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Dear Ian

I have seen Kairos at work in prisons since 1999 when I attended my first closing ceremony as the Governor of Grafton Correctional Centre. That was an experience I will never forget, as I saw men who would in other circumstance be rendered inarticulate in front of a group of people, and who would never express emotion, describe their experience and express their feelings about the Kairos program in front of an audience of over 100 people!

That experience convinced me to allow Kairos into other correctional centres that I have managed, either as Governor or Commander. I have been to many closing ceremonies, in both men's and women's prisons, and have been moved each time.

My personal observation is that Kairos seems to have a softening effect on the inmates that participate in it. The Kairos short course provides the inmates with a safe haven for the time they are involved in it. I have seen women accepted into the general population who prior to participating in Kairos were separated from other inmates for their own protection.

Once the program is over the inmates are sustained by a new circle of support from within and outside the prison. The ongoing Journey Program continues that softening effect on those inmates that participate – and as more and more inmates participate in Kairos, there are more inmates who share this new way of dealing with what's going on in their lives. This can have a very positive impact on the rest of the population of that prison.

People in prison come from the most disadvantaged groups in our society. Many come from broken homes. For the women in particular, a really high percentage of them (probably 70-80%) have experienced sexual abuse as children; have experienced sexual abuse as adults; come from violent backgrounds; have been made to feel worthless and useless; and probably internalised all the things that have happened to them. They have high rates of self-harm and high rates of drug use.

The important thing about Kairos for me is that the Kairos community makes no judgement about the inmates as people, accepts them for who and what they are, and still has positive regard for them. I suspect Kairos is the first time many inmates have received unconditional regard from anyone, and feel they are not beyond redemption. I also suspect that Kairos and a Kairos ceremony is the first time that many inmates have ever felt good about themselves – and not at the expense of someone else. That has to be a good thing.

The other good thing about Kairos is that it can provide inmates with pro-social people as examples of whom to associate with after release. Criminal associations (or lack of pro-social associations) are one of the causes of re-offending that participation in Kairos can address.

Inmates in Kairos aren't angels, they just seem to have found something that makes a difference to their lives, and maybe will support them to live a law-abiding life on their release into the community.

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