

Rimutaka Prison, New Zealand, November, 2011

With thanks to the New Zealand Department of Corrections, I was privileged to be given a tour of Rimutaka Prison, the country's largest male facility. Their system utilizes philosophies and techniques that could benefit facilities worldwide.



In addition to my own summary of what I experienced, I have added more information found through research, and added those links for you.

Prior to leaving for New Zealand I asked the corrections professionals on my Linked In what questions they may want answered. The response was large and I appreciate the input. At the end of this article you'll find my responses.

In this Insight piece I'll share with you 3 key findings:

1. A common sense approach to reentry that saves money.
2. A classification system that compares to the United States Bureau of Prisons.
3. Being green and conserving national resources are a way of life.

Here is a brief picture of the correctional settings in New Zealand (NZ):

- Total population of the country of NZ is approx. 4.3 million, in a land mass the size of the state of Colorado.
- Most of the 4+ million New Zealanders are of British origin, but about 15% are descendent of the indigenous Maori population. Many of the country's customs and way of life are derived from the Maori culture.
- There are approximately 8,500 inmates confined in a total of 19 facilities (16 are for males), in NZ they are often referred to as prisoners. Rimutaka Prison has around 540 staff.
- And, there are an additional 40,000 offenders living under some form of supervised release.



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- The country has one registration number system and that number stays with prisoners, while in prison or in society, allowing NZ the ability to accurately monitor recidivism.
- NZ has a parole commission that works closely with the courts and facilities to ensure compliance with policy and laws established by the government.



About Rimutaka, New Zealand's largest prison facility: Rimutaka prison is a 30-minute train ride north of Wellington, NZ's capital. The current population of the Rimutaka Prison fluctuates between 900 and 1100 prisoners, with a staffing complement of over 500 employees. Here is a link to a YouTube video that was produced by a

local TV station: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6au3ym9SSOU.

Through the influence of the Maori culture, Maori Units have been established to allow staff and prisoners working together to learn and apply "the principles of tikanga" (correct procedure) incorporating Maori thoughts, beliefs and actions.

The Rimutaka prison houses all levels of prisoners from High to Minimum. The different levels are separated all the time. Prisoners about to be placed in society have the option to live outside the fences and that process will be discussed later.

Reducing re-offending is the overriding objective of the Department. This explanation was taken directly (though American spelling has been used for clarity) from the www.corrections.govt.nz website:

"Every prisoner entering Rimutaka Prison develops an offender plan with their case manager, which they are expected to comply with. The focus of the offender plan is on reducing re-offending on release and is developed following an assessment of a prisoner's risk, needs and motivation.

This ensures they are placed on the most appropriate and timely programs and interventions to address the underlying causes of their offending."

Rehabilitation programs and interventions provided at Rimutaka Prison fall into four main categories:

1. motivational
2. cognitive-behavioral
3. employment and education
4. re-integrative

Motivational programs are designed to increase motivation and to encourage and prepare prisoners to confront the causes of their offending.

There are **two primary motivational programs** used at Rimutaka Prison: the Tikanga Maori Program and the Short Motivational Program.

The Tikanga Maori Program uses Maori philosophy, values, knowledge and practice to help prisoners increase their understanding of their Maori identity and their values, and improve their self-esteem so they become motivated to address the causes of their offending.

The Short Motivational Program aims to increase motivation by increasing a prisoner's problem awareness and recognition, reduce ambivalence, address cognitive distortions, and help them consider options and formulate goals.

Cognitive-behavioral programs aim to reduce re-offending by helping prisoners address the causes of their offending and teach them to identify, analyze and solve problems and make decisions to better their lives. Prisoners also learn how to understand the consequences of their actions and gain control over their own behavior.

Rimutaka Prison provides two general cognitive-behavioral programs to prisoners.

The **Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Program** is designed for prisoners in the middle risk range – that is those not high risk but still enough of a risk to warrant rehabilitation. The Program increases problem awareness and recognition, reduces ambivalence, addresses cognitive distortions, and teaches prisoners to consider options and formulate goals.

The **Short Rehabilitation Program** is a brief rehabilitation Program aimed at a smaller number of prisoners who require rehabilitation but do not have enough time in their sentence to complete a longer one. The Program is similar to the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Program, but is shorter and more intense.

Both the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Program and Short Rehabilitation Program target a range of prisoners and are designed to cover the common elements of all offending.

Specialist units

Rimutaka Prison has a number of specialist units which provide long and intensive rehabilitation programs aimed at specific causes of offending.

The prison's Te Whare Manaakitanga (formerly called the Violence Prevention Unit) provides specialist treatment to high-risk male prisoners with violent convictions.

