

## **Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

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**Submitted by:** Mission Australia  
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**Submitter Comments:**

03 December 2024

Mr Martin Hunt MP,  
Chair, Justice, Integrity and  
Community Safety Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

By email: [JICSC@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:JICSC@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Chair

**RE: Submission to the Inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024**

I write to you to state Mission Australia's strong objection to the *Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024* that has been referred to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee. We find the measures that infringe on the human rights of children, particularly by treating them like adult offenders, lacks a basis in evidence that it will lead to safer communities or reduce offending rates.

Mission Australia has long advocated for a health and welfare approach to child and youth justice matters. Primary school aged children are still learning right from wrong and prison does not provide the rehabilitative environment to do this. It is our job as adults to help children learn from their mistakes in a safe way so they can lead happy and fulfilling lives in our community.

We work closely with children and young people with complex needs and provide early intervention and diversionary programs nationally for young people who are at risk of becoming or are already in contact with the justice system. These programs include STAR here in Queensland, as well as Youth on Track (NSW), Juvenile Justice Support Program (NSW), and Youth Crime Prevention (Victoria).

The way to create safe and healthy communities is to meet the needs of children, not lock them away and make their future life outcomes worse. The real solutions lie with investing in community services to support families, health and disability care, and working with schools to keep children engaged. Escalation into serious offending often means we have failed children by not providing the safety and support they needed to positively thrive.

Politicians and other leaders in the community have a responsibility to be guided by experts and the evidence. The reality is that there is no good age for a child to be locked away in prison. The medical evidence is clear that children under the age of 14 years are undergoing significant growth and development, and any contact with the criminal justice system can lead to lifelong harm and trauma.<sup>1</sup>

According to Dr Mick Creati, Senior Fellow, Royal Australasian College of Physicians:

*"The latest neuroimaging of the prefrontal cortex (the part of your brain responsible for planning and impulse control) shows that it isn't fully developed until the age of 25, and as*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018), Young people in child protection and under youth justice supervision: 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2017.

*such, children at the age of 14 years have less developed impulse control compared to adults. At ten years of age, it is even less so.”<sup>2</sup>*

Mission Australia is a member of the Raise the Age campaign that is seeking to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years in every Australian jurisdiction. This should be the policy pursued by the Queensland Government along with sufficient investment in programs and initiatives we know are effective and child safe. I have provided example case studies below.

#### **Case study: STAR (Strong, Together and Resilient)**

The STAR Program works with young people who are at high risk of ongoing involvement with the youth justice system, and their families. STAR aims to build individual, family and cultural connections to build the protective factors against offending behaviour while also addressing the factors that increase the risk or likelihood that young people will offend.

STAR has helped young people like Jane (alias), 15 to set and achieve their goals for a positive and successful future. Jane was supported by our Indigenous Mentor to enrol and regularly attend Skill 360's "Taste of Trades" program. Jane successfully completed the course and has gained her Cert 1 in Construction.

Over 12 weeks (3 days per week) of practical training and theory, Jane received career mentoring and work placement support, work experience in local facilities, training for a variety of roles and access to industry employers for advice and work trials.

Jane is receiving further support from STAR to obtain identification to finalise her White Card and explore vocational and employment pathways now available to her. With practical support and mentoring from her caseworkers, Jane has significantly improved her confidence, self-esteem, pro social attitudes, emotional regulation and future career opportunities.

#### **Case study: Justice Reinvestment Program<sup>3</sup>**

Justice reinvestment is a data-driven approach to improve public safety managed by not-for profit organisations to reduce corrections and related criminal justice spending, and reinvest savings in strategies that can reduce crime and strengthen communities.

Justice reinvestment diverts a portion of the funds spent on incarceration to communities where there is a high concentration of young offenders. The money that would have been spent on custodial services is diverted into early intervention, crime prevention and diversionary programs that address the causes of crime in these communities, creating savings in the criminal justice system which can be tracked and reinvested in communities.

