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CRC ANNUAL REVIEW 2022

MESSAGE FROM THE PATRON OF THE CRC

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

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The Community Restorative Centre (CRC) is a splendid organisation that delivers services to people committed to custodial institutions and their families and supporters.

After uncertainty and challenges experienced over the past two years, 2022 has provided CRC with a window of stability. It has allowed the organisation to build on various gains both in terms of funding and service delivery.

One aspect of the work of CRC lies in advocacy, policy development and research. It is carried on in a unit devoted to these tasks. The Advocacy, Research and Policy Unit's ultimate objective is to achieve improved outcomes for people who have come into contact with the criminal justice system through addressing gaps in research in ways designed to improve the criminal justice sector. Help, where possible, to individuals is vital and compassionate. It is a duty of good citizens. However, extrapolating from the broad community of those in need is just as important. CRC needs to translate its constant review of the criminal justice system into a focus on

broad policy. An illustration of this vital activity is CRC's provision of public policy briefs and submissions to government, which this year included commenting on the NSW Government's draft legislation Amendment ("Coercive Control") Bill 2022 (NSW). I applaud this work.

Significantly improved funding for CRC's service delivery in 2021-22 has facilitated continued operation of several programs. It has also enabled expansion of other programs.

When people in prison are discharged from official custody, many are experiencing challenges including lack of opportunity, intellectual disability and cognitive impairment. Such people (and many who do not fit within these categories) face significant barriers to obtaining housing and are at risk of returning to the dangers of incarceration. This is symbolised in Sydney, not far from NSW Parliament on most evenings, where the number of homeless people dependent on private charitable support is obvious to politicians, administrators and other citizens walking by on their way to their warm homes in the midst of housing shortages. CRC's Reintegration Housing Support Program has this year assisted a total of 220 clients across six Housing NSW sites. Of this number, 75 identified as First Nations members and 93 have secured long-term housing options, comforts other citizens take for granted.

This year has enabled the expansion of other programs of assistance. One such program that is to be welcomed and praised is the Women's Diversion Pathway Program, funded by Corrective Services NSW under the provisions of the s26(2)(i) of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 (NSW). In that provision, a female prisoner who is a mother of a young child or children may serve her sentence in a manner which enables her "to be with her child in an appropriate environment determined by the Commissioner". This is a development that is to be strongly commended. Such expenditure will be repaid by future generations who are thereby helped to avoid a revolving door of poverty, homelessness and dependency.

Also during 2022, CRC's youth program, Pathways Home, was expanded. It provides transitional support for young people in the justice system. Often, they are in need of special help to deal with their drug or alcohol use. Once again, the proportion of First Nations people, many of whom have histories of trauma and repeated episodes of incarceration, is much higher. The service focuses on the health needs of First Nations youth. I pay respects and offer thanks for those who work in this area. After receiving generous philanthropic funding, CRC was also able to establish a Creative Arts Unit and to continue delivering music, art and theatre workshops. These are crucial initiatives to help keep Indigenous youth,

and others from the general community, from the dangers and despair of the revolving door.

Providing former prisoners and detainees with new opportunities in life is an important challenge for CRC. Can we imagine a society with fewer prisoners dependent on institutions? Can we ensure that the minority amongst sentenced prisoners, who claimed to have suffered injustice in their trial or in their appeal, can gain a second or further opportunity for judicial scrutiny of their case? Each of these and other challenges faced by CRC and its clients/families require informed initiatives of law reform. Most of those in need cannot formulate how the need can be developed and provided. This also is a challenge for CRC. It is a precious institution. It exhibits compassion and practical support. It is why I am proud to be associated with CRC and its small team of dedicated workers and volunteers. In a world that often exhibits neglect, these are people who deserve the accolade of ‘righteousness’.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Kirby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent dot above the 'i' in "Kirby".

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG

Justice of the High Court of Australia (1996-2009)

Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission (1975-84)

Australian Human Rights Medal (1991)