Prisoners in the unit learn the skills necessary to live without violence, including self-management and control of violent impulses, conflict resolution, timeouts and challenging violent thinking. The prisoners also actively learn to change their attitudes towards women and learn to control impulsive behaviors.

Rimutaka's Drug Treatment Unit provides a specialist 24-week residential drug and alcohol Program. The Program includes one-to-one and group cognitive behavioral therapy, education on addiction and change, along with education about building new skills – especially social skills.

Rimutaka also has one of **New Zealand's five Maori Focus Units**. The unit, Te Whare Whakaahura, establishes a culturally appropriate environment in which prisoners can address issues relating to their offending. The Maori Focus Unit is constituted on tikanga Maori principles and operates within a tikanga Maori environment. Through the practice of Maori values and disciplines, and specialist Maori programs, the Unit aims to bring about positive changes in thinking and behavior. Te Whare Whakaahura also offers the Maori Therapeutic Program, similar to the Medium Intensity Rehabilitation Program, but drawing on Maori philosophy, values, knowledge and practice in its delivery.

Rimutaka Prison has New Zealand's only **Faith Based Unit** – He Korowai Whakapono. The unit provides a therapeutic community environment, characterized by prayer-centered daily routine and worship. Prison Fellowship New Zealand provides programs in the unit that require prisoners to come to terms with the consequences of their crime on victims, their family and the community.

Prisoner employment - managed by Corrections Inmate Employment (CIE), plays an integral part in the rehabilitation of prisoners as it provides prisoners with essential work skills and habits. The last prison census in 2003 found that over half of all prisoners were not in paid employment prior to sentencing.

Prisoner employment increases the chance a prisoner will find sustainable work on release and research shows this will result in fewer prisoners being reconvicted.

Rimutaka Prison offers three main types of employment:

- internal activities, such as food preparation
- business-like industries, including a nursery, joinery and workshop
- commercial work parties.

Prisoners are able to earn credits under the National Qualification Framework, allowing them to work towards qualifications whilst they are engaged in employment and training.

Minimum security prisoners who are nearing release may also be eligible to participate in **Release to Work**, a form of temporary release that allows prisoners to be in paid work in the community during the day. It provides prisoners with a stable work record and the job is often carried on after a prisoner's released from prison.

Education - There is a strong relationship between a lack of education and criminal behavior.

At the time of the last prison census in 2003, 51.7 per cent of all prisoners had no formal qualifications.

Educational achievement and participation can equip prisoners for self-sufficiency and reduce the barriers to living an offence-free life. A prisoner can enroll in any subject or education Program they consider themselves capable of achieving.

There are four main types of education offered to prisoners at Rimutaka Prison:

- Foundation Skills – allows prisoners to develop their reading, writing, speaking, listening, critical thinking, math and problem solving skills
- National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA) – run in conjunction with the Correspondence School
- Industry Training Qualifications – earned on-the-job with Corrections Inmate Employment
- Self-Directed Tertiary Study – distance learning initiated by prisoners and supported by the Department.

In addition, some computer and hobby classes are also available.

Reintegration programs aim to reduce re-offending by addressing problems likely to increase a prisoners' risk of re-offending on release.

Being imprisoned can have significant social consequences for a prisoner. They are likely to have lost their job and accommodation, they are unlikely to be able to support their families and their relationships can be adversely affected in other ways. Combined, this can lead offenders into a cycle of institutionalization.

Rimutaka Prison provides **two reintegration programs**:

- Living Skills – a broad-based Program to give prisoners skills and knowledge on how to function effectively in society on their release
- Parenting Skills – a group Program designed to teach parenting and relationship skills.

Case managers also work with high-need prisoners at Rimutaka Prison to address their specific re-integrative needs and help them prepare for release in the community.



New uniforms were introduced last year, seen above

Rimutaka Prison operates a **specialist Reintegration Unit** for male prisoners serving the final 12 months of their sentence and who would benefit from specialist support before they return to the community. Prisoners held in these units are assisted to find accommodation and employment, as well as with practical life skills such as managing debt.

Rimutaka Prison also has **Self-Care Units** where longer-serving prisoners may be eligible to spend time as they near release. These are residential-style units inside the prison that let prisoners get used to living in a flatting type environment and give prisoners an opportunity to learn and practice the skills they will need to live independently after release. The Living Skills Program is also delivered in the Self-Care Units and many prisoners participate on the Release to Work Program.

Prisoners who find sustainable employment on release are less likely to re-offend.

Permanently based at Rimutaka Prison, Work and Income work brokers and case managers help prisoners nearing release to find suitable work before they are released.

Working with the community

The community has an important role to play in the rehabilitation and transition of prisoners back into the community by supporting and encouraging prisoners to live an offense-free life.

Many sectors of the community are involved in rehabilitating offenders and helping them move back into the community.

