

This sign and display print unit comes with a difference – it is located inside one of the country’s biggest correctional centres. Print21 editor **Wayne Robinson** investigates.

CSI Print: providing real opportunities

Sign and display print businesses can be found in all sorts of locations around the country, with all sorts of rationales for them being there, and all sorts of business models, but few would expect one to be inside a correctional centre, as is the Corrective Services Industries (CSI) print unit at Long Bay Correctional Complex in Sydney.

The print unit is one of many CSI businesses that run within Long Bay, alongside others such as a bakery, a laundry, textiles, food services, facilities management and technology and assembly unit. There are other print units located, three in fact across the 29 Correctional Centres in NSW, including an offset operation in Cessnock. Victoria, Queensland, and ACT Corrections run similar work and education programs.

“We have given them the opportunity to have a real option on the outside.”

ANGELO VARNAKULASINGHAM, SENIOR OVERSEER

The primary aim of the CSI Print unit at Long Bay, like the others, is to provide education, skills training, and qualifications to inmates, so that upon release they have a better choice available to them, and one, that if taken, may lead them on a different pathway to the one that put them behind bars.

Recidivism – re-entry into the prison system – is alarmingly high amongst inmates, and often because they know no other life than the one that has taken them to the lonely

confines of prison. CSI, including the Long Bay print unit, is tackling this head on, and is seeing real results.

The day I visit is symbolic, a bleak, grey, winter’s day, with a cold wind whistling around the correctional complex, but with the sun breaking through the clouds. As we enter the print unit the atmosphere changes to one of warmth and human activity.

The print unit at Long Bay has been running for the past 13 years, under the guidance of David Rickwood, business manager operations; Angelo Varnakulasingham, senior overseer; and overseers Mark De Audney and Kathy Doan.

Angelo Varnakulasingham is a lifelong print professional, with 43 years under his belt. He works with De Audney, formerly of trade printer Printforce, and Doan, in

the day-to-day running of the print production, with David Rickwood, who comes from a background in shop fitouts, where sign and display clearly plays a key role, responsible for business operations. All are genuinely committed to the special focus of this particular printshop. Varnakulasingham says, “We have seen quite a few inmates go through the print centre and make a go of it in the industry once they have left the criminal justice system, they don’t return, which is incredibly



rewarding, because we have given them the opportunity to have a real option, and they have taken it.”

CSI Print at Long Bay operates as a commercial business, but Varnakulasingham is keen to point out he does not go after general commercial work. The business comes from government agencies, and he says, “anything that is being sent to China is fair game.” He says, “We most definitely do not undercut the local market, and in fact we work as an overflow for many local print businesses when they need extra capacity for one reason or another.”

Equipment is not subsidised or given to the print centre by the suppliers, its purchase has to go through the same rigours as any taxpayer funded spend. Varnakulasingham keeps himself fully informed, the day I visited was just after Visual Impact in Brisbane, which he had attended.

The print unit at Long Bay runs both screen and digital print production systems, all the digital equipment networked into one



workflow. Equipment includes HP Latex R1000 hybrid flatbed / roll-to-roll printer, a Canon Arizona flatbed, a Mimaki roll-to-roll, with an Epson F2260 direct-to-film printer and a heat press, a Roland DG Versacamm UV for promotional products, which has seen the best part of 20 summers, and a Zund cutting table. Varnakulasingham says, “We have the means to handle a wide range of work, producing high quality jobs. Our customer base is loyal.”

Work produced at Long Bay includes floor graphics, product labelling and packaging, wall graphics, WHS signage, wayfinding signage, commercial signage, banners, DTG t-shirt printing, promotional products printing, plaques, packaging, trophies, stick-on labels, and signage, as well as signage display and point of purchase. There is also a contract packaging and assembly service.

There is also a fully equipped design and prepress studio, which along with the digital workflow,

means that inmates become fully aware of the new digital print era.

The aim of the education and training is to take inmates to the formal qualification, a Cert III in sign and graphics, which can take between two to four years to achieve. The TAFE teacher comes onsite, rather than the staff going to the TAFE, but apart from that the process follows exactly the same path as gaining a regular Cert III.

Once the inmate has achieved the Cert III, which by then means they will have several years printing experience, and is ready for release, the next challenge is to find a print company willing to take them on. Varnakulasingham says, “There is a skill shortage in the industry, but nonetheless there can still be resistance to taking on a former inmate by print businesses. Fortunately, it is not all of them though, and we have found some empathetic companies, who have opened up to our people, and who are reaping the rewards of committed, trained, qualified staff.”

ABOVE

Well equipped: CSI Print has a good selection of sign and display equipment

Motivation of the inmates to go through the print centre is clear to see, and easy to understand, most want a pathway out of the criminal justice system. And practically, within the confines of Long Bay, being able to get out to the print centre, do work, relate to print professionals and other inmates, while learning a new skill and getting a qualification in it, is motivating.

Varnakulasingham says, “Just like in a regular sign and display print operation every job is different, with different media, different finishing, and requires a solutions-focused approach. This isn’t learning by rote, we are teaching the inmates to apply critical thinking, to work out how to achieve the result the customer wants, within the acceptable cost parameters, and achieving a standard that they, and the customer, will be proud of.”

The working day at Long Bay runs from 6am to 1.30pm, five days a week, with overtime available if the work is busy. People in custody who attend work or programs while in custody are paid in accordance with the Inmate Incentive Allowance Framework. This framework is designed to assist inmates to purchase necessities through the weekly Grocery and monthly Activity Buy Ups, contribute to family responsibilities, contribute to victim compensation, and accumulate savings for reintegration.

Varnakulasingham says, “We are doing something worthwhile here. We operate under the same pressures as any print shop, we have to commercially justify everything we do and propose, and we have to get the work out on time and to the required standard. I’m proud every day of what our guys achieve, and even prouder when the day they walk through the gates back to the outside world is the last time we see them in here.”

Prison is an unfortunate place to find oneself, especially if you are there because of limited options. There is no doubt that CSI, and the work of Varnakulasingham, De Audney, Doan and Rickwood, is providing the option of a better future for all those that avail themselves of the opportunity. **21**