished and were open to any ideas to assist their development.

The computers in the cells are used for education, occasionally in a games form, email and as a TV. They are a PC inside a sealed screen as a single unit, with no hard drive and as such are dependent on the system that is centrally controlled.

Communication by email was stated to be a great success. Approximately 22,000 emails were sent and received by 440 prisoners each week.

Checking emails is a task delegated to one person. All email messages that hit quarantine (due to policy violations) are delayed until they can be explicitly vetted by staff.

Email messages that do not trigger the quarantine filters (i.e. they observe the prison policy) are delivered within five minutes. There is little possibility for a fully automated check via technology due to the false identification of words from text checks.

Each prisoner can have an email list of up to five people.

Evidentiary requests from courts are difficult to manage and the searching process is difficult.

It was stated that prisoners don't share their access codes with other prisoners, as that would expose their personal emails to other prisoners.

After one hour of discussion within the conference room, Jenny West, the Compliance Officer, guided John and Brett into the AMC.

EDUCATION

Jenny took them to the Education area where David Bell and Arthur Huggins of the education private supplier Campbell Page explained the processes. He provided a document on access to education, which is attached.

There are two PhD students, thirty-three USQ students, and also a small number attending TAFE and Open Universities.

There are two systems that work separately, the PrisonPC system and the Corrective Services system.

Computers with hard drives are in the Education Section in Training Room 1, under video camera surveillance, and they remain separate from the network of PrisonPC computers. One PC has access to the internet. Prisoners are provided with 1.5 – 3 hours a week in the Education Section. Emails are a primary function but letters can also be printed out.

Upon successful student enrolment through the AMC system, USQ course materials for each prisoner are delivered by mail to the Education team at AMC via CD. They then upload these materials onto the PrisonPC system that is accessed locally by prisoners doing the course. Course convenors at the USQ can be contacted by adding them to a prisoner's five approved email contacts, or via the education officer. Assignments are submitted via the education officer.

Belinda is the librarian. She assists with sourcing articles for assignments. There are requests for additional material for USQ courses.

David Bell said Moodle was utilised with flexible learning toolboxes from Victoria. Access to VET-Fee-Help national funding was provided for a Certificate II.

Printing for education was free. Other printing was 20c a page.

Educational games are also provided via in cell computers. They assist in relieving boredom combined with educational purposes.

COUNSELLING

No counselling occurs through the computers. Below are some proposals as to how online counselling could be made available to the prisoners.

LEGAL

Access to the ACT legislation, the Acts, regulations and processes has been stopped for 9 months. The librarian said she provides PDF files. There is a restriction on the Australian Legal Information Institute (AUSTLII) website due to concerns that prisoners could search other prisoners' cases, where previous aberrant behaviour could be discovered, inciting prison attacks.

On technical examination that problem can be avoided, as access to the AUSTLII site can be restricted to both specific areas or on a per-inmate basis, permitting prisoners to view only whitelisted relevant sections.

The following sections of the AUSTLII site can be whitelisted using current resources, allowing inmates access to legislation:

http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/act/consol_act/
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/act/consol_act/toc-html

This matter is expanded more fully below, under "Opportunities for Development."

PRISONERS' VIEW

Two prisoners, who are on the Prisoners Committee were brought into the Education area and talked for half an hour. Both have duties of peer mentoring to other prisoners.

They suggested that there should be an opportunity to share information and have paralegal support from trained prisoners. Parole information, bail requests and suggestions could be accumulated and made available to everyone. This would be useful support additional to the limited legal aid available.

Emails to the Ombudsman and lawyers are privileged although prisoners generally did not feel confident that their rights to privacy were respected.

No counselling occurs via the computers. The prisoners nevertheless advocate this function, as stigmatisation would be avoided through an online medium.

The prisoners stated computers could facilitate pre-release information, such as accommodation and employment, which are part of the ACT Through-care program. Access to external service providers would also be of use.

The prisoners desired training with practical and skilful jobs, such as forklift training.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Having computers in cells opens up safe communication that would also allow provision of online services to prepare prisoners for reintegration. The delivery of respectful relationship counselling to manage domestic violence and access to education are especially of benefit.

Currently there are a number of websites available for prisoners such as some universities and government websites. Additionally some sites are hosted internally such as the library database and some are only available for specific users.

Whitelisting Websites
Whitelisting a URL means access is permitted. Whitelisting can also be regarded as an approved list of websites that people are allowed to access. It is used to allow access to pertinent and safe websites.

If the address is a website domain, any URL that starts with that domain is whitelisted. So any links that are on the original page will also be whitelisted. However, you can also blacklist sub-pages that are deemed inappropriate.

