

My Name is Nadine De Bruyen. I was recently released from Qld prisons, after serving 7 years and 3 months across 3 institutions, and I declare that all this information is true and correct.

The following statements are true and correct I am writing this statement as a layman, in my own words, being incarcerated robbed me of my intelligence, capability to perform tasks I would have found menial, my life and coping skills, my dignity, confidence and self-worth. Prison was supposed to “rehabilitate” me, but all it did was rob me of a future. Even though I am free now, it is only a word. I have swapped one prison for another. In the seven years whilst incarcerated in Queensland Correctional Facilities, nothing but additional trauma was added to the already existing damage inflicted on me by an abusive partner. I was denied the opportunity to prepare for the outside world after 7 years of living under conditions designed to break a person and set the majority up for failure, only to be released into a world I was not prepared for or recognised anymore. Within the first two weeks I wanted to go back to prison because I couldn’t cope. I had non-stop panic attacks and only attempted to leave my house once with disastrous results. I never go anywhere without a support person, and even then it is extremely stressful. I have suicidal thoughts because I am not equipped to cope. I am petrified all the time and filled with self-loathing because I suddenly find myself “dumb and obsolete”. This is not only my experience, nor is this only for my own sake, but it is also on behalf of all the other women that were, are and will be incarcerated.

My story isn’t unique, many have suffered more than what I have, but I have a voice and it would be scandalous if I didn’t at least attempt to bring to light and hopefully improve the conditions for people that find themselves incarcerated. I can only speak of my own experiences and incidents I was aware of whilst in Brisbane Womens and Southern Queensland Correctional Centres, but I am certain that the suffering is no less in any of the other correctional centres. When reading this, please bear in mind that it was prepared with very little notice, all of my computer skills are outdated, but everything can be verified.

My name is Nadine de Bruyn, a 49-year-old woman and I was incarcerated from the end of August 2016 to the 5th of November 2023. I was taken to Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre on 01 September 2016 and removed from there on the 2nd of September 2016 by my Prison Mental Health Psychiatrist. **SEE CASE NOTES 1-2 SEPT 2016 AND REPORT BY DR CRYSTAL VAN DER BELT** I have no memory of this, and I spent the next two years in The Park Mental Hospital, slowly rebuilding myself.

Because of conflicting evidence, disagreement by three different psychiatrists and my refusal to please guilty to a second charge I was not guilty of (and that was later dismissed) in the Mental

Health Court, my case was referred to the Criminal Court and I was transferred back to Brisbane Womens Correctional Centre (BWCC) on the 15th of May 2018. I was diagnosed with PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder, Anxiety and traits of Borderline Personality Disorder, (BPD).

On arrival at BWCC, I was strip searched at Reception. Because I was from the Park Mental Health Hospital, I was moved to S4 Safety unit into the padded cell (cell 9) with only a mattress and safety blanket on the floor. I was strip searched again (Removal of Clothing), dressed in a safety smock and with no underwear. I spent two days in there with 24-hour artificial light, no window or fresh air. I had a shared toilet and shower with the neighbouring padded cell. I was on 15-minute observations but was monitored 24/7 by the surveillance cameras in the cell and in the toilet. The only access to water was from the bubbler attached to the toilet or if you asked the officers. The only sound was of fellow inmates' screams and the two blaring televisions in the dining/common area, which was unbearable, even at night-time. All I could think about was dying.

The condition of the women's prison safety unit has been under scrutiny for its lack of humane conditions and essential requirements for some time, and I can attest that it is nothing short of hell on earth. (Monroe. 2019. PC. 2021)

Being strip searched by two officers and dressed in a safety smock with no underwear, is extremely distressing and degrading for female inmates, especially since most of us had experienced sexual and physical abuse. The humiliation of getting your period and having to "free flow" is dominated by the toxic masculinity of the employee culture of QCS. When you are in a safety smock, you are not allowed underwear, even when you have your period. We weren't allowed socks or jumpers, no matter how cold it was.

Not only are you stripped of your dignity, but you are also denied your name. You are referred to as Prisoner XYZ, making you feel even more insignificant and dehumanised.

