

# Imprisonment needs fresh approach

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PHOTO: LESLEY STEPHENSON

INSTEAD of reforming offenders, South African prisons are producing hardened criminals.

So says Eliza Kenyon, Zululand Social Work Supervisor of the South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (Nicro).

Speaking at a non-custodial sentencing information session at the Nicro Zululand offices in Empangeni, Kenyon sought to promote constructive alternatives to prison sentencing.

The session was well attended by local organisations such as Phoenix Zululand, Khulisa Crime prevention, Legal Aid, the Department of Justice and the National Prosecuting Authority.

The new approach is to keep offenders in their communities, and through community service and specifically designed programmes address the root causes of crime.

This is meant for offenders who are not a danger to society.

'Non-custodial sentencing has been in place since the beginning of the year, but we are receiving very few referrals from the courts,' says Kenyon.

'I believe this is because there is a lack of knowledge about these



Eliza Kenyon leads the presentation on non-custodial sentencing at the Nicro Zululand offices in Empangeni during Restorative Justice week

alternatives,' she said.

In principle the aim of imprisonment is to stop an individual from committing further crime and to act as a crime deterrent.

## Ineffective

According to Nicro, research has shown that imprisonment does not rehabilitate people or work effectively as a deterrent.

The effectiveness of prison sentences is further reduced by the state of South African prisons.

Large court rolls, overcrowded prisons and long periods of de-

retention while awaiting trial are commonplace.

Presently there are about 190 000 prisoners, of whom more than 50 000 await trial, in 242 correctional facilities country-wide.

These prisons collectively hold approximately 73 000 more inmates than they were designed for.

Upon release, stigmatisation and marginalisation often follow, leading to social exclusion which in many cases, encourage repeat acts of crime.