Cases and legislation are located in different areas on the AUSTLII website. Whitelisting could be used to allow access to legislation only.

Whitelisting http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/act/consol_act/ allows access to current ACT Acts. Similarly, http://ww.austlii.edu.au/au/consol_act/ba199241/ allows access to the Bail Act 1992. Cases have their own specific prefix depending on the court. For instance, Supreme Court cases can be found at http://ww.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/act/ACTSC/. As can be seen, this does not involve the /consol_act/ prefix, indicating that legislation can be whitelisted while excluding access to cases.

The computers currently in use at the AMC do not provide any counselling services to prisoners. But in order to reduce recidivism rates and best prepare prisoners for reintegration upon release, online counselling is essential. Underneath is a list of services the Community Justice Coalition has already sourced, which are free and available and can be whitelisted.

SERVICES SAFE, WHITELISTABLE AND FREE

Family and Relationship Support

Anglicare Southern Queensland
- http://betterrelationships.org.au/counselling/about/
- Free online counselling to residents of Queensland and Australia. Here you can talk to a professional counsellor securely and confidentially in one of the following ways.
  - A real time text-based chat with a counsellor using a web-based interface.
  - Or you can communicate one-on-one with a counsellor via a series of emails.
- Focus on issues concerning families and relationships
- Based in Brisbane but available to clients anywhere in Australia

MensLine
- https://mensline.org.au/want-to-talk/
- National telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns
- Free online chat counselling
- Counselling is a conversation between a trained mental health professional and someone who wants to talk about their worries and concerns, and/or work through their mental and social health issues.
- All staff managing our telephone or online counselling services are qualified professional counsellors, social workers or psychologists, trained to follow a contextual counselling and problem solving process to listen, understand you, and help you find ways to feel better.
- Counsellors are experts in men's mental health, anger management, family violence (perpetrators and victims), substance abuse, healthy relationships and integrated wellbeing.
- Funded by Australian Government Department of Social Services and delivered by On the Line, Australia's leading professional telephone and online counselling provider.

1800 Respect
- https://www.1800respect.org.au
- Support for victims of sexual assault, domestic and family violence
- Online counselling offered 24hrs a day 7 days a week
- Offers one-to-one online contact with a qualified and experienced counsellor

Crisis Support

Lifeline
- https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/online-services/crisis-chat
- Crisis Support chats are available between 7pm-4am (Sydney time) 7 days a week.
- Short-term support for people who are overwhelmed and having difficulty coping or staying safe
- Real time using 'chat' technology
- Confidential one-to-one with a Lifeline Online Crisis Supporter
- Not online counselling but crisis support

Kids Helpline (Under 25)
- https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/get-help/
- Offers phone, email and web-based counselling for youth aged between 13 and 25
- Email counselling is perfect for you if you can't get to a phone or prefer to write things down. One of our counsellors will read your email carefully and reply with info, questions and suggestions for you
- Webchat counselling 7 days between 8am and 12am AEST

- Web counselling lets you connect one-on-one, real time, with a Kids Helpline counsellor, over the web.
- Additional mental health resources available on the KHL website
- Confidential one-to-one with a Lifeline Online Crisis Supporter

- Not online counselling but crisis support

Behaviour Change and Substance Abuse

OCD Stop!
- http://www.swinburne.edu.au/lss/bpsyc/clinical-and-health-research/ocd/
- OCD STOP! is a free online psychological treatment specifically targeting obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).
- The program consists of 12 weekly modules completed online. You will have access to:
  - The online program operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week
  - Accurate and up-to-date information about OCD
  - Information on how to control anxiety and better manage OCD
  - Downloadable video and audio (including patient stories, expert explanations and relaxation exercises)
  - Downloadable lessons and workbook exercises
  - Program content after completion

Counselling Online
- https://www.counsellingonline.org.au
- Operated by Turning Point in Victoria and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Counselling Online provides assistance to Australian residents concerned about alcohol & other drugs.
- Online text-based counseling
- Also offers email support and self-help modules

LGBTIQ Counselling

QLife
- https://qlife.org.au
- QLife is Australia's first nationally oriented counselling and referral service for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people. The project provides nation-wide, early intervention, peer supported telephone and web based services to diverse people of all ages experiencing poor mental health, psychological distress, social isolation, discrimination, experiences of being misgendered and/or other social determinants that impact on their health and wellbeing.
- Web Counselling available from 3pm-12am 7 days a week, 365 days a year Australia wide.
- Web chat services provided by volunteers supported by a team of paid staff members
- Mental Health and Referral Information Available via the web 24hrs a day
- QLife member organisations include
  - Diverse Voices – Queensland
  - Living Proud – Western Australia
  - Switchboard – Victoria
  - Twenty10 (incorporates GLCS NSW)

  - National LGBTI Health Alliance

Out and Online
- https://www.outandonline.org.au/pages/about-out-and-online
- Out & Online is an online program to improve wellbeing and reduce mental health symptoms in same-gender attracted youth aged 18-25 years. Out & Online provides early intervention for symptoms of anxiety and depression based on scientifically tested psychological treatment.
- Program users receive access to interactive online material tailored to their symptoms, including videos, downloadable audios and tip sheets, online exercises and links to other services
- Out & Online is available for free as part of a research trial being conducted by researchers at Swinburne University of Technology, Federation University Australia and Deakin University.

