

Stories from the Faith Based Unit - Andy's Story

Andy T. is a Pacific Islander who had been brought up with the Christian faith but had chosen to go his own way, into a world of alcohol, drugs and eventually crime. He was jailed last July for aggravated robbery, using an axe to rob a garage of petty cash he needed to feed his habits.

After witnessing stand-over tactics, fights and verbal abuse in jail for a month, he had had enough, and decided that Christianity was what he needed to get his life back on track. "I wanted to get back to my roots, to the way I was brought up," he says. He was accepted for the faith-based unit.

Though the initial stages were hard and change was initially slow, he says he eventually learnt to treat everyone with respect and an open heart and mind. "It breaks down the barriers. Some of the guys comment if they see me talking to officers, but I say they're just normal people, like you and me."

While at the unit Andy has completed courses in employment skills, parenting, and living skills as well as the Christian programme. "I'm thankful that something like this has been opened up to us. I'm thrilled at the changes I've accomplished while being here. I'm learning about God's love, and believe he can change anyone if you're willing to accept his way."

Andy works in the prison gardens and looks for the small joys which every day brings. "I enjoy working outside. I see different people every day and always say hi - officers, visitors, whoever they may be."

He has learnt to empathize with his victims and would like to apologize face-to-face to them. He is determined to be a good father to his children. "If I follow His way and live according to the Bible I'll have no problems," he believes. He hopes he will also be reconciled to his family once they realize he has returned to the faith.

While aware that he will face temptations again once he leaves jail, he is confident he can resist them. "I'll tell my mates, sorry guys, that life is over. I actually want to see if I can change some of my friends, and tell them, you can't do that forever, you've got to find a new path."