

Regional creativity needed at Woomera

WE would like to draw attention to the potential for psychological harm among detainees at detention centres such as Woomera. The article on asylum seekers by the Minister for Immigration does not address this matter.

While it is acknowledged that some detention is necessary for health and eligibility screening, the practice of incarceration is questionable. This is because it is highly probable that a large number of detainees have suf-

fered traumatising experiences prior to their migration due to the ravages of war and political repression, which can include imprisonment and torture.

It is now clearly established that such experiences in a very significant percentage of people have major long-term detrimental effects on their biological, psychological and social health. Additional incarceration in circumstances that further violate these people's dignity and fundamental rights can only exacerbate these problems.

The most profound and long-lasting effects often occur in children.

Ultimately, most detainees will be allowed to stay in Australia, having had the bona fides of their refugee status accepted. Instead of becoming grateful and healed citizens they may well be embittered and broken ones.

We are also concerned for the health of those working at

detention centres. They are vulnerable as secondary victims when they identify with the plight of the detained or when, self-protectively, they become inured to their suffering. In detention centres, well-meaning carers may become burnt-out and disillusioned.

One of the major yardsticks for judging the values of a society is its care for the underprivileged and socially exiled. It is a test of these values, political conscience and compassion of our nation to fully address issues of traumatising.

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