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Sydney Home Offers Hope to Break Cycles of Trauma, Violence, and Incarceration

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In Sydney's inner suburbs, Rainbow Lodge provides a lifeline for men seeking to escape cycles of trauma, violence, and jail. Run by individuals with lived experience, this unique program offers a third option for those on remand or transitioning from prison, aiming to halt reoffending through rehabilitation and support. This article explores how Rainbow Lodge tackles deep-rooted issues and the challenges of scaling its impact.

Rainbow Lodge, a modest terrace in a quiet Sydney street, houses just eight men, soon expanding to 13 with City of Sydney funding. It's a haven for those like Jarred, who faced six stints in custody for domestic violence offences. "I'm very lucky to be here," Jarred told The Guardian, praising the camaraderie among residents who share his desire for change. Unlike the volatile prison environment, the Lodge fosters stability with communal living and daily programs addressing trauma, drug use, and violence. Program director Paul Robinson notes that most residents have violent offences on their records, often tied to unresolved trauma and substance abuse, making the Lodge's focus on rehabilitation critical.

The program's success lies in its leadership by former offenders, like an elder who runs sessions at John Morony Correctional Centre. One participant, who completed the program while on remand, shared, "Seeing an elder lead was awesome. I finally had someone to ask, 'Why am I feeling like this?'" This connection helps men confront the pain driving their behaviour, from childhood abuse to drug dependency. However, with alleged domestic violence offenders spending three months to a year in custody, as program manager Hill observes, the lack of early intervention programs in remand centres remains a gap. Rainbow Lodge's expansion to all remand facilities is a goal, but funding and political will are hurdles.

Critics argue the government prioritizes short-term fixes over systemic reform, leaving initiatives like Rainbow Lodge under-resourced. With only a handful of beds, the program struggles to meet demand, and its reliance on mixed funding raises questions about sustainability. As Australia grapples with rising incarceration rates, Rainbow Lodge offers a proven model to reduce recidivism, but its small scale underscores

the need for broader investment to truly break the cycle of trauma and violence.