

## ANZSOG Case Program

### Changing outlooks: Thinking small for big change

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Most grand plans made over dinner are a dim memory by breakfast but Rod Chenhall and Graham Bradshaw, ended up forging a life-changing partnership. Chance seated them together at an introductory function for their Executive Masters of Public Administration (EMPA) program at the Australia and New Zealand School of Government in early 2015. The two launched into small talk about their respective roles. Chenhall was the Community Corrections Director for the Hunter and Central Coast Regions at Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW), while Bradshaw headed up Standards and Services at Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW). Chenhall discussed some of the challenges facing him, chief among them being the:

exponential growth of offenders subject to community-based orders, and [the fact] we didn't have enough worksites to discharge the core mandate. In other words, we were going back to the courts and saying: "Sorry we don't have a work option for the offender" and the offender would be re-sentenced with the risk of being locked up.

The flow-on effects for offenders, families and communities were great, he explained, in both social and economic terms. 'Based on outcomes to the community, a custodial sentence is less likely to see a reduction in the offending behaviour', Chenhall explained. Meanwhile, custodial sentences typically cost the state more dollars per offender, while community orders were a mere fraction of that.<sup>1</sup> With over 10,000 people to place each year, CSNSW had its work cut out.<sup>2</sup>

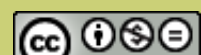
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<sup>1</sup> Interview: Rodney Chenhall and Graham Bradshaw, Sydney, 20 August 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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Bradshaw, a UK expat, didn't have much background knowledge about the NSW justice system and wanted to hear more about how community orders were carried out. Chenhall explained that, typically, groups of about 10-15 offenders worked 8-hour shifts under the supervision of Corrective Services personnel. Tasks might include graffiti removal or landscaping local and state government grounds. Offenders failing to attend or complete their orders was an ongoing issue. One reason was that many people subject to community orders worked during the week and struggled to get time off during business hours when most shifts took place.

As Chenhall spoke, Bradshaw realised he might actually be able to help. His role involved improving infrastructure delivery and frontline services across the state's transport network and he was particularly interested in maximising the utility of Transport assets. Train stations, for example, had plenty of areas such as carparks, walkways, gardens and concourses that were often in need of attention. Moreover, stations were open and accessible after hours and on weekends. Together they began to outline a plan. Forty-eight hours after meeting for the first time, Bradshaw and Chenhall were embarking on a project together. One of the first questions was how to get support from their respective agencies.

## A tale of two organisations

Transport for NSW was having a good run. Responsible for the development, operation and coordination of the state's transport systems, TfNSW's remit encompassed all modes of public and private transport— including roads, heavy and light rail, ferries, taxis and more contemporary rideshare services. The NSW state government had made transport a priority, Bradshaw observed, with the funding and support to match. TfNSW had the largest public infrastructure program in the southern hemisphere underway, its cranes crowding the Sydney skyline. Meanwhile, around the department, the mood was buoyant. Bradshaw described his Secretary Tim Reardon's 'have-a-go' ethos and willingness to support promising ideas. But the palpable confidence and enthusiasm made it 'very easy to assume that everyone in NSW government is having a great time because you are', he said.

Life at Corrective Services NSW was something of a contrast. Part of the Department of Justice, CSNSW oversees the prison system, as well as supervision for offenders in the community, e.g. parolees. Resources were stretched, and a much more cautious, by-the-book attitude reigned. This was largely a matter of necessity. Politicians and the public generally paid little attention to corrections – except when things went wrong and there was blame to assign. A significant segment of the community also favoured highly punitive approaches to crime and were sceptical of diversionary measures like community-based orders. Chenhall and Bradshaw anticipated that CSNSW would probably have the most reservations about collaborating, but they figured that if a prominent and powerful agency like TfNSW was onside, they would be more likely to get the green light.

## Testing times

Early on, Chenhall and Bradshaw realised that they had to marry two organisations with different cultures, risk appetites and objectives plus little history of working together. TfNSW in particular had minimal experience with inter-agency collaboration, especially in the area of human services. 'We decided to do a trial first and prove the model before going for the big mandate as we wanted to control the narrative in the early stages', Chenhall explained. Between them, they had sufficient authority and support to get a test underway, so they established an initial 12-month local Service Level Agreement at Gosford, Wyong and Morisset railway stations, on the Central Coast of NSW, zeroing in on known hot-spots for antisocial behaviour. 'The idea was to target public amenity', he said. 'To get rid of graffiti, look at areas that were primarily inactive and bring people back on site. And that then becomes a crime prevention strategy.' Chenhall also wanted to 'break down the

barriers between an offender, who might frequent the transport system, and some of the people who work at, or use the station or interchange, and who look at them and think that these guys are quite undesirable’.