General Services

Moodgym
- https://moodgym.com.au
- Moodgym is an online self-help program designed to help users prevent and manage symptoms of depression and anxiety. It is like an interactive, online self-help book that teaches skills based on cognitive behaviour therapy.
- Moodgym consists of five interactive modules which are completed in order.
- The development and delivery of Moodgym is now undertaken by e-hub Health – an ANU spin-off company managed by the senior Moodgym team.
- Moodgym is designed for people who would like to prevent mental health problems or manage problems that are troubling but not incapacitating.
- The ongoing delivery of Moodgym is funded by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health, through its Telephone Counselling, Self Help and Web-based Support Programs funding measure. This means that the program is free for use by all Australians.

Beyond Blue
- https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support
- Beyond Blue web chat provides short-term counselling, information and referrals for anxiety and depression.
- Online between 3pm-12am AEST
- Chat requires pop-ups, Java and cookies to be enabled
- Also provides email support offering a response from a mental health professional within 24 hours

Mindspot Clinic
- https://mindspot.org.au/
- The MindSpot Clinic is a free service for Australian adults who are experiencing difficulties with anxiety, stress, depression and low mood. We provide online Screening Assessments and Treatment Courses, or we can help you find local services that can help.
- MindSpot is made up of a team of over 30 Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists and Mental Health Professionals who are passionate about providing a free and effective service to people all over Australia. We have a dedicated IT team to ensure that this happens as securely and efficiently as possible. MindSpot is based at Macquarie University, Sydney, and we are funded by the Australian government.
- Treatment courses take approximately 8 weeks.

- Most people find symptoms of anxiety and depression reduce by 50%. 95% of people report that they would refer a friend.
- Available free to Australians aged over 18 who are eligible for Medicare funded services

On Track
- https://www.ontrack.org.au/web/ontrack/programs
- Psychologists at QUT have written the On Track programs. They are free and use methods that have been shown to work.
- You can use the programs at your own pace, at times and places that suit you. The programs are interactive, and help you learn skills to manage your own problems.

This Way Up
- https://thiswayup.org.au/how-we-can-help/courses/
- Offers online CBT-based self-help courses
- Courses are evidence based and designed to be completed within 2 months.
- Free courses available
  - Introduction to mindfulness
  - Coping with stress
  - Managing insomnia

E-Couch
- https://ecouch.anu.edu.au/welcome
- E-Couch is a self-help interactive program with modules for depression, general anxiety, social anxiety, relationship breakdown, and loss and grief.
- It provides evidence-based information and teaches strategies drawn from cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal therapies as well as relaxation and physical activity.
- Requires Java and Flash is recommended

Sane Australia
- https://www.sane.org/get-help
- Provides Phone, Chat and email mental health support
- Chat available weekdays 10am-10pm AEST

MyCompass
- https://www.mycompass.org.au
- MyCompass is free online, interactive self-help program. MyCompass is designed to address mild to-moderate symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression through personalised treatments delivered entirely online.
- It delivers proven psychological techniques used by doctors and psychologists such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).
- When used correctly, it can be as effective as antidepressants and enables lasting improvements to mood, anxiety and stress levels.
- Ideally, you need to commit to the program for a minimum of seven weeks to gain the full benefit.
- Online learning modules each include three 10-15 minute sessions that can be completed at the user's convenience. Completing the mood-tracking component takes around 1-2 minutes per day.

Eheadspace

- https://eheadspace.org.au
- Eheadspace is a confidential, free and secure space where young people 12 - 25 or their family can chat, email or speak on the phone with a qualified youth mental health professional
- Young people may contact us if they need advice, are worried about their mental health or are feeling isolated or alone.
- Eheadspace can help with a broad range of issues like bullying, drug and alcohol issues, depression and anxiety, relationships, concerns about friends, fitting in and isolation.

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[i] Sentencing Advisory Council, "Released Prisoners Returning To Prison", (Victoria State Government, 2016).

[ii] Productivity Commission, "Report On Government Services 2016, Chapter 8 Volume C" (Australian Government, 2016).