

## Backpacks sponsorship will help support vulnerable men leaving prison

An initiative to provide a backpack of essentials to some of the most vulnerable men on their release from Junee Correctional Centre has received a \$5000 boost from the Fusion Walan Miya Group - the prison's training provider.

Centre Vocational Services Manager Donna Moulds said some men released from prison have no family support or a guarantee of permanent accommodation, and leave carrying their belongings in a plastic bag.

“Our backpacks project will provide around 50 men a year with the essentials they need on leaving prison, and a better chance of success as they start the process of reintegration into the community,” Ms Moulds said.

“We consulted with inmates who were very supportive of the idea - knowing that even having the bag would reduce some of the stigma of being recognised as ‘fresh from the inside’. And we worked together on a list of contents.”

Inmates identified items that would be most helpful to newly-released men for their journey home or to emergency accommodation. These included a sleeping bag, change of clothes, rain coat, toiletries, first aid kit, water bottle, and snacks. Eligible men would also receive a pre-paid mobile phone.

Also included in the backpacks will be resources such as a train timetable, map, notepad and pen, and a laminated list of emergency contacts, including shelters, Centrelink, Medicare, job networks, and food banks.

Ms Moulds said: “Each backpack will cost around \$135 and we are grateful for the generous support of our training provider and to be able bring this project to life.”

“The men will be able to do simple things of brush their teeth and have some chewing gum as this helps to settle nerves,” she said. “Having some snacks means they won’t go hungry on the train, as they may have to travel many hours to find emergency accommodation, or to report to parole.”

Fusion Walan Miya Group Director Lucas Scarpin said: “Over the past few years we have seen first-hand how motivated some of the men at Junee Correctional Centre are to improve their lives when they leave prison.

“Knowing some men are released with very few support structures in place, we wanted to support the centre’s initiative, to provide some measure of assistance for those most in need. Some of these men are attending our training courses and working hard to boost their skills and qualifications for future employment.

“If our support can assist a single man in their transition back into society, then this is money well spent.”

### **Photo/filming opportunities: Front of centre:**

- An inmate leaving prison with a plastic bag of gear (for contrast)
- Handover of a backpack to an inmate from Donna and Lucas.
- Inmate looking at contents of bag.
- Inmate leaving prison and walking towards the gate with backpack.

\*Interviews with Donna and Lucas.

- *The GEO Group Australia is Australia's largest provider of private correctional services. Our focus is on rehabilitating prisoners and giving them the support and growth to become positive and productive contributors to our society.*
- *GEO Australia manages Junee Correctional Centre on behalf of Corrective Services NSW, with 370 staff and a capacity for 1300 prisoners. Find out more at: [geogroup.com.au](http://geogroup.com.au)*

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