Each time spent in the S4 unit; my mental health noticeably declined. My psychologist reports and case notes will be added as annexes.

Due to the conditions of the S4 unit, my health and that of the other inmates often declined. Physical pain often caused the ladies to protest in a violent manner because asking for help didn't get results.

I was frightened and did not want to leave my cell when asked to.

Despite requesting a book to read to assist my mental health, I was only given one on 17 May 2018, however this was only permitted during non-lockdown hours.

On 18 May 2018 I was moved to a single cell with a television. The cell was dirty, the toilet covered in old toilet paper and faeces. This too was under constant camera surveillance and fresh water only from the toilet bubbler. The fluorescent lights were always on, making sleep almost impossible. You well and truly feel like an animal.

In the morning you are handed a toiletry bag with your cell number on it, a towel and a change of clothes if any was available. Sometimes days would go by without access to clean clothes. Most of the ladies in S4 were indigenous, hence we all had the same problem with our hair. It was winter, we all had dry skin, which caused skin breaks and infections due to the poor water quality.

The ladies accommodated in S4 suffered from various conditions, including substance withdrawals. There were ladies with severe intellectual impairments, they certainly did not belong in prison. Some were very unpredictable and volatile, and this was intimidating and did not help anybody's state of mind. There were constant codes, lockdowns fights and altercations with officers.

There were no medical staff in the Safety Unit, only officers, both male and female. The office was manned by both sexes, the cameras were monitored by them, and they could see us having showers and going to the toilet.

Whenever you had to leave S4 to go to the Medical Centre or for a Legal visit, the walkways were closed, and you were escorted by two officers. Some women wore spit masks, and some were handcuffed. You were always within sight of the officers, but every time you returned to S4, you had to be ROC searched.

S4 had a concreted caged area and that was the only access to fresh air. The area was cold and dirty, access was often denied due to staff shortages. We were sometimes segregated from each other, there was a door that divided the unit into two areas, both on the inside and in the yard.

Lockdowns occurred regularly and for prolonged periods of time. There was no way of escaping screams and suffering of the fellow ladies and this always had an extremely negative impact on my mental health. To me and many other women, **the Safety Unit in any prison is the worst hell imaginable.**

You are denied privacy, dignity and intellectual stimulation. All you do is wish away time and become suicidal. Some ladies often swallowed objects such as pens and pencils, batteries, razor blades; two young women inserted razor blades into their vaginas.

I've been on an Involuntary Treatment Order since 2016, implemented by Prison Mental Health Services, an organisation separate to QCS. During my incarceration under Queensland Corrective

Services, I have always been a Person of Concern and on an Elevated Baseline Risk process. This was implemented by the psychiatrists employed by the prison, and it hampered my progress significantly. My case notes consistently stated that I “did not present with current indicators of DSH/suicide or intent” yet being placed on observations and back in the Safety Unit was always held over my head.

I had never attempted suicide whilst under QCS’s control, yet seriously considered it every time I was placed in the Safety Unit. I would often cease my medication as a means to protest the treatment I was receiving, and the restrictions placed on me. I started self-harming in the Safety Unit by scratching myself and over the years this escalated to cutting.

I was moved to **S5** (known as the Care Bear unit) on 13 June 2016. This is an extension of the Safety unit, but “less controlled”. There were two units in **S5 – A and B**. There were approximately 10 women in each unit, I think perhaps 7 cells, some doubled up. The only access to the outside was a concreted encaged area. There were altercations daily, violent women with extensive histories were mixed with people incarcerated for the first time, causing fear and distrust. I chose to remain locked away in my cell, sleep during the day and stay awake at night to escape these circumstances.

I watched people being bullied, stood over and any attempt to make things better for all of the ladies were thwarted by the officers, supervisors and managers. A young lady (Angie) was sexually assaulted by an older woman in S5A in the same month I was in that unit.

Searches: Removal of Clothing ROC

I started refusing to leave S4 because of the ROC searches and this would continue to happen whenever I was required to leave the prison for medical appointments for the rest of my incarceration. I was sexually assaulted by my ex-husband, the ROC searches were extremely triggering for me, thus my health suffered because my fear was greater than any medical requirement. I did not want to be handcuffed and ROC searched.

