




Speech by
Desley Scott

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

Hansard Thursday, 7 June 2012

SISTERS INSIDE

 **Mrs SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (6.01 pm): The contrast of largesse shown by this government in its plan for a new 'Taj Mahal' for the Premier and his ministers on the one hand and the disdain and complete lack of empathy and human kindness shown to the most marginalised, disadvantaged group in our state on the other is staggering. I refer to the Aboriginal women incarcerated in the Townsville Correctional Centre. I have toured many Aboriginal settlements in my time as a member. I have seen the look of sadness and despair in the eyes of some of the women, some with severe disfigurement who have suffered domestic violence often due to alcohol abuse by their partner. They are mothers and grandmothers who want the best for their children, but due to a lack of opportunity or education or due to their place of birth sometimes women have the cards stacked against them.

It is in the Townsville Correctional Centre that you will encounter a high number of Aboriginal women who may have been imprisoned for prostitution, petty crime or violence defending themselves against the abuse of a partner. Whatever their crime, they are not worthless and they are certainly not beyond rehabilitation. Sisters Inside has a very long history of giving practical support, loving care and understanding to women prisoners and it offers them education, counselling and support, particularly following their release. They ensure these women have every opportunity to turn their life around.

Twelve months ago, in response to a tragic suicide, Sisters Inside was granted \$120,000 to provide specialised services to these women. The statistics show that 80 per cent of the women in this prison are Aboriginal and 90 per cent of those women cannot read or write. This means they suffer isolation and they are often victims of sexual and physical violence which sometimes commences in their early teens. Some drown their despair in alcohol and end up in prison. Debbie Kilroy, CEO of Sisters Inside, has walked in their shoes.

By the first quarter of this year, 188 women had been assisted. I believe that many in this House would have seen the report by Jessica van Vonderen on *7.30 QLD* where a former prisoner, Renee, was interviewed. Imprisoned for a third time on drug and prostitution charges, her life has now been turned around thanks to Sisters Inside. In my estimation there is little to surpass the story of a life rescued and a family reunited. Renee is not alone.

If the Premier is truly looking for savings in his budget bottom line, he should look at the savings in reducing the incidence of recidivism, the reduction in police and court time and, for his personal satisfaction, to know he has reduced the trauma caused to the children and, finally, the sheer joy of seeing one more family rehabilitated and living back in the community. Accept the challenge, Premier, and fund this vital service.