KPMG conducted a preliminary evaluation of the Justice Reinvestment program in 2016 and indicated that when compared to other crime prevention programs, this had a number of promising criteria for success and that the data driven and community led approach had the potential to address underlying causes of crime.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tondorf, .C (2019) Too Young for Facebook, Old Enough for Prison, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/too-young-for-facebook-old-enough-for-prison>.

<sup>3</sup> See further: Just Reinvest NSW, accessible at: <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/about/>.

<sup>4</sup> See further: KPMG, Unlocking the Future: Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project in Bourke – Preliminary assessment, 2016, p. 8, accessible at: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/ladocs/submissions/59833/Attachment%20-%20KPMG%20Preliminary%20Assessment%20Maranguka%20Justice%20Reinvestment%20Project.pdf>.

### **Case study: Youth on Track<sup>5</sup>**

Youth on Track is an early intervention service designed to provide services to 10-17 year olds who are at risk of long-term involvement with the criminal justice system and their families. Youth on Track provides the police and schools with an opportunity to refer young people they consider to be at risk of re-offending, to an offence-focused intervention without requiring a court order. Young people can opt into taking part in Youth on Track. Mission Australia delivers this program in Blacktown, Central West, Hunter and the Mid North Coast regions. The service is funded by NSW Department of Communities and Justice.

Youth on Track provides case management and evidence-informed interventions to address a young person's criminogenic risk, ultimately reducing their risk of long-term involvement in the criminal justice system. The Youth on Track program uses the Changing Habits and Reaching Targets (CHART) behavioural intervention and Collaborative Family Practice for family intervention.

CIRCA, commissioned by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, conducted an evaluation of Youth on Track and found that the program had positive attitudinal and behavioural impacts on the participants with improvements to their relationships with peers and community.<sup>6</sup>

Data from Youth Justice NSW confirm that the program has a high rate of success across a number of measures. Data from the first six months of 2021 indicate that, of the 180 young people who participated in the program: 75% reduced or stabilised formal contact with police after referral; 100% reduced their risk of reoffending at program completion; 65% of high-risk young people improved their education and employment risk factors; 52% of high-risk young people improved their family and community risk factors.<sup>7</sup>

Impact measurement is Mission Australia's consistent, sustainable, national approach to measuring outcomes, to know we're making a difference in the lives of the people we serve. We measure wellbeing using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). The PWI is a measure of subjective wellbeing that is calculated from seven different life domain questions. The PWI and its domains have been defined and statistically validated as a reliable measure of subjective wellbeing by the International Wellbeing Group, in partnership with Australian Unity and Deakin University.<sup>8</sup>

On average, people who participated in our Impact Measurement survey when exiting Youth on Track services during 2021 had experienced improvements across all wellbeing domains, except health which remained stable. The biggest improvement was in how participants felt about their future security, which increased from an average score of 6.1 at entry to an average score of 7.5 at exit. Overall satisfaction with life as a whole increased from 6.5 at entry to 7.5 at exit. The average score for people exiting Youth on Track were within or above the Australian normative ranges for all domains except health.

### **Case study: Youth Crime Prevention<sup>9</sup>**

The Youth Crime Prevention program is part of the Victorian Government's response to youth offending, particularly recidivist offending, tackling the issue through the proven strategy of

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<sup>5</sup> See further: Youth on Track, accessible at: <https://www.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/youth-justice/youth-on-track>.

<sup>6</sup> CIRCA, Youth on Track Social Outcomes Evaluation: Final Report, 2017, accessible at:

[https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/CIRCA\\_Social\\_Outcomes\\_Evaluation\\_2017.pdf](https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-07/CIRCA_Social_Outcomes_Evaluation_2017.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Youth Justice NSW Youth on Track Unit, 2021. Youth on Track Snapshot Jan – Jun 2021, Department of Communities and Justice.

