



LOCKED IN: AFL confirms Perth grand final start time



Mining

Construction

WA News

Indigenous Australians

Economy

Aboriginal prisoners helping answer WA's skills shortage

Danielle Le Messurier

The West Australian

Fri, 14 May 2021 6:11PM

+



 (From left) Westrac sales GM Cameron Callaway, Carey trainer George Miles and Prison Officer Jim Potter with graduates of the Carey Bindjareb program. Credit: Iain Gillespie/The West Australian



The call for desperately needed skills in booming industries such as mining and civil construction is being answered from the most unlikely of places.

Twelve Aboriginal prisoners are seeking to join the industry, having completed a 14-week training course that equips soon-to-be-released Indigenous men from minimum security jails around WA with the skills they need to enter the workforce.

The Carey Bindjareb program is run by Indigenous contractor Carey Mining and the

The 400ha Serpentine facility is a working farm that also provides opportunities for prisoners to learn skills producing food, including milk, meat and eggs for the State's prisons. They can also undertake vocational training courses at the various prison industries.

The program was taken up by Carey Mining in 2019 after being founded in 2010 by Aboriginal elder John Alexander. Mr Alexander, right, was previously national Indigenous development manager for Bis Industries and chairman of the board of directors for youth charity Fairbridge.



 Aboriginal elder John Alexander, who came up with the idea for the Bindjareb program.

There have been 191 graduates in total, including 57 under the stewardship of Carey. About two-thirds of graduates who have since been released from prison have gained industry employment.

A 2016 Deloitte Access Economics cost benefit analysis of the Bindjareb program found that for every dollar spent, about \$2.49 worth of economic benefits were generated. The greatest benefit came from increased productivity.

Deloitte said providing skills to maintain employment post-incarceration better enabled men to avoid imprisonment and take part in the workforce.

Mr Alexander said the initiative had more than halved rates of recidivism, which are higher in Indigenous ex-offenders than non-Aboriginal ex-offenders.

“Before the program, 75 per cent of the Aboriginal people were coming back into prison. When they go through this program, it’s reduced by over 50 per cent,” the Noongar Goreng elder said. “Our Prime Minister is talking in the Closing of the Gap discussion of reducing (recidivism) by 30 per cent – well no, we’re not going backwards.”

Mr Alexander, also a cultural trainer and custodian of the program, said Indigenous participants were not “evil people” but simply “guys who have made a mistake”.

“The key point for these men to understand and for non-Aboriginal people to hear is that to succeed in mainstream, you do not have to surrender your culture,” he said.

WA has the highest imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the country at 4.1 per cent, compared with the national rate of 2.6 per cent.

A prisoner who graduated from Carey Bindjareb this week, who could not be identified due to privacy reasons, plans to secure a fly-in, fly-out position pending parole early next year.

“I’m also doing my diploma in work health safety, so I’m using this as a stepping stone to get into the industry,” he said.

Another graduate said he had been able to reconnect with culture while furthering his plans to be a FIFO machine operator.

“Doing cultural things (in the course) has got my self-belief back into my culture,” he said.

 Prisoners work a hydroponic vegetable garden at Karnet Prison Farm. Credit: Iain Gillespie/The West Australian

Ex-prisoner Mr Parker, the first Carey Bindjareb graduate to work full-time at WesTrac, hoped to see others follow.

“Where I come from to now, my life has taken a whole turn. It’s just surreal,” the machinery worker said.

Carey Bindjareb participants are supported to gain industry-specific skills including a Certificate II in Civil Construction, tickets on forklifts and a working-at-heights qualification.

The course has a big emphasis on culture and building confidence. Trainers and mentors provide the men with tools to assist with everything from interview techniques to dealing with racism.

With Australia’s borders closed for the foreseeable future and an estimated \$108 billion worth of infrastructure projects in WA’s pipeline, many of which are resources-related, custodians of the Carey Bindjareb program hope to see a return to the days of the mining boom when “virtually 100 per cent of graduates” were placed in employment.