I was never treated for the trauma caused by the abuse because as per one of the psychologists *“QCS does not treat trauma because we are not equipped to deal with it”*.

The psychologists were mostly young and inexperienced. One suggested that I hold an ice-cube as a means of coping rather than self-harm, I pointed out the fact that I was in a secure unit and that ice cubes did not just fall from the sky.

We were living like caged animals, all with the premise of keeping us “safe”. On two occasions I was doubled up with another prisoner in S5, causing me even more distress because there was no privacy, we had to use the toilet and shower while we were locked away in the same cell.

On the 31st of August 2018 the entire **S5 was moved to S10** (but still known as the Care Bears) as part of “**Operation Elevate**”, QCS’s goal to never have women doubled up in cells again. It is common knowledge that they started doubling up again in 2022, installing new double bunkers at SQCC in Secure.

S10 was another form of hell. There were more cells, the noise was deafening and I deteriorated mentally. At the time I was not medicated for hypervigilance yet. I was attacked by a mentally unstable lady called Dollar on the 11th of September 2018 in a fit of rage and had to physically restrain her. She was injured in the process and I felt extremely guilty about this. My psychologist’s reports consistently mentioned my decline, on the 12th of September 2018 a Notice of Concern (NOC) was raised because I had made a statement that I wanted to die. I was not put on observations and this is where I learnt that you had to lie about your mental state in order to get out of S10 and progress to Residential.

I was moved into Residential 5C, obtained a position as a senior librarian and I started doing better. In addition to my position as a librarian, I was also a Peer Support worker, Child Carer, PAC member, Cat Carer and Bail Clerk. I was still in prison, but at least I had purpose and something to occupy myself with. I still had to see the psychologists but learnt to navigate around them for them not to place me back in the Safety Unit. In prison this is referred to as “faking it till you make it”. Supervisors often placed vulnerable ladies in the unit with me because they knew that I would do my best to support them.

2019: I was in residential unit 5C with inmate TANIA Cowan, who had recently begun the Medium Intensity Substance Intervention (MISI) program, and her mental health had not been well since prior to the commencement of the course and I had been assisting inmate Cowan with submitting request forms to see a psychologist to help inmate Cowan process the associated triggers and untreated traumatic memories resurfacing as a result of the MISI intervention. The only programs that did help, they took from us.

The 19th May 2019, the Supervisor moved inmate Cowan to Residential Unit 4, which caused her additional stress. Inmate Cowan moved back into Unit 5C. On the morning of the 25th of May AM, inmate Cowan attempted to take her own life by hanging herself with a shoelace from the steel doorknob in her cell.

I remained in Residential Unit 5C until the morning of 25 May 2019. At the time Ms Tanya Cowan and I were in a relationship, which we managed to hide as they would've moved her out of the unit. She was doing the MISI Course (Medium Intensity Substance Intervention). Prior to that I had helped her complete several Prisoner Request forms seeking counselling. She had childhood trauma and great fears about her upcoming release and the possibility that she would be homeless and relapse. She was upset that night and when I asked her about this, she said that the MISI course had made her believe that she was not as far into her recovery process as what she thought she was. This was not the first or the last time I had heard someone express that sentiment. Ms Cowan went to her own cell next to mine; I couldn't sleep and heard a noise coming from her cell. I tried to open the door but it was blocked. I managed to force my way in, found her hanging from the doorknob with a shoelace, totally unresponsive. I started CPR and the other ladies in the unit woke up. Ms Cowan started breathing again, and soon after that the night supervisor and officers came because one of the ladies had called a code. I was very upset and crying. The ambulance arrived sometime later and Ms Cowan was transported to hospital. The Supervisor asked me to go with him to S4 and that Ms Cowan would be going there upon her return. I was in shock, vomited in front of the unit and walked with them to S4. I did not realise how this would change the remainder of my incarceration at BWCC.

