

## **Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

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## **Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry on the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry. My name is Jase Tom, and I am the co-founder of Thrive and Connect, an organisation committed to empowering young people to overcome adversity and develop their potential. Drawing on over a decade of experience as a frontline police officer, academic studies in psychology, and direct work with marginalised young people, I bring a perspective shaped by personal growth, professional insight, and a passion for helping young people see their inherent strengths.

The Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 represents a pivotal moment for our justice system, and societal perceptions of at-risk young people. While its intent to address community safety is clear, I believe its measures risk entrenching harm and disadvantage, particularly for the vulnerable populations I work with. This submission advocates for evidence-based approaches which promote dignity and empathy.

### **Thrive and Connect: Empowering Young People**

Thrive and Connect creates environments where young people can discover their self-worth through activities that provide them with agency and celebrate their unique strengths. When young people experience success, they internalise their value, fostering personal growth and prosocial behaviour.

Our Coastal Connector Programme exemplifies this approach. Through outdoor learning, skill-building, and creative activities, we develop young people's social and emotional skills and self-efficacy, altering trajectory and facilitating meaningful growth. The programme aligns with the Social and Emotional Learning Framework in the National Curriculum, which research shows is essential in helping young people develop the "soft" skills needed to thrive through adolescent. However, marginalised youth and young people with disabilities—those who need these skills the most—often face significant barriers to access these crucial skills. Thrive and Connect addresses this gap, creating pathways that empower young people to rewrite their narratives and alter their life trajectories.

### **Critique of 'Adult Crime, Adult Time'**

Developmental Psychologist, David Yeager has dedicated his career to research which demonstrates that adolescents are capable of critical thinking and goal-directed behaviour when provided autonomy, status, and respect. The adolescent brain is driven by a need for status and respect, and rarely responds positively to punitive systems. Instead, they thrive in environments where they are empowered to channel their potential constructively.

Frustratingly, we view teenagers as unruly and needing to be controlled despite overwhelming evidence showing the ineffectiveness. The 'Adult Crime, Adult Time' bill

seeks to further reinforce this misguided narrative, while other states, territories and nations develop and implement impactful policies adopting this evidence and science understanding of adolescence.

### **The Need for Empathy and Dignity in Justice**

Young people caught in these cycles are not broken. They are often frightened, vulnerable children navigating lives marked by trauma, rejection, and adversity, sometimes putting on a mask to hide their inner fragility and fear. What they need is to be seen and treated as humans—with non-conditional positive regard and approached by us without judgement. Acts of empathy and support break this cycle, while punishment and isolation only deepen the harm they experience.

Dr Donna Hicks PhD highlights the transformative power of dignity in resolving conflicts. The Mandela Effect, as she describes, demonstrates how affirming the inherent worth of individuals fosters trust, reconciliation, and meaningful change. Is it out of our societies capacity to cultivate communities who have the capacity to extend a hand of support after a young person acts in a way associated with disrespect or inciting indignity?

### **The Disproportionate Impact of the Bill**

This Bill risks disproportionately targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth and young people with disabilities, groups already over-represented in Queensland's justice system. Expanding criminal histories, introducing adult penalties, and removing detention as a last resort exacerbate these inequities, further limiting the opportunities for growth and rehabilitation, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

### **Personal Perspective and Advocacy**

My years in frontline policing shaped a belief in strict enforcement, but education and exposure transformed my understanding. Studying psychology illuminated the subconscious forces driving behaviour, allowing me to reflect on my biases. This shift enabled me to see the inherent strengths in all individuals, particularly young people navigating adversity. On a weekly basis, I witness young people rise from unimaginable hardship. With the right opportunities and engagement, transformation is not only possible but inevitable in all young people but too often, we give up far too quickly.

### **Impact of the Bill: Evidence-Based Concerns**

This Bill represents a significant step backward for Queensland's justice system. Research consistently shows that punitive measures fail to address the root causes of youth offending, often exacerbating them.

Expanding criminal histories and imposing adult penalties will create long-term barriers to

## **Conclusion**

Jailing children who have only known trauma and rejection is not justice. It is a failure of humanity. Our state and nation need courageous leadership, akin to Nelson Mandela's, to champion what is right. Let us ask, "What happened to you?" and create systems capable of seeing young people as seeds of potential, not problems to be punished and isolated. This punitive path only deepens cycles of harm and inequality whilst the brighter path prioritises dignity, empathy, and hope which will strengthen community connections and provide the safety all Queenslanders seek.

I urge the committee to reconsider the measures in this Bill and embrace approaches that nurture possibility and facilitate growth.

Yours sincerely,

**Jase Tom**