



Evolve – Keeping Kids on Track
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13 Sep 13

Education and Innovation Committee
Parliament House, George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

**SUBMISSION – QUEENSLAND EDUCATION (STRENGTHENING DISCIPLINE IN STATE SCHOOLS)
AMMENDMENT BILL 2013**

INTRODUCTION

Evolve – Keeping Kids on Track is a not for profit youth mental health service delivering trauma focused interventions and educational reengagement programs for disadvantaged, at risk and disengaged young people. Evolve works with schools, families, communities and young people in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Evolve specialises in community owned programs, wilderness expeditions, camping, high adventure and farm life experiences as non-clinical and engaging natural settings for the delivery of trauma focused mental health services.

THE BILL

Reacting to behaviour through increased and wider powers for Principals will help to create clear and definite boundaries for young people who do not recognise nor have the skills to make values based decisions. We tentatively support the legislation and the intention to solve problems of antisocial behaviour early and locally.

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT PSYCHOLOGY

Unfortunately young people with antisocial behaviours have had a sub-optimal upbringing particularly during the first 18 months of life and consequently they do not have reliable values. They are also operating with heightened emotional arousal due to an assumption that the world is unsafe (a history of abuse and neglect leads to this being a true assumption). Heightened arousal means their brains are engaged in fight-flight mode and they cannot access their frontal lobe thus are not capable of making decisions based on anything other than fighting or escaping. Values and consequences do not enter into the equation until they have calmed down and re-engaged their frontal lobe.

Escalation through the autonomic nervous system is rapid while emotional regulation returning to homeostasis through the parasympathetic system is quite slow. In short such students need time, without threat and fear, to calm down. In addition to increased powers of discipline we recommend that every school has clear policy and places for students to de-escalate, if possible, prior to the disciplinary system being fully engaged.

BEST PRACTICE

We recommend that every school become a trauma informed service as described in the excellent "Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery"¹. This document is not aimed at mental health services alone and schools would benefit greatly from the internal process of becoming trauma informed. Teachers would be equipped with a greater ability to keep students calm, non teaching staff would be able to contribute to the creation of de-escalation and all students would be safer and less distracted from their work. School reviews and teacher professional development budgets should account for the costs associated.

OPPORTUNITY

Evolve - Keeping Kids on Track seeks to prevent escalation and assists young people to self manage. We have tested several programs of varying durations and intensity across ages 8-19 years both within and externally to schools. We seek the opportunity to work with Education Queensland at policy and service delivery level to assist schools to create preventative measures to compliment the increased disciplinary powers that are planned.

We believe that reducing the number of students needing to be the target of increased powers is cost effective, humane and less trying on school staff and other students than dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Prevention is possible and would adhere the Queensland Youth Policy² and is very much the intent of recent plans and recommendations received and written by government such as the 'Carmody' Inquiry³ and, the Youth At Risk Initiative⁴. We refer to statements in the attachment.

RECOMMENDATION

Evolve recommends that the legislation of increased powers for Principals also requires Principals to ensure that prevention policies and structures are available to all students and that this would be enacted through the process of their schools becoming 'trauma informed services'.

Evolve has some expertise with preventative and remedial systems within education and would be pleased to consult with government in the pursuit of its worthy aims detailed in the attached excerpts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Pringle', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

GRAHAM PRINGLE
QLD STATE MANAGER

Attachment – Excerpts from 2012-13 policies and Inquiries that emphasise prevention and trauma as key aims and desires of the Queensland government.

- 1 Kezelman C.A. & P.A. Stavropoulos 2012. Adults Surviving Child Abuse 2012 Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery, ASCA: Sydney.
- 2 Queensland Government 2013, Queensland Youth Strategy: Connecting Young Queenslanders, <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/communityservices/youth/queensland-youth-strategy-connecting-young-queenslanders>
- 3 Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2013, Taking Responsibility: A Roadmap for Queensland Child Protection, www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au
- 4 Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services 2012,

Youth at Risk Initiative (YARI), <http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/community/services/youth/youth-at-risk-initiative-yari>

Queensland Youth Policy
(excerpts)

Young people are unique individuals of value. 'One Size Fit All' is not a valid service delivery approach.

Strengths, abilities and resilience should be developed for life long benefit.

Helping families function well is a significant support for young people.

A range of targeted services for young people who experience complex challenges and/or who are vulnerable and at risk will be provided.

Young adolescents transitioning from primary to secondary school will get more support for their academic, social and emotional needs.

A blueprint for the future of youth justice, seeking to reduce youth offending and build safer communities, will be developed. This will include ... addressing the causes of crime

Practical guidelines, tools and resources will be developed to support youth programs and organisations that work with young people.

Youth At Risk Initiative (excerpts)

The objectives of YARI are aligned with the department's strategic objectives:

- better services and pathways...
- more inclusive, active and safe communities
- a more sustainable, community service system that delivers better value.

Young people will:

- receive the right level and intensity of service response dependant on their circumstances
- be encouraged and supported to work towards self-determined goals that are sustainable in the long term.

Further aims:

- closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- preventing young people from becoming involved or further involved in the justice system
- preventing children and young people from being placed in the care of Child Safety Services, DoC
- assisting vulnerable young people to negotiate key transitions and have positive futures.

Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
(excerpts)

The Commission found that government "is not ensuring the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children as well as it should or could".

They identified three reasons:

- too little money spent on early intervention to support vulnerable families;
- a widespread risk-averse culture that focuses too heavily on coercive instead of supportive strategies and overreacts to (or overcompensates for) hostile media and community scrutiny; and,
- linked with this, a tendency from all parts of society to shift responsibility onto Child Safety.