Later that morning I was placed on 15-minute observations, strip searched, placed in a smock and segregated from the other prisoners. As it was the weekend, no psychologists were available. Ms Cowan returned to S4 on the 26th of May 2019 and placed on 15-minute observations and in a smock. **The case notes between 27 May 2019 to 20 June 2019** reflect the way the both of us were treated. I was angry because Ms Cowan had actively sought help and the prison failed her. She nearly lost her life and in less than a week I lost everything that I had worked for. The only manner I could express my frustrations and rage was by ceasing my medication and going on a hunger strike. I was traumatised by what had happened and was never offered counselling for this. Instead, I had to start all over again and Ms Cowan was transferred to SQCC, approximately 2 weeks prior to her release. I am still in contact with Ms Cowan and she continues to struggle with her mental health. I still have flashbacks of many events in prison, but this was by far the worst.

I finally "progressed" back to Residential on the **20th of June 2019, but as per my case notes between then and 06 September 2019, it** clearly reflects the repercussions I experienced from the events that took place on the 25th of May 2019. Throughout my entire sentence I constantly requested to be removed from the ELBR process because it had a great impact on my opportunities.

I was actively self-harming as this was the only effective coping strategy I had. I hid it most of the time out of fear of being returned to the Safety Unit and found it ridiculous that a trained psychologist would ask “are you having thoughts of harming yourself”, expecting an honest answer.

On 22/11/2019 I was placed in S4 again. I had disclosed to the psych that I was self-harming, to which she suggested I should attempt not to have razor blades ready, but to rather take the time to disassemble a razor and that this might give me time to think about what I was doing. SEE CASE NOTES **12/11/2019 TO 22/11/2019** This was the first time that one of the psychologists had made a practical suggestion that I could relate to. I went back to the unit, disposed of all of my blades (this could've easily been verified exactly as I described on the unit camera footage). The psych broke my trust and for being honest and open to intervention, I was put back in hell. I went through ROC searches again, the cuts were seen and noted to be superficial. I never self-harm to cause permanent damage, only as a coping mechanism.

SQCC

I was transferred to Southern Queensland Correctional Centre on the 18th of December 2019 from the S4 Safety Unit at BWCC. Once again I had to go through the ROC searches and was placed in the Safety Unit. This was another Hell, the biggest difference being that you weren't allowed contact with any of the other inmates. You were segregated and the only interaction you had was with the psychologists and the officers. To this day it remains the same. The official visitor, chaplains and organisations from the outside are not permitted access on unscheduled days.

I remained a Person of Concern (POC) and on an Elevated Baseline Risk until my release on 05 October 2023. During my incarceration at SQCC Gatton, I was victimised, targeted and harassed by Management and certain staff members. I made several complaints to the Official Visitor, Queensland Human Rights Commission, The Commissioner of Corrective Services etc, but to today nobody has addressed or tried to remedy the situation. **(see attachments)**.

Apart from my initial intake into the Safety unit, I was only ever put back in there for one night as a “precaution”, “to keep me safe” when I received the news that I had lost my first Visa Revocation Appeal. Even though it was noted that I was not perturbed by the decision, Management members and psychologists that I had made complaints about in the past, decided that I should be placed on 15-minute observations in the Safety Unit. **(DATE CASE NOTES)**. Officers working in that area were surprised at this decision, advocated for me to be returned to Residential, which I was the next day. I had converted to Islam, but was made to remove my head covering, ROC searched, put in a smock and safety pants covered in faeces and had to shower and go to the toilet once again with

cameras surveillance manned by both sexes. My religious needs and rights were totally disregarded, and I am certain that this was an attempt by certain staff members to break me.

I was put on observations on several other occasions, but these were done whilst accommodated in other areas of the prison. I continued to self-harm throughout the remainder of my sentence and was constantly involved in a battle to have my basic human rights as a prisoner and human being met. (these documents are quite extensive and another separate matter).

The rest of my submission I would like to focus on events and circumstances that affected other prisoners held at SQCC and how this impacted their mental health.

