

16 • THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2009



Captive audience: Fremantle musician David Hyams in a music workshop with inmates at Hakea prison.

Picture: Bill Hatto

Jailhouse rocks with charity tunes

ATHANAE LUCEV

A group of blokes in prison greens pouring their hearts into melody and verse may be hard to imagine but song-writing classes are giving a voice to a hidden wealth of talent in WA jails and helping rehabilitate offenders.

Each Tuesday, under the tuition of Fremantle musician David Hyams, a group of men at Hakea Prison are translating into song their experiences behind bars.

More than 40 songs have been recorded for a possible CD, with profits to go to a charity for victims of crime.

Department of Corrective Services arts co-ordinator Frank Italiano said WA prisons held some of the best musical talent he had heard.

Under Mr Italiano's direction, prison arts programs have grown from purely educational courses to include recreational activities and other forms of rehabilitation.

"The prisoners are realising there's value in what they are doing, and value that's being recognised by other people," he said.

"That's something many of them haven't experienced before."

Hyams, who has worked in several

Perth prisons, said he cherished the opportunity to work with what, in most cases, was raw talent.

"I had one guy who walked in with a stack of songs he had already written and in that same class I had someone who had never written a song before in his life, so we're drawing on varied experience," Hyams said.

"But I think it's cathartic for most of them — everyone has a story."

Hyams, whose Celtic-jazz band Miles to Go celebrates its 10th anniversary at Kulcha next month, said teaching in prisons also had helped revitalise his song-writing.