‘Once we identified a pilot area’, said Bradshaw, ‘we delivered some really good on-the-ground promotional activities, both independently and jointly, of people who would be directly impacted: site officers, local directors, unions, station staff and local businesses. We did presentations about what the program would and wouldn’t be.’ Bradshaw also figured that for the program to become ‘real’ and sustainable it needed an identity and soul – starting with a title. They eventually settled on ‘Changing Outlooks’ which reflected both the work being done and the impact they hoped to have on people’s lives. ‘Once it’s got a name, it’s got a personality,’ Bradshaw noted, ‘Although it was a very simplistic thing, it became valuable in of itself as it made communications easier and more fluid’.

Chenhall and Bradshaw were especially keen to allay the concerns of local rail workers. Explained Bradshaw: ‘When we were out there talking to the guys onsite, we were saying things like: “These people are not high-level offenders such as murderers, these are people who have made a poor choice, like we all do on occasions, and are putting back into the community. These are people who use our trains Monday to Friday, people who you know in your family.”’ They reassured stakeholders that all offenders underwent risk assessments prior to entering the program to ensure community safety, further they would be supervised by Corrective Services staff in a program overseen by TfNSW. Offenders, however, would not be doing work that would ordinarily be performed by TfNSW employees. Bradshaw termed it, the ‘But For’ rule i.e. but for these workers, the work would not be done. Groups would start with simple tasks such as litter collection before more complex ones were introduced allowing all parties to gain in confidence whilst refining controls and processes.

As well as talking extensively to local transport and corrections staff, Chenhall and Bradshaw ensured they introduced local personnel to each other, since they would be working together on the ground. Bradshaw stressed the importance of avoiding ‘blind dates’; he wanted an opportunity for them build rapport and common understanding ahead of time. Much hinged on the early stages of the program. Said Bradshaw, ‘We recognized that a phone call to the media or Executive management in the first couple of weeks to say, “You won’t believe what’s happened here!” [would spell disaster]’.

At Changing Outlooks’ launch, Bradshaw and Chenhall braced themselves for reports of groups not turning up or on-site incidents but the bad news never came. Quite the opposite. ‘It wasn’t about making every station perfect,’ explained Chenhall, ‘It was about doing the 2-3% every weekend’. But small improvements such as clearing rubbish and cleaning graffiti was enough to have a big effect, especially on public perceptions. During a site-visit one weekend, Bradshaw met a local resident who was so impressed with the program’s efforts he turned up in his hi-vis gear offering to help. (Reluctantly, Bradshaw had to turn him down, citing the oft-used WHS risks!)

Before long, Changing Outlooks was also making a tangible difference in participants’ lives. ‘Once we started to establish gardens down at Gosford,’ said Bradshaw, ‘offenders then started to have a stake in that precinct and actually felt like they did something of value. Which for some of these people, I don’t think they’ve ever felt. [We heard] stories where [offenders] were taking their family back to show them the garden and improved amenity– it’s a real investment in the community.’ Chenhall and Bradshaw ensured they relayed these anecdotes back to TfNSW and CSNSW. They also distributed Before and After photos (Exhibit A), as well as positive commentary from the community and participants.

## Scaling up and stepping back

From the outset, the paired aimed to take Changing Outlooks state-wide. However, they knew that heart-warming stories would need quantitative reinforcement. They chose a series of simple metrics, tailored to the interests and values of each agency. At the same time, program activities were related back to broader department and government objectives, such as the Premier's Priority to reduce litter 40% by 2020. 'My Secretary was interested in lost-time injuries, financial efficiencies and customer feedback. But for Corrective Services, it was how many people were engaged, program retention rates and site incidents', Bradshaw said. Chenhall saw the program having a genuine deterrent effect on other offenders. For example, one area which was cleared of 250 hypodermic needles over the course of a few weeks, didn't see any reappear for many months. He added: 'Projects being offered through rail saw us spending less resources on enforcement and getting people to undertake the work because people wanted to do the work'.

They also incorporated strong visual imagery into their reports, e.g. number of garbage trucks or swimming pools filled with rubbish, for greater impact. This was supported by a joint narrative, explained Chenhall, and clear, regular communications using terminology familiar to each organisation. They also prioritised 'face time'. Bradshaw, in particular, spoke to everyone he could at TfNSW about Changing Outlooks at every opportunity. 'I had come from an agency where you could sit and have a coffee with the Secretary, no matter where you are in the hierarchy. I hadn't recognized that it wasn't like that [in Australia],' Not easily discouraged, the affable Yorkshire native took to meeting colleagues at the bus stop, the elevator, the cafeteria – anywhere he might engineer a 'chance' encounter and explain Changing Outlooks.

