

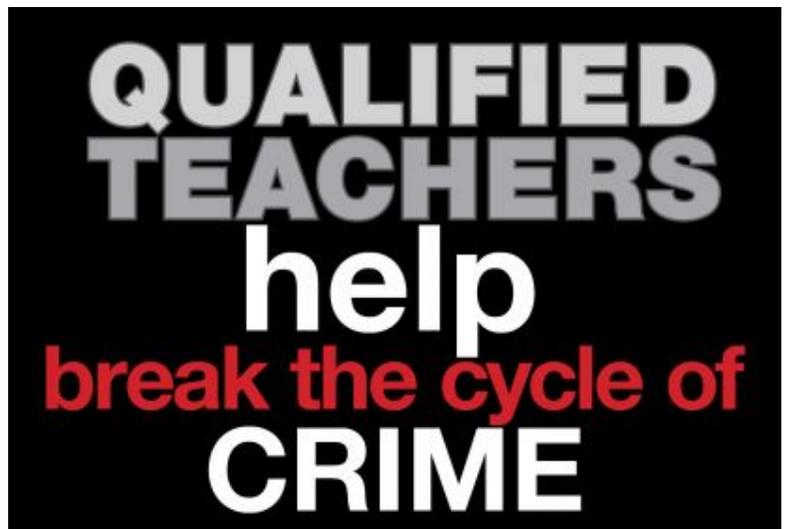
## Helping inmates learn how to learn

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“When the inmate crosses the threshold into education, all the labels that have been attributed to them are shrugged off for a few hours and they can begin to grow,” said Amanda Josling, teacher at the Intensive Learning Centre at Lithgow Correctional Centre.

“They become a student. They are treated like an adult, sometimes for the first time in their lives. They learn autonomy and self-reliance. They learn teamwork and companionship. They learn to set goals, small goals, and they learn that they can achieve them. They learn that the little goals become the stepping stones to reach their big goals.

“They learn consistency and stability, and they learn how to learn. And they learn that following the rules can help you achieve your goals, whether it is following the rules of BODMAS [order of mathematical operations] or grammar rules, they see their own success. And they learn that some things just never make sense, like trying to follow the ‘i before e, except after c’ rule,” said Amanda, who has been working in Corrective Services as a teacher for almost eight years.



Previously she taught literacy, numeracy and digital literacy to at-risk youth through a non-profit organisation that focused on pre-employment literacy skills.

Although Amanda has worked as a project officer and auditing officer within Corrective Services Industries Education head office, as a Correctional Education Officer and Senior Correctional Education Officer, she said the role of teacher is her “very favourite thing to do”. “Watching the development of a student’s self-efficacy is almost palpable,” she said.

“‘Where is the spacebar, miss?’ or ‘Why is there a red line under my name, Amanda?’ and sometimes, ‘Where is the work that I did yesterday? No, I didn’t save it, why didn’t you save it for me?’ On those days I am exhausted from dashing between students to solve their issues.

“I know they are developing confidence and self-reliance when they don’t need to call my name as much. Even when working on more complex programs, they generally call me over to show me their PowerPoint animations when they have researched and extrapolated information about a topic that ignites their passion, from Mt Panorama to the Mighty Rabbits to Fibonacci Theory, or reconnecting with country, tradition and family.”

Amanda said she most enjoys a cold cup of tea. “If I have been too busy to reach for my tea, it’s been a great day.”

Jo Gibson, a teacher at Wellington Correctional Centre, said she was looking for a change when she decided to

leave her job as a secondary teacher in a public school and work in Corrective Services.

“It seemed like a good idea at the time and I had nothing to lose,” she said, laughing. “My tenure teaching came across with me, I still have the same benefits, I don’t have to take work home with me and I have more family time.

“The job does not have as much pressure for results like secondary teaching so I am able to cater to each student’s individual needs at a pace they are comfortable with, whether that be numeracy or literacy or even life skills.”

And on the question of fearing for her safety: “It is a safer environment than people realise. I think because it’s a gaol, everyone presumes it’s dangerous. I’ve never felt threatened, scared or intimidated.”

Noeleen Lumby works as an Indigenous Identified Teacher on beautiful Dhungutti Country, in the Intensive Learning Centre (ILC) at Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, Kempsey.

“We have many Indigenous students who come to the ILC to learn. It has been fulfilling as an Indigenous woman and language teacher to provide these young men with opportunities to engage with their language and develop resources to take home to share with their families,” said Noeleen, who has worked within Corrective Services for almost three years.

Her reasons for working with Corrective Services stretch back decades. “One of the schools I supported as a consultant in south-west Sydney was Dorchester School in Reiby Juvenile Justice Centre at Airds. It was an experience that changed my life. A few years later I went on to work as a language and cultural teacher for a short period at Dorchester. This experience further highlighted to me the disparity between the numbers of Indigenous youth in our justice system compared to non-Indigenous youth incarcerated. Many of the students in the Intensive Learning Centre at Mid North Coast have been through the Juvenile Justice School system and have not had successes in any school environment.

“I enjoy supporting students with their learning and feel very privileged to be able to support, in some instances, adult learners to become literate.”

“We as teachers also look at new research and ways to support learners with complex needs and medical conditions as well as learning difficulties. Often we are required to think on our feet and make decisions based on reading the room and the students’ needs.”

After four years as the Correctional Education Officer at the Intensive Learning Centre (ILC) in the maximum/medium male sector at Mid-North Coast Correctional Centre, Nala Hayes has recently switched into a teacher role.

“Some stand-out moments include assisting students to get back in touch with their families through learning to write letters and make cards, students learning to read story books so they can read to their children over the phone or upon release, and students telling us that the ILC has changed their lives,” she said.

“The rewarding aspects of the job are definitely what keeps me here, but there are other benefits of the job including permanency and job security.”

Before working for Corrective Services, Nala worked as a primary teacher in the Catholic system. “I had (and still have) multiple family members working for Corrective Services NSW and I had heard about their positive experiences over a number of years. I was also looking for my ‘fit’ in terms of career and job satisfaction,” said Nala, explaining why she switched sectors.

“My biggest fears going in were making the change from primary to adult education and relating to the cohort. Both fears turned out to be unfounded and while at times the role is challenging, the rewards are enormous.

“My fears now are not for me, but for my students. As their teacher, I want these men to have the best possible chance of rehabilitation and reintegration into society and community.”

Nala said some of the most important qualities for working for Corrective Services include resilience, empathy, respect and professionalism. “A sense of humour helps too.”