Rimutaka Prison has a close relationship with the Pasifika and Maori communities and works closely with local iwi.

The prison also works with a number of support agencies, including the Prisoner's Aid and Rehabilitation Trust (PART), Prison Fellowship and the Salvation Army, to support the successful reintegration of prisoners back into the community.

A large number of people also regularly donate their time, energy and expertise as volunteers with Rimutaka Prison. Volunteers provide invaluable support for prisoners and their families and give prisoners the opportunity to spend their free time constructively through music, art or sport.

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Q & A - Questions from Linked In professional counterparts

What is the governing body for the Department of Corrections?

The New Zealand Department of Corrections is under the Guidance of the Minister of Corrections who answers to the Prime Minister. The Minister of Corrections gives guidance to a Chief Executive Officer who oversees the operations of the prison system.

Is there an Accredited Agency that is policy driven?

No, they are a self governing discipline, but follow guidelines established by the United Nations and have adopted many policies from other countries, such as Canada.

Initial Classification, is it conducted as a team at their facilities with several staff present.

Initial Classification is started at conviction, before sentencing. Clinical and law enforcement staff conduct interviews before prisoners arrive at the facility. Each facility has a tracking system in place to follow the information being provided. Once the prisoner is received, more classification is conducted until the prisoner is placed in an Orientation Unit. Gang members are monitored and prisoners are given points (similar to the Bureau of Prisons) for affiliation. Their scoring system is very much like the Federal Bureau of Prisons, because the end result is to predict behavior.

Is mental health handled in-house?

Yes, prisoners who have demonstrated the inability to maintain focus and able to operate "normally" are evaluated. If it is determined the prisoner cannot function in an open environment, they are placed in a separate unit within the facility.

Environment Concerns, what measures are their facilities taking to protect the environment and being green?

I was amazed, it's really not the institution that thinks green; it's the community. Seventy percent of Wellington (the nearby city and capital of New Zealand) electricity is generated by hydroelectric power. Ten percent of their power is generated by the 62 wind turbines that are located around their mountain tops and five percent is generated with solar power.



Meaning they are only 15% dependent on fossil fuels.

As for the institution, they only buy products boxed in recycled materials and have local bins for trash items, but it's not necessarily a system, but a way of life. Walking around the town of Wellington at convenience stores you would see electrical posts to recharge your car and much of the transportation system operates on diesel or electricity and that includes the train I took to get to the facility (*photo above*).



What are their medical issues?

New Zealand has a national health care system and also the ability to purchase your own care. Prisoners needing immediate care are moved to a location to accommodate them. There are no pill lines, but medication is **delivered to them**.

How do they monitor gangs and manage them?

This is and will always be a point of concern. As mentioned before, Gang members are scored appropriately and they are housed separately within the facility. Prisoner codes are the same there as in our country about separation.

Recreation and education programs, are they promoted within the facility?

Education programs are emphasized from the start of confinement. The tracking system used to monitor prisoner movement and classification is also used to track their educational gains. It's a one system fits all and all staff are affluent in the use of the program. Recreation programs are promoted, but not necessarily for self improvement but are a policy requirement.

What are the measures they use to assure reentry programs will work?

Their approach to reentry is incredible. From the start, unit behavioral placements are programmed. Drug classes are made available at every level on incarceration. As mentioned, the Maori Unit teachings along with faith based and

self-help units are also utilized. These programs are all volunteer, but strongly promoted.

When a prisoner's security level drops with less than two years to serve, he or she can request placement in a facility outside the fence and they truly get indoctrination into society. **They are given jobs, either around the facility, and/or community and must pay rent, pay for their food, clothing and any other items needed. There is a job placement committee that ensures prisoners are compliant with the rules and regulations. This action as you might assume is a major saving of tax dollars.**

Prison Industries, do they have them and if so what types do they provide?

Prison industries are not the type we are accustomed to. Their industry is focused on reentry. A department named Corrections Inmate Employment or (CIE) locates jobs throughout the community including farming, horticulture, forestry, building, timber processing, light engineering, electrical assembly, textiles, catering and laundry, depending on where the prisoner is going to be released geographically. Prisoners can earn from 20 to 60 cents an hour and develop a trade. Other money earned from these projects for employment goes back to the institution to cover other charges incurred in the process.

If a person wants to experience working in the New Zealand System, what are the steps to be taken?

Contact the New Zealand Department of Corrections at www.corrections.govt.nz

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Sincere thanks to the New Zealand Department of Corrections for this insight into their prison system. Your time, professionalism, effort and hospitality are much appreciated.

Disclaimer: Although we have made every reasonable effort to be factually accurate, we are not responsible for errors contained in this report. All information is subject to change and the views, opinions and conclusions expressed are those of the author alone.

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