In my role as an art tutor, I volunteered to paint a mural in the Safety Unit as a means to “make it a more friendly and cheerful” environment. I can now state that this was a ploy to gain unrestricted access to the Safety Unit and observe and note the conditions there. I had made it my personal goal to try and expose the Safety Unit for what it was: a place to put severely unwell prisoners that could not be housed in the general prison population, under inhumane conditions. A dungeon for women that were failed by the Queensland Government, Queensland Health, The Justice System and society in general. Women that were products of the Juvenile Detention System, victims of child abuse, survivors of domestic violence, women suffering from substance abuse, severe mental and intellectual impairments. Women caught up in the justice system and placed in the Safety Unit because there was nowhere else to keep them. The majority of the women were indigenous, repeat offenders and women that had asked for help from the prison authorities and because of failures had caused harm to themselves or others or had attempted suicide. I commenced painting on 09 August 2022 and dragged the project out until about August/September 2023. Sometimes another inmate, also employed as an art tutor, assisted me.

There are two padded cells with shared toilets and showers. The padded cells have no windows, and the lights are kept on 24/7. They have double doors, an “airlock” in between the two doors that lead from the cell to the passage. There is no form of distraction, all you have are the blank walls to look at.

Showers and toilets for all of the other cells are shared between two adjoining cells, access controlled by the officer station.

All of the cells and bathrooms are monitored by 24-hour surveillance cameras, watched by officers of both sexes and of various ages and levels of experience.

The only access to water is a bubbler in the access-controlled bathroom on top of the toilet or if you request some from the officers.

Clean changes of clothes are not always available and are always covered in stains.

The safety wear is made from a hard and heavy canvas like material, that causes chafing and discomfort on your nipples and private parts. Often the correct sizes weren't available, causing even more irritation.

The cells have a bed, mattress, safety blanket and pillow and are kept at a low temperature. There are boxed in televisions in the rooms, channels and volume controlled by the officers. One wall is painted with chalk paint so ladies that are allowed access to chalk can draw on it. The lights are on 24/7.

The cells and passage area is filthy, the cleaning cupboard/room in the passage reeks. Mops used to clean faeces and urine are kept in this space and used to clean the general area.

The Safety Unit is cleaned when outside visitors are expected, mostly it is in disarray unless one of the inmates or officers clean it. I have personally observed officers having to clean soiled cells, toilets and bedding, something that is not their duty.

There is only access to one phone for the unit. This is a mobile unit that is placed outside the cell in a vent, hence no conversation is private. Should the call go unanswered, or the number is engaged, you can only attempt to make another call 15 minutes later because the system is set up not to allow consecutive calls. You can only make phone calls when the phone is free, and an officer is available to facilitate this.

There is a caged video monitored courtyard, which can be accessed upon request and only when there is staff available to facilitate this.

Each time an inmate leaves the unit, they have to undergo a ROC search upon return, even though they are escorted and supervised for the entire time.

Prisoners get extremely agitated because the passage is blocked off from the officers' station by a locked door. Intercom calls are often ignored, or inmates are told to wait for the officer to make his/her next round (usually every 15minutes). The staff shortage leads to great frustrations and discontent on both sides.

On lockdowns and weekly scheduled lockdowns, you are kept in your cell with no access to the phone and very little interaction with the staff.

Lockdowns occur frequently due to overcrowding and staff shortages.

An inmate, Nadia Peddel, whom I had known from the beginning of my sentence was in the unit for most of the time I painted there. I have referred to her mental state earlier in the document. Nadia would bang her head against her cell door on many occasions until blood ran freely. Codes were called on her frequently.

There was a very young prisoner, Amelia (?), who was the most unwell person I had ever seen. This includes my stay in The Park. This girl would scream and cry constantly, she was mostly naked because she would remove her clothes. She would spread faeces and urine all over her cell and herself. The more senior staff members found this very distressing, made several complaints to the psychologists and management. A junior male officer called Kai stood in front of her cell door, staring into her cell and made a remark to another officer "now the crazy cunt is just staring out of the window". This young woman was totally unaware of her surroundings and completely psychotic, yet it took the prison at least a month to move her (I assumed to a mental facility)

The younger officers (mostly male and one in particular) often made racial and extremely offensive slurs about the prisoners. On more than one occasion both myself and the other lady doing the painting had to remind them that we could hear everything and that their behaviour was unprofessional and disgusting.

