

Community Support and Services Committee

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 9 January 2022 1:07 PM
To: [REDACTED] Community Support and Services Committee
Subject: FW: Townsville Youth "crime wave"...an alternative
Importance: High

From: Bruno van Aaken [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, 9 January 2022 1:03 PMa
To: 'mailto:CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au' <mailto:CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au>; 'lasc@parliament.qld.gov.au' <lasc@parliament.qld.gov.au>; [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: FW: Townsville Youth "crime wave" ...an alternative
Importance: High

From: Bruno van Aaken [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, 1 January 2022 4:31 PM
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Townsville Youth "crime wave"...an alternative
Importance: High

Firstly, I am working together with Karl McKenzie to bring about a more just and comprehensive treatment of Indigenous youth by the justice system here in Townsville. While Karl is a respected Elder, Chairperson of the Townsville Community Justice Group, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation and therefore takes the lead role in our endeavours, I am a criminologist with experience in the field of post release experience of offenders. I also have significant experience with youth, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous within the forensic sphere. I hold a doctoral degree in philosophy with a studied expertise in criminology. We work in a relationship of mutual respect and trust for each other's life experiences, culture and life philosophies, and it is from this place that our joint and individual creativities emerge.

Reflecting on a recent conversation with Karl McKenzie, regarding Abergowrie, an Aboriginal day and boarding school situated 40 km North-West of Ingham, having also read the primer from the honourable Michael Berkman, the Greens member for Maiwar, and his reference to Justice Reinvestment, and its place in the current thinking of the QLD government, and then coupled with my own thoughts and research on the topic, here are some thoughts for consideration regarding an intervention in the increasingly vexatious youth crime situation.

What is needed here in Townsville, with its endemic youth crime issues, is an interrupt to form the basis of an early intervention strategy. Firstly, we need to cease calling them criminals. Secondly, we need to engage these younger children, yes, they are children, in a safe environment. This can be challenging because many come from home environments which are absolutely not safe with drug and alcohol related abuse and criminal activity featuring among the older family members. We then need to intervene in the lives of these children and their damaged and sometimes toxic families by breaking the chain of events which lead from relative innocent childhood to developing criminal behaviour. If we then turn to the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and recruit our young charges from the 10-14 year age group from this retributive justice environment and place them into an environment of supervised caring and learning, away from the older youth, we may be able to achieve a gradual turnaround in the current offending situation.

Using the principals of Justice Reinvestment

1. The cost of incarcerating one young person/child in the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre is approx. \$250k per annum.
2. 37% of these youth approximately (35-40) are in the 10-14 year age group and in reality are still children. They are used by the older 15-17 year old youth as “apprentices in crime”.
3. These young children don’t belong in an institution of retributive incarceration and should be removed from such an institution to be treated as children not criminals..
4. Justice Reinvestment takes money from the carceral estate and reinvests it in early intervention with a view to preventing the development of criminal behaviour
5. There is spare capacity at Abergowrie, , to use in an endeavour along these lines. Abergowrie at this stage has unused capacity and is in need of support.
6. At the above expenditure figures, initially relocating 5-10 Aboriginal children from the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre to Abergowrie and reinvesting only half of their cost to the state if they were still accommodated in Cleveland. This would present a triple benefit to the state, Catholic Education, and the Aboriginal Community.
 - a. The state would save \$125k per child and reduce the workload on Cleveland staff
 - b. Abergowrie would receive potentially \$125k per annum per child (\$1.25 million per annum if 10 children) to accommodate and educate, thereby ameliorating the financial stress currently experienced by this school.
 - c. The Aboriginal Community as well as the larger community would benefit in that this intervention would potentially remove the apprentices in crime from open society i.e. the 10-14 yrs old currently in care at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, thereby reducing the youth crime rate over a period of time.
7. While in care at Abergowrie, these children would receive an appropriate education, including a reintroduction to culture and healing, as well as a stable caring environment in which to grow and be grown by the current senior student population of the school as well as staff.

There are a myriad of issues to sort out here of logistics, strategies, legal considerations etc, but this could be a constructive way forward for the region instead of the constant call for tougher laws, tougher penalties and the cry of “lockem up”! What is happening is a social pathology which we, in the interests of public safety, have criminalised. The continuing offending pattern and published research by eminent criminologists states quite clearly, this punitive approach does not work! It merely exacerbates this disturbing trend! It is time to seriously consider an alternative such as we have just presented.

Dr Bruno van Aaken
B Hlth Sc (Rehab Couns) M Hlth Sc (Education) MANZSOC FACBS PhD
Consultant Criminologist
Iliad Consulting Services
M | [REDACTED]

Karl McKenzie JP
Chairperson
Townsville Community Justice Group
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation