Justice Reinvestment in Australia: More for your dollar in dealing with crime?

Courtney Young

Australian Justice Reinvestment Project
“The goal of justice reinvestment is to redirect some portion of the $54 billion America now spends on prisons to rebuilding the human resources and physical infrastructure – the schools, healthcare facilities, parks, and public spaces – of neighborhoods devastated by high levels of incarceration.”

The Model

1. Identify communities
2. Develop options to generate savings
3. Quantify savings to reinvest in identified communities
4. Measure and evaluate impact on identified communities
JR in the US
1. Mapping the Data

B. W. Cooper Housing, Central City New Orleans

Source: Spatial Information Design Lab
2. Generate Savings
3. Reinvest in Communities

Programs identified as Justice Reinvestment strategies
(US states working with the Justice Centre)

- Enhance educational opportunities
- Increased housing options
- Expand employment services
- Increased police resources
- Improvements to restitution system
- Standardised risk assessments
- Changes to supervision regimes
- Increased community-based diversion
- In-prison initiatives
- Broader sentencing options

Number of states
4. Evaluate Impact

JR outcomes in Texas

In 2006, Texas had a projected prison population growth of **14,000 in 5 years** at a cost of US$523 mil

**Implementation:**
- Substance abuse treatment programs
- 1,700 new beds in halfway houses
- 3,200 new beds in in-prison treatment programs
- Changing probation and parole regimes

**Outcome:**
- 2008-2010: **decrease in prison population by 1,125**
- 2008-2009 budget: **net saving of US $443.9 million**
- **$200 million** redirected to programs that reduce recidivism and increase public safety
- **$4.3 million** pulled from the 2008–2009 corrections budget for a violence prevention program, the Nurse–Family Partnerships, to be delivered to 2000 families in identified ‘high stakes’ communities
JR outcomes in Texas

CRIME RATES V IMPRISONMENT RATES
WHAT ARE WE SPENDING ON IMPRISONING PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA?

Corrective Services expenditure by jurisdiction 1999-2010

* Stat for WA for 2006 is incomplete due to change from Ministry of Justice to Dept of Corrective services midway through that financial year.
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Conceptualising Savings

- Conceptualising correction costs as public safety investments
- Phase 1 – CSG procedures
- Broadening the notion of costs
- Collecting Australian data
  - An economic analysis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Offenders; Prisons vs Residential Treatment
    - Savings potential of $111,000 per non-violent indigenous offender with substance abuse problems, per year
Thinking critically about JR in the Australian context

- Adoption of term as ‘vague catch-all’ leading to loss of focus on redirection of resources.
- Potential for JR to be co-opted as a strategy of disinvestment.
- Lack of guarantees that monies saved through penal moderation will be applied to justice reinvestment programs.
- Arguments that it is disingenuous to focus on costs savings over values.
Thinking critically about JR in the Australian context

- Challenge of locating fiscal rationality arguments within a moral & political vision that connects with cultural imaginings concerning crime and punishment.

- Practical hurdles of effecting enough change to sentencing, parole, bail programs to realise sufficient savings to be in a position to invest in ‘JR projects’.

- Identifying an agency to coordinate JR (cf US CSG).
Thinking critically about JR in the Australian context

- Establishing a political structure for devolution of funding and responsibility.
- Understanding how a place-based system may operate in the context of Australia’s unique geographical layout.
- Degree of involvement of the private sector.
- Supporting program innovation.
Particular relevance to Indigenous incarceration

- Disadvantage
- Remoteness
- Community buy-in
- Victims’ issues
Case Study: Papunya

- 2006 census: total recorded population of 379, (including 71 people under 14 years).
- In 2007–08, 72 adults entered Northern Territory jails who usually live in Papunya
  - (includes people who had multiple receptions in the same year).
  - The number of individuals is probably closer to 50.
- Imprisonment costs in 2008 for the NT were $181 per day per prisoner.

Positing a median sentence of six months of the year (taking into account those churning through on short sentences), this represents a corrections cost of over $2.4million per year (incarceration costs only) for a community of less than 400 people.
Where to from here....

- Funding for specific research projects in:
  - incarceration and asset mapping
  - mechanics of budgetary devolution

- Re-deployment of DCS funding from custodial to:
  - first CJS programs
  - ultimately communities

- Find the will for:
  - Expanding existing and new joint federal/state, NGO and voluntary sector programs
  - Building on existing generalist programs
  - Seed funding for specific pilot projects, followed by allocation of part of custodial budget for successful outcomes

- Circulate and debate research on cost and success of non-custodial alternatives & community/prevention measures
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