

Geraldine Hayes

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I've worked with the Prison Service for almost 16 years, and I'm coming up to three years as the superintendent of Launceston Reception Prison. I started out my career in the mining industry, and then I went to work for the trade union movement. A friend of mine then said, 'Why don't you look at prisons?' I went to an information night, and I thought it looked interesting, so I took a month's annual leave from my job, and I started working at the prison. From day one, I knew this is where I wanted to be.

I like the structure. I also like the uniform, to be honest – not having to think about what to wear to work every day! I also have a belief that something I might say or do might change someone's life one day. I think that we should attempt in the prison service to have that positive impact on people.

What we want to get away from is the stigma of prison officers as bullies. What we want to get across is that, yes, people do end up in prison, but we can have an impact just by modeling good behaviour. It's as simple as that. A lot of our prisoners have never had a conversation with a woman which hasn't involved violence, drugs, rape, sexual assault, all those things. As a female, that's something we can bring to the table. We can bring a professional face to show prisoners that you can talk to women about general things.

It's about making a difference, but realistically. You're not going to cure the world. There are

going to be prisons forever whether we like it or not. It's what we do with people while they are in prison that is so important.

It can be quite lonely. I am the second highest ranked uniformed female officer in the state, and there are only two senior managers who are females. I create my own supports by travelling to Hobart, to connect with my peers and receive support. It can be extremely isolating, both as a leader, and as a woman working in the prison service.

Prisons are dangerous places. We are all hyper alert. It just does change your life. Before you even consider a career in prisons and prison management, you need to be extremely resilient yourself. From my point of view, you don't last 16 years in the prison service, male or female, unless you are resilient. You learn how to cope with the stress, and you learn how to bounce back.

If I were to give advice to a young professional in this field, I would say: seek a champion, and surround yourself with people who can assist you in your career. Don't expect for it to be handed to you on a platter. If you want it, fight for it and take it, because it's your right. If you have the skills and ability, it's your right to have a role as a supervisor, or a superintendent, or a director of prisons, whatever it is. Don't be told no. If you want it, go out and fight for it.



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