I had to personally undergo two Urine tests, even though I had no history of substance abuse. Nothing could ever prepare any person for the humiliation and trauma this barbaric procedure causes. Firstly, you are escorted to the reception area where you are given water to drink. You have an allocated time in which to consume the water and advise the officers that you are ready to do the test. You are taken into the UT room, where you undergo a ROC search and given a smock. If you had your period, you were required to remove your tampon while undressing. The two officers watch you while you urinate into what we referred to as a paper hat. You are not permitted to wipe after urinating, so it would just run down your leg until the test was completed. If you were unable to produce urine, you were mostly punished by being moved back to the secure units, losing your job and hobbies. I had to be medicated and given extra time and water with the permission of Oscar 1 because I was hysterical and could not produce. This treatment caused many of us lasting trauma.

Boredom is one of the worst contributors to mental decline in prison. If you want to partake in hobbies such as card making, diamond dotting, crochet or knitting, you have to have good case notes, no incidents and a job for a period of time. This is also subject to the Accommodation

Manager's discretion. The prisons are overcrowded and doubled up, there are not enough jobs for everyone. Prisoners, especially ones with mental disabilities are at a disadvantage, they either can't get a job or are incapable of keeping it because of stressors. Many are illiterate; therefore, they can't occupy their time reading or studying. The courses offered by the prison system to increase your chances of a future career opportunity are impractical and the wait lists are long. Activities are also very limited and restricted; staff are not always available to facilitate. Prisoners have no purpose or motivation because there is nothing to look forward to or work towards. The majority of prisoners are mothers, used to preparing meals for our families, but even that was taken away by less cost effective and wasteful packaged meals.

On the **11th of March 2023**, Simona Zaffaroska was assaulted in residential and to protect herself from further harm, she threw herself down a set of stairs to hide her injuries. She was moved to Secure, where she was assaulted again. She was threatened with a weapon in the art room on **02 August 2023**, I took the weapon away. Simona lived in constant fear of retaliation and attempted to commit suicide by drinking cleaning liquids and secreted medication (she made a suicide pact with another young lady, possibly Diamond). Simona had to be resuscitated and intubated, both were taken to hospital. Simona later told me that whilst in the Safety Unit, in an attempt to get out of there, that she "naked in my own shit and piss, screaming at them to let me out". In the years that I have known Simona, I had made several attempts to get her support and treatment from the psychologists, I have watched her mental state decline.

About a month before my release Ms Emily Tracey attempted suicide.

As a prisoner you feel powerless and have to accept the treatment by some staff members and officers. On the **21st Of January 2021** Supervisor Judy Lipp announced on the PA system that "any ADA dog's life is worth more than any prisoner's because they cost \$40 000 to train". This is because people were throwing stones from peaches and nectarines on the ground.

I was personally told on many occasions that someone like me was not wanted "in my prison" by several members of the then Serco and QCS management.

I briefly worked as a Visits Cleaner at SQCC. There is a screening machine, supposed to pick up any suspicious items kept on a person. Out of curiosity I once asked an officer if I could see how it worked and why we had to undergo ROC searches after contact visits. She stated that the Government would not pay to have the machine upgraded, therefore it was ineffective.

We lived in constant fear of physical attacks as they were becoming more frequent and severe. On **27 July 2023** a woman's face was slashed open with a weapon and she received 74 stitches. The

incident occurred on the oval and the attacker climbed two fences to get to her. Officers were present but failed to intervene, they were given instructions not to interfere and endanger themselves.

On **29 April 2022** a woman walked through the art room to get to the hairdressing salon and stabbed another woman in the face. The wound was horrendous, I grabbed a cloth and held it over her face to stop the bleeding. A code was called by the outside hairdresser, the officer walked into the art room nonchalantly and radioed for medical assistance.

Incidents like these, constantly living in fear and seeing brutality has a lasting impact on a person's mental health. None of us, including the victims, were ever offered counselling. On top of our own trauma we were incarcerated with, we are left with the additional damage caused by witnessing or experiencing violent events.

