

CORRECTIONS Communicator

Updating the community on the Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility

Corrections facility goes to Court

In late January 2004 the Environment Court will begin hearing appeals against the designation for a new women's corrections facility in Manukau City.

Five appeals relating to social, cultural, environmental and infrastructure matters have been lodged with the Court.

In the six months since the appeals were lodged, we have met with all appellants to work through issues before the hearing starts. Good progress has been made to settle aspects of some appeals.

The hearing is expected to finish in early February, however the Court may not release a decision until mid 2004.

The design of the facility is complete and the site is ready to be built on. If the Court

rejects the appeals against the designation, the Department will be able to proceed with the construction of the facility. Construction is expected to take up to 18 months.

National Property Manager, William Whewell, hopes the corrections facility will open on time in 2006.

"The need for a new purpose-built facility for women is clear. Inmate numbers are continuing to rise to the point where we are shifting women from other facilities to a temporary unit at Waikeria (men's) Prison. This situation is not ideal. Women inmates have particular needs that can only be met with a purpose-built facility," he says.

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Mayor of Manukau, Sir Barry Curtis, was keen to find out more about the design of the new women's corrections facility during a recent Pacific community fono in Otahuhu. Construction Manager Wayne Otway explains the site layout and a 3D model to Sir Barry.

Welcome

Kia ora and greetings. It's been a busy time preparing our evidence for the Environment Court hearing next year. While appeals are not unusual for a project of this size and nature, it is disappointing the appeals have created some uncertainty and will affect the opening of the corrections facility. In the meantime we will continue to accommodate inmates at Waikeria Prison. (See "Women move into Waikeria Prison" overleaf).

It's exciting to see the final design of the new facility. Like the other three currently planned, this facility will be designed to fit into its environment and have minimal visual impact. It will contain groups of single-storey cells within planted and landscaped areas.

With large enough sites we can avoid the traditional multi-storey design of corrections facilities that many people imagine when they think of prisons. The operation and management of the new facilities will also differ to how we have traditionally run prisons. Within the bounds of security, inmates will be expected to show more initiative and self-responsibility. This will provide inmates with the skills and habits needed to live an offending-free life after release.

William Whewell
National Property Manager



DEPARTMENT
OF CORRECTIONS

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Earlier this year the Minister of Corrections accepted a recommendation from Manukau City Council commissioners that the designation be confirmed subject to conditions. The recommendation followed a week-long hearing in February at which submitters to the designation application were able to tell commissioners their reasons for supporting or opposing the facility.

A designation on the site would allow the Department to use its site to operate a women's corrections facility. The conditions on the designation are designed to minimise any impact of the facility on the community and the environment.

Appeals against a designation are allowed for in the Resource Management Act. During 2001 and early 2002 the Department successfully defended appeals against the new Northland Region Corrections Facility in the Environment Court. Construction of this facility began in early 2002 and it's expected to open in 2005.

Contact us

Corrections Communicator is the newsletter of the Department of Corrections' Regional Prisons Programme. Letters and comments are welcome.

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Women move into Waikeria Prison



The Nikau Unit for women opened in June 2003

A unit for women inmates has been set up at Waikeria Prison, as a short-term solution to help manage the increase in the women's prison population. The 60-bed Nikau Unit, altered to be suitable for women inmates, opened in June this year.

"Women inmate numbers, currently over 300, are about 20 percent higher than this time last year. The Nikau Unit adds to our options for managing women offenders. It has been commissioned to bridge a gap in women's prison accommodation until the new facility opens in Manukau City," says Bridget White, Assistant General Manager, Women's and Specialist Services, Public Prisons Service.

Bridget explains that, although the unit is located at a men's prison, it is separate from the male accommodation areas. It is fully fenced and operates self-sufficiently, with its own kitchen and laundry.

"Some of the staff recruited for the unit have worked in women's prisons before, and all the staff have attended the training programme on understanding and working with women offenders," says Bridget. "The Unit Manager is Jan Taepa, whose previous experience at Arohata Women's Prison is very valuable."

Waikeria Prison is near Te Awamutu and one of the Nikau Unit's advantages is its

proximity to centres in the upper North Island. Many female inmates are mothers and accommodating them closer to home makes it easier for family and support networks to keep in contact.

Bridget explains that the Department is working on many initiatives for women offenders.

"Specific training has been developed for staff working with women inmates, and mother and baby bonding facilities have been completed at Christchurch and Mt Eden women's prisons. A Tikanga Maori programme designed specifically for women offenders is being piloted.

"We've reviewed our policies with regard to managing women offenders, and the security classification system is also under review.

"The ultimate goal of all of this work is to return women to the community well equipped to make a new start."

Bridget says the Nikau Unit is proposed to operate until the new Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility opens.

New Zealand's three women's prisons are: Mt Eden Women's in Auckland, Arohata in Wellington and Christchurch Women's. Women make up about five percent of the total prison population of around 6,300 inmates.