Persistence paid off. TfNSW Secretary Reardon liked what he was hearing and seeing. During its first year, Changing Outlooks delivered 7,255 hours of work (primarily litter, vegetation and graffiti removal) worth \$800,000, at a cost of \$80,000.<sup>3</sup> In early 2016, Reardon approved a permanent program which would eventually extend to the rest of the state and include roads for the first time. Bradshaw and Chenhall knew it was about time to pass their 'baby' to others. Chenhall's regional responsibilities would restrict his capacity to take the project much further and they both understood that the program's future depended on multiple people in each organisation having a sense of ownership over the project. That said, it still wasn't easy. Recalled Bradshaw:

As quickly as we could we stopped it from being the Graham and Rod Roadshow and made it about the local teams on the ground. So, I would introduce station staff to local correction staff and get a conversation going about what work could be done and how it needed to be controlled. Having that local relationship, without us stepping in, was really important.

Yet their concerns about handing over weren't imaginary. During the transition from pilot to program, they discovered that there were issues progressing through Corrective Services due to significant staffing restructures and instability across key roles. Momentum began to slow; communications became more sporadic; various commitments were not followed through. Changing Outlooks risked stalling just as it was meant to go up a gear. Bradshaw decided a circuit breaker was in order and unwittingly broke protocol to contact the head of CSNSW directly. He suggested a meeting to emphasise the benefits of the program and discuss next steps. Realising his faux pas prompted a brief heart-in-mouth moment but it was a propitious mistake: after weeks of poor communications within 48 hours, Corrective Services had scheduled an appointment to discuss next steps. Soon thereafter, CSNSW was fully back on board and the project was back on track. Being able to point to a successful pilot was a key factor, Bradshaw claimed:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/news-media/changing-outlooks-program>

Whenever we had a naysayer – on my side or Rod’s – who said “Transport are difficult, Corrective Services are difficult. Two worlds colliding, it’s not going to work,” we could say, “Well you know what? It’s been working for 20 weeks up at the central coast, so I’m really surprised to hear you say that – here let me show you last week’s scorecard”.

## Making progress

By early 2016, Changing Outlooks was in operation at six sites: the three original central coast locations plus Wollongong, Homebush and Strathfield (the latter two in Sydney’s inner west). Over 15 months, participants removed the equivalent of 30 garbage trucks filled with refuse, or an average 56 garbage bags of vegetation and litter each weekend.<sup>4</sup> ‘The Changing Outlooks program is an excellent example of how government agencies form partnerships that support each other’s’ goals,’ Transport for NSW Deputy Secretary, Customer Services, Tony Braxton-Smith said at TfNSW 2016 Cluster awards ceremony which formally recognised the program’s achievements, ‘The work has significantly improved the look and feel around these stations, restoring the sense of cleanliness and safety that customers expect and appreciate,’ he remarked.<sup>5</sup>

Chenhall and Bradshaw, however, were looking ahead. Plans were underway to combine community-based orders with skills training, including discussions with state training organisations. The next phase of the rollout would also bring in other modes of transport. Bradshaw saw almost limitless potential for other collaborative partnerships and TfNSW had approached other departments such as Families and Community Services and Aboriginal Affairs NSW to explore the possibilities. They discovered that the private sector was also receptive; accounting firm PWC had already pledged pro-bono support for further cross government collaboration. One idea, already well advanced involved refitting retired State Transport Authority buses and ex-train carriages to create facilities for the homeless or to provide access to government services. ‘Sometimes the planets align,’ Bradshaw reflected, ‘I think that I’d found one of the people at Corrective Services willing to have a go and try something new and Rod was absolutely key to that...Personally we took quite a few risks, because in both organizations we hadn’t been given permission to do this. No one had said, “no” but not getting a “no” doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a “yes”’.

Looking back on what had been achieved in a relatively short time, both men attributed their success to having courage to ‘back yourself’, focussing on the benefits to each party before the delivery details, and reaching out to make connections. They also stressed the importance of trust, communication and showing appreciation. Perhaps most crucial was a willingness to apply some imagination to the concept of ‘public service’. Said Bradshaw: ‘This is what we did as two agencies. Get together as agencies that wouldn’t normally work together and find a solution to a societal challenge or policy or service delivery problem that you’ve got. Because that’s all we did – a concept that Minister Constance, NSW Minister for Transport and Infrastructure eloquently described as ‘an absolute no brainer’

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/Pages/media-news/media-statements/2017/accolade-for-cleaning-up-train-stations.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## Exhibit A: Before and After photos

### Wyong Station Surroundings

Before



After



### Homebush West Station Surroundings