There is very little medical care at the prisons, SQCC was without a GP for more than a year. Women are suffering from abscesses, tooth decay, golden staph infections, all kinds of medical conditions that should be treated because we are under the "care" of Queensland Correctional Services. Delayed diagnoses of cancer often became terminal. Health Care is a basic Human Right, but Human Rights are a novelty in prison. Most women are disadvantaged, downtrodden and used to being treated like animals and human waste, therefore they never speak up. The system is designed to break you. I will never forget sitting in a room with Ms Ester Schelvis at BWCC with Supervisor Rita, waiting for the PAC meeting to begin. This Supervisor, notorious for being mean, said "I will break all of you and then build you up".

NOUN

rehabilitation

(noun);

rehabilitations

(plural noun)

- *the action of restoring someone to health or normal life through training and therapy after imprisonment, addiction, or illness*

Rehabilitation is the process of re-educating and preparing those who have committed a crime, to re-enter society. The goal is to address all of the underlying root causes of crime in order to ensure inmates will be able to live a crime-free lifestyle once they are released from prison.^[1] It generally involves psychological approaches which target the cognitive distortions associated with specific kinds of crime committed by individual offenders, but it may also entail more general education like reading skills and career training. The goal is to re-integrate offenders back into society.

Seven years down the line, having been broken down, I am still waiting to be built back up. I still wonder what was done to “rehabilitate” me. I am lost in a new world. My offence in 2016 was the direct result of a mental breakdown after years of abuse. I took ownership of my offence, what did the prison system do to improve my mental health? I have more damage now than what I had before being incarcerated. I am weighed down with added mental struggles because of what I went through in the Queensland Correctional Centres. My physical health has declined. I am left with irreparable damage to my teeth caused by years of continuous grinding and neglect because of lacking dental services, leaving me with not only physical pain, but great feelings of shame. I have nearly doubled my weight because of comfort and binge eating. I never felt motivated to exercise in prison, prior to incarceration I trained in a gym every day. My eyesight has deteriorated. These are physical ailments, but they had a huge impact on my mental health and possibly my life expectancy. I used to be an avid reader, easily devouring a book every second day. I have not been able to read a book in nearly four years. I was never permitted to study, so I gained no recognised qualifications. There are no computer literacy courses in prison, anyone incarcerated for a prolonged period is left overwhelmed like I am sitting in front of a computer, constantly battling feelings of being stupid. I did not know how to use an ATM, mobile phone or check-out register at the grocery store. My independence no longer exists, my driver's license has expired, I can't drive anymore. I have not cooked in years. I have not had to shop for my own clothing and underwear in close to a decade, getting ready for an appointment often leaves me in tears. Learning how to use a washing machine and television is daunting, every electronic device with buttons and options have become my enemy. I still stick to prison habits and regimes. Having a normal conversation with people in passing leaves me paralysed with fear and distrust. These are all functions I took for granted before being locked up in institutions for my rehabilitation. I often consider suicide. I don't have a single moment that I don't want to self-harm, the only thing stopping me is the fear of being discovered and being hauled off into an institution. I still don't trust psychiatrist or psychologist; I am still stuck in the habit of telling them what they want to hear because I am petrified what would happen if I were to tell them how I feel about myself and my newfound “freedom”. My feelings are not unique, I am told on a daily basis that this is “normal and to be expected after such a long period of incarceration”, “don't be so hard on yourself”, “give yourself a break”, “readjusting will take time”..... I received an eight-year sentence, I served more than seven. I could not be more remorseful about my offence; the feelings of guilt will never pass. Eight years seems to have changed into a life sentence because I don't have a life anymore.

I know of many of my fellow prisoners that died within the first month of their release. I still call myself a prisoner, because that is what I still am. Nobody can repair or make up for the irreparable

damage 1000's of children, women and men suffer every day inflicted upon them in the name of "rehabilitation" The system robs you of your mind and soul. I have seen women stuck in the revolving door until one day you hear that that person is no longer alive. I learnt the hard way that not all people that go to jail are bad. I suffer from a mental condition. I am a convict. I will never be embarrassed to say it. The ones that should be embarrassed and incarcerated are the people sitting in offices, making decisions and playing with people's health. This is nothing but systematic genocide.

