Expanding Adult Time, Adult Crime and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026

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Youth crime in Cairns has become an increasingly significant concern for residents, businesses, and community leaders. While community safety must remain a priority, the response to youth offending must also recognise the complex social and cultural factors that contribute to this issue. A balanced approach, combining accountability, stronger sentencing where appropriate, and targeted rehabilitation programs is essential to achieving long-term reductions in youth crime.

One of the most pressing needs is the development of better structured intervention and rehabilitation programs specifically designed for young offenders. Many youths involved in the justice system come from disadvantaged backgrounds, experience unstable family environments, or lack access to consistent education and mentoring. Without meaningful support, young offenders often cycle repeatedly through the justice system.

Programs designed to engage young people in education, vocational training, cultural connection, and life skills development can significantly reduce reoffending. These initiatives must begin early, particularly for youth already showing signs of disengagement from school or community structures. Intervention at an early stage can redirect young people before criminal behaviour becomes entrenched.

In addition, youth justice facilities and support services must be better equipped to address the specific needs of young offenders. Facilities should prioritise rehabilitation rather than simple detention, with access to qualified youth workers, counsellors, educators, and cultural mentors. Structured daily programs that combine education, employment training, and behavioural support are critical in helping young people reintegrate successfully into society.

A particularly important consideration in Cairns and across North Queensland is the high proportion of Indigenous youth within the justice system. Programs addressing youth crime must therefore incorporate culturally appropriate rehabilitation strategies. Indigenous young people benefit greatly from programs that include cultural education, connection to country, and guidance from respected Elders within their communities.

Involving older generations and community leaders in the rehabilitation process is vital. Elders and respected community members can provide mentorship, cultural grounding, and accountability that formal justice systems alone cannot achieve. Their involvement helps reinforce identity, responsibility, and respect, which are key factors in reducing repeat offending.

At the same time, there must be clear consequences for serious or repeat offences. Stronger sentencing options for persistent youth offenders may be necessary to protect the community and to reinforce accountability. However, sentencing should be paired with structured rehabilitation programs during detention so that time in custody becomes an opportunity for behavioural change rather than simply punishment.

Ultimately, addressing youth crime in Cairns requires a coordinated approach between government, law enforcement, community organisations, Indigenous leaders, educators, and families. Investment in prevention, early intervention, culturally appropriate rehabilitation, and properly resourced youth facilities will deliver better long-term outcomes for both young people and the wider community.

Reducing youth crime is not simply about being tougher, it is about being smarter in how we support young people to change direction and become productive members of society. By combining firm accountability with targeted support and culturally informed rehabilitation, Cairns can create a safer community while also giving vulnerable young people a genuine opportunity to rebuild their lives.

These views come from lived in experiance and Bachelor or Law.