

# Aboriginal elders program seeks to break cycle of violence for NT prisoners

PM / By [Stephanie Zillman](#)

Posted 18 Sep 2017



There are hopes the elders program will reduce recidivism rates. *(ABC News: Emilia Terzon)*

Aboriginal elders in the Northern Territory who regularly visit prisoners believe many are not ready to reintegrate into community life upon their release.

Many Aboriginal inmates are in prison for domestic violence offences, and the elders said it continued the cycle of violence to send them straight home when

they were paroled.

Peter Lindsay who is an elder from Beswick, 340 kilometres southeast of Darwin, said he would like to see reintegration formally factored into parole conditions.

"When they come out of jail they sit down with elders, as well as people from health organisations, [to address] drugs, alcohol and domestic violence," he said.

"We need to get them better prepared to go back to their family members.

"That way, when they come out of jail they won't just wind up straight back there because of trouble."

## **Elders program much more than chit chat**

Initially, Mr Lindsay thought he would be visiting men and boys from his own community.

He soon discovered the program had greater potential if they talked to whoever was in need.

"See, I was new – I thought I was going to see my mob," he said.

"But I realised that as soon as the elders go in there, others from all over want to speak with us.

"We don't know them, but we do our best and hear them out and want to hear all the issues."

Mr Lindsay said he believed the program had the potential to reduce recidivism rates.

"If I could stop four to five of them from repeating offences then I'm doing my job," he said.

## **'We know they're in there for a long time'**

Mr Lindsay said the relationships the elders formed with prisoners should be

supported to continue once the prisoners are paroled, even if they are from different communities.



The isolation of prison means inmates can lose their connections to home. (*ABC News: Emilia Terzon*)

Elder Johnny Shellford, from Robertson River in the Northern Territory's Gulf country, said when he first got involved in the program he was overwhelmed by how much the visits meant to the inmates.

He said he often took messages home after he had visited community members.

"It is hard for them because they know and we know they're in there for a long time, and it's not [financially] always possible for family to visit," Mr Shellford explained.

He said the isolation of prison meant inmates often lost their connection to their homes, and he would like to see more elders join the program to visit inmates.

Posted 18 Sep 2017

Share