“A lot of organisations out there, from corporates to smaller businesses, are interested in these guys,” Carey trainer and mentor George Miles said. “They know the calibre of the

Carey training manager WA Lisa O'Neill said she was getting requests for more traineeships from clients across the civil and mining industries.

"I'm very aware they are struggling to get the right people into the job roles due to lack of skills," she said.

Mining services companies WesTrac, Bis Industries, Monadelphous, Alcoa and Makita have thrown their support behind the initiative by providing machinery and equipment for training.

In some cases, they have also hired graduates. WesTrac has taken on two ex-prisoners from the program.

Along with providing heavy-duty machinery for the course, WesTrac hosts a site visit at its head office in Guildford, where trainees can operate Caterpillar machinery in its dig-pit.

"The skill sets they develop enable them to fill positions in a variety of roles from machine operation to warehousing and trades assistant positions, and helps start generational change," WesTrac general manager construction industries Cameron Callaway said.

📷 Over 30,000 litres of milk are packaged a week at Karnet. Credit: Iain Gillespie/The West Australian

Karnet superintendent Ray Edge said the next step involved taking the successful Bindjareb model and making it accessible to other industries and non-Aboriginal prisoners.

“We’re looking for sponsors in that space,” he said. “We’re looking at catering as an option – just because you’re a man, it doesn’t mean you want to work in a mine.”

Mr Edge said businesses such as Alcoa had been supportive. Karnet has an agreement with the company and its contractor Piacentini and Son to facilitate apprenticeships at the nearby Huntly Bauxite Mine.

“That’s led to a very high success rate in employment post release as well,” he said. “They travel there as prisoners but when they’re released they become employees, essentially.”

Get the latest news from thewest.com.au in your inbox.

[SIGN UP FOR OUR EMAILS](#)





LISTEN NOW

Know more about the news with The West Live. It's WA's favourite daily news podcast.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

FROM AROUND THE SITE

- ▶ [Man critical after brutal backpacker stabbing](#)
- ▶ [More fish kills degrade local marina](#)
- ▶ [Worrying rise in the number of drownings in WA](#) +
- ▶ [Multiple vehicles set alight in suspected arson attack](#)
- ▶ [\\$290m Mt Holland concentrator win for NRW](#) +
- ▶ [Logging of native forests to be banned in WA](#)

‘Incompetency’: Gladys’s plan smashed

Business

Bad news for ScoMo in latest poll

Business

Western Australia: Solar Panels Are Almost Free, Thanks To The Government!

Live Smart Save Money

SPONSORED

Signs Of Liver Damage That Shouldn't Be Ignored (Must Watch)

Liver Health

SPONSORED

Bowels: A Simple Trick To Empty Them Completely

Gut Solution

Fears Qld on verge of 'large outbreak'

News

Israel eyes third jab, cases rattle China

News

Find the Perfect Gift

Bvlgari

SPONSORED

Worried your child has fallen behind? Try this new 1-1 tutoring service

Cluey Learning

SPONSORED

WA Homeowners Can Now Switch To Solar For Almost No-Cost

Take Our 30-Second Quiz To See If You Qualify

Elite Smart Energy Solutions



Exciting arts experiences for the school holidays!

The AWESOME Arts Festival showcases an array of events for bright young things!

AWESOME Arts

SPONSORED



Theatre, ballet, art and FREE activities!

Bring your bright young things to explore the AWESOME Arts Festival these school holidays!

AWESOME Arts
SPONSORED

OUR NETWORK

West Rewards
West Regional Network
West Announcements
West Classifieds
WestBusiness Events
West Travel Club
The Game
Media Education
PerthNow
7plus
7NEWS

OUR PARTNERS

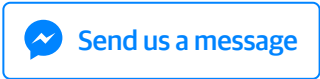
Airtasker
HealthEngine
SocietyOne
iSeekplant
Home Beautiful

That's Life
Beauty Crew

SUBSCRIBE TO

The West Australian Newspaper
The West Email Newsletters

CONNECT WITH US



Contact Us Frequently Asked Questions Editorial Policy Editorial Complaints Place an ad in the Classifieds
Advertise in The West Australian Corporate

© West Australian Newspapers Limited 2020 Privacy Policy Terms of Use

