

Lack of support making jail a revolving door for some, says lawyer

North ravaged by crime

RUSTY WOODGER

IF the state's crime data was treated as a competition, suburbs like Corio and Norlane would be considered elite.

The 3214 postcode that encompasses the suburbs regularly features high up the list of Victoria's crime categories.

A breakdown of government data from the past decade shows the postcode ranked third when it came to the rate of burglaries committed across Victoria.

It came in at second for property damage, third for cultivating and manufacturing drugs, and fifth for crimes against the person (including assaults).

Unsurprisingly, the crime rate in Corio, Norlane and North Shore was consistently



above the average for regional Victoria.

It comes as legal experts raise major concerns about the way governments are dealing with people from disadvantaged backgrounds going through the justice system.

Local criminal lawyer Michael Brugman said the situation was particularly bleak in regional areas, where he said there was a lack of properly funded services to tackle issues such as mental illness, drug addiction and unemployment.

"The community and the government have been repeatedly warned that unless they address the issues causing crime, they are making our community less safe, no matter how many police we employ or prisons we build," he said.

Mr Brugman, who runs his own legal practice and has worked in the Geelong region for more than two decades, said a "significant" portion of his clients were from the northern suburbs.

He said the lack of available

support was making jail a revolving door for some people.

"I can confirm that this has been happening in significant numbers in Corio and the northern suburbs of Geelong," Mr Brugman said.

"People are being released from prisons and remain unemployed, homeless, and become mentally unwell or drug addicted again.

"After leaving prison they are forced to jump off a cliff and back into the same cycle they were in prior to being imprisoned. Many return to crime to support themselves."

Concerns are also being raised about the capacity of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) to provide advice and representation to disadvantaged people who are unable to afford private lawyers.

In the decade to 2016, the number of legal aid clients in Greater Geelong was more than 71,000, which was the third highest in the state.

Figures for Corio and Norlane could not be obtained, however VLA states its clients "often live on the margins of society".

Dr Marilyn McMahon, deputy dean at Deakin University's School of Law, said adequate legal representation was "critical" to Australia's criminal justice system.

But she flagged concerns about budgetary restraints that were limiting the number of people and matters that could be represented under legal aid.

"Add to this the reduced fee that lawyers get for matters funded by Legal Aid and it becomes understandable why

some people believe that there is a crisis in legal aid in Australia," Dr McMahon said.

Meanwhile, as crime continues to be a hot-button issue for politicians, Mr Brugman is calling for a different approach to reduce offending.

He argued political leaders should dump mandatory jail sentences in favour of mandatory rehabilitation.

"In 2018 it cost approximately \$127,000 per year to keep an adult locked up for 12 months," Mr Brugman said.

"Imagine if this money was invested per person in preventing crime.

"It could be better used assisting young people when they enter the criminal justice system or others to access treatment they currently don't have as an option."

FACTORIES CAME, FACTORIES WENT

HARRISON TIPPET

DERRICK Wyse reckons he'll be working at St Andrew's Foodshare in Corio "until they wheel me out".

The 61-year-old supervisor's feelings are similar as to whether he'll ever leave Corio, where he was born and has spent the past 60 years living just down the road from the Anglican church of St Andrew's.

"I'll be 61½ soon — in September 62," Derrick says.

"I think I was about 1½ when we moved into my house, and I'm still there.

"I just live on me own. It's a bit boring at times, but at least it's peaceful."

Derrick, pictured, has had a working life similar to many in Corio and Norlane, having found work in manufacturing as a teenager — only for the manufacturing businesses to close in the north.

"My first job was at Harvesters when I was about 16, and after they bit the dust I worked at Pilkington's — just over the bridge in North Geelong, the glass factory. And you know what happened to them too — they bit the dust too," Derrick says with a wry chuckle.

"There have been a lot of places shut since then too ... Alcoa, Ford Pilkington's, Harvesters, Henderson's — we've just lost so much industry here and there's no jobs, people running around the streets with

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DERRICK WYSE

nothing to do," he said.

After the loss of his job at Pilkington's as a 35-year-old, Derrick lived off his redundancy payout for a while, before eventually starting as a volunteer at St Andrew's Foodshare — handing out food parcels to those in need.

"I volunteered for six months, and then I started voluntary work for the dole — so nearly five years now," he said. "It keeps me out of mischief."

"It's not bad, I work in the church and I also work in the op shop."

Derrick said the group was always hoping to attract more food donations — which can be dropped off at the church or op shop (104 Bacchus Marsh Rd, Corio).

"We're always looking for the same stuff — cereal, baked beans, spaghetti, tea bags — that's what we put in the parcels every day," he said.

"We average close to 40 a week — last month we gave out about 160 parcels — and we're only open four days a week — Tuesday to Friday."