Just like all people, not all officers and QCS staff members are the same. Some genuinely want to improve conditions, and in their own way they do. Treating prisoners with respect and dignity, not being judgemental, having empathy and insight can and does make a big difference. Many have family members that are or have been incarcerated, have mental illnesses or disabilities or suffer from substance abuse. Many are themselves victims or survivors of abuse. During my first week in S4 at BWCC a supervisor came into the cell in an attempt to reassure me that I would be ok. His words were "It is not my job to punish you, the courts have already done that. My job is to keep you safe while you are here". Many officers are vocal and do not agree with the procedures and treatment, but they are quickly shut down. Unfortunately, not all employees realise what their job entails. Misuse of power over prisoners that have no power and are without rights is common. Constantly using the Safety and Detention Units as a threat or moving (tipping) someone away from their support network breaks your spirit, yet it happens daily. It was common knowledge that the male kitchen Trade Instructors, Paul and Mark (TI's) in both BWCC and SQCC used their power and position in an attempt to coax prisoners into performing sexual acts. At SQCC there is a female kitchen TI, Carol (who later became an officer) who was well known for her racism and tyranny. Accommodation Managers such as Di Scates and Juanita Zuna (now deceased) are the worst of the worst. They play god with who gets placed where and often in a deliberate attempt to cause disruption and sometimes racial incidents, people with mental illness or disabilities are placed within units that are not suitable. Women like Wendy R, Glendina, Katrina, Chloe ? Mason, Cubby, Dollar, Milkie, Nadia P, the two Tammy's, Jacinta S etc were the "hot potato's" of the prison population and were used like weapons.

Currently there is a lady in SQCC , Ms J Palmer, that has been incarcerated for the past 20 years. She has served her sentence. She became eligible for parole more than a year ago, but the current Queensland Government changed legislation and now she has to fight to be released and adhere to new conditions imposed on her.

Witnessed abuse of other prisoners

Tahlia Boyce - during my time in S4, S5 and S10 I saw

the Riot Squad (Turtles) physically take her down

She broke a television case and fluorescent light fitting in her cell and cut herself

She banged her head against the glass window of her cell door until blood was freely flowing, without intervention by staff

She ripped her veins from her hand out with her bare teeth

She inflicted cuts on her arms and legs

Substance abuse history

Traumatic childhood

Some of the officers taunted her, there were very few that knew how to approach her

Tiffany Jagger – aged 17

She broke her shoulder slamming herself against a door

She repeatedly inflicted horrendous cuts on herself

Substance abuse history

Traumatic childhood

A fellow prisoner attempted to stab her in S10 and I managed to take the knife off the lady that attacked her

Alicia Herbert – aged just under 18

Traumatic childhood

Self-harm

Substance abuse history

Rebecca Ison

Traumatic childhood

Horrendous self-harm

Intellectual capacity of a child

There were women that had been to The Park with me during my stay there and prison was not a place for them. They were all extremely unwell, would self-harm, be bullied or mocked by other prisoners and often be taken advantage of. Nothing was ever done to remedy the situation or prevent this treatment.

Nadia Peddel

Natasha Milkie

Michelle M (?)

Rebecca (brother in The Park too)

Kristy ?

A lady was incarcerated for serious assault on a police officer. She was about 1.50m tall and slight. She was charged for biting the police officer, yet she had no teeth, not even dentures.

Ms Boyce was often restrained, handcuffed with her hands behind her back and I saw her in a spit mask.

Tammy Duffy was another prisoner with severe physical and mental disabilities. She was often victimised and taunted and frequently wore a spit mask.

Two ladies with mental illnesses and disabilities were released back into the community during my last year of incarceration. Their names were Sarah Pike and Courtney w - I came to know well and considered them my friends. I will never see them again. Courtney was a young woman with her whole life ahead of her. Sarah left behind a new baby. Suicide claimed them both, but they are only two of the countless women, men and children that lost their lives after being "rehabilitated".

Monroe, N. (2019). August 2019-FINAL REPORT-Inquiry into Imprisonment and Recidivism.

Productivity Commission. (2021). Australia's prison dilemma.