

Stories from the Faith Based Unit - Kate's Story

Teaching parenting skills to prison inmates is comparable in some ways to teaching teenagers, says course facilitator Kate Dominicovic from Parenting Inc.

While the men in the faith-based unit are generally respectful and polite, their thinking and comments can reflect their inappropriate ways of problem-solving that have become a life-time pattern, she says. It also takes time for the inmates to recognize that there are alternatives, perhaps better alternatives, to the way they were brought up themselves.

“Many have come from difficult home environments where positive parenting hasn't been modelled,” Kate says. Kate and co-facilitator Claire Ross explain to the inmates that the cycle can be broken, that their own children may well do better in life than they themselves have done if treated differently.

It is also difficult for the inmates to practice parenting skills, when so many of them rarely or never see their children. Corresponding by post is one way of connecting with their children which some have developed.

One inmate was delighted with a response from a teenage son, which indicated he had influenced his son's values for the better. Some of the skills such as honesty, respect and conflict resolution learnt in “whanau” meetings and other aspects of the Christian programmes in prison are also applicable in the “Tool Box” parenting course.

The courses usually involve six sessions, but for the inmates, they have been adapted to ten. “A lot of the concepts are so new to them,” Kate explains.

She likens the skills needed to that of a sports coach - setting boundaries for their children and applying penalties if the boundaries are crossed, as well as offering support, encouragement and training to get the best out of their team. “I think the inmates respond very well to this concept.”