<sup>8</sup> International Wellbeing Group (2013) Personal Wellbeing Index: 5th edition. Melbourne: Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University, <https://www.acqol.com.au/uploads/pwi-a/pwi-a-english.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See further: Youth Crime Prevention Program, <https://www.crimeprevention.vic.gov.au/grants-and-programs/youth-crime-prevention-program>.

strengthening the ability of local communities intervening early and diverting young people from criminal behaviour. The program works with a targeted group of young people aged 15-22 years, identified by statutory bodies, addressing risk/protective factors through tailored support; delivered by a Guide and a Community of Support using individual and group modalities. Mission Australia is a consortium partner, delivering services in greater Dandenong and Casey.

#### **Case study: Juvenile Justice Joint Support Program**

The target group for the Joint Support Program is young people under the supervision of Juvenile Justice within the community who have been assessed as having a medium to high risk of offending. The Joint Support Program seeks to emphasise outcomes, flexibility and a continuum of service delivery between Juvenile Justice and funded service providers through strong collaboration and case management processes, client-focused strategies and regular review meetings to ensure target outcomes are being achieved.

Casework support complements Juvenile Justice's case management, which centres around addressing the criminogenic needs of young offenders. Case workers work with Juvenile Justice to support young people to achieve the goals outlined in their Juvenile Justice case plan. Relationship Intervention is funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and provides a short-term intervention with young people and/or significant people in their lives where there are relationship difficulties and conflict related to their offending behaviour. The Relationship Intervention worker focuses on strategies to improve relationships, reduce conflict, mediate solutions and encourage collaborative problem solving between the young person and the significant people in their lives.

Mission Australia delivers the Joint Support Program in the following locations: Casework Support (Illawarra Shoalhaven, Grafton, Tweed, Lismore, Far West, Central West); Crisis Accommodation (Central West, Murrumbidgee); and Relationship Intervention (Illawarra Shoalhaven).

#### **Case study: Act Now Together Strong<sup>10</sup>**

Mission Australia in Western NSW Region has collaborated with Juvenile Justice in NSW and Monash University in the Western NSW region for over four years in the delivery of the Act Now Together Strong (ANTS) program. Based on Professor Chris Trotter's Collaborative Family Work model, this is an evidence based 6-8 week program focussing on developing pro-social and communication skills within the family unit.

The model has been evaluated in Dandenong, Victoria with a youth justice population. Approximately 95% of clients indicated the model was either 'totally successful' or 'mostly successful' in meeting their family goals; 74% of families indicated that the family was 'getting on much better' after the intervention, and 80% of families suggested the target problem was 'a lot better' after intervention.<sup>11</sup> There is significant evidence to suggest that short term behavioural family intervention has significant impact on reducing recidivism.<sup>12</sup>

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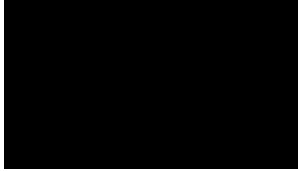
<sup>10</sup> See further: ANTS, [https://www.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/youth-justice/programs-and-services/offence-focused-intervention#:~:text=skill%20building%20exercises,-,Act%20Now%20Together%20Strong%20\(ANTS\),skills%20within%20the%20family%20unit](https://www.nsw.gov.au/legal-and-justice/youth-justice/programs-and-services/offence-focused-intervention#:~:text=skill%20building%20exercises,-,Act%20Now%20Together%20Strong%20(ANTS),skills%20within%20the%20family%20unit).

<sup>11</sup> C. Trotter, Collaborative Family Work – a practical guide for working with families in the human services, accessible at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343611875\\_Collaborative\\_Family\\_Work\\_A\\_practical\\_guide\\_to\\_working\\_with\\_families\\_in\\_the\\_human\\_services](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343611875_Collaborative_Family_Work_A_practical_guide_to_working_with_families_in_the_human_services).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

I trust the Committee will be guided by the evidence of what works as it prepares its report on the Bill. I would welcome the opportunity to be contacted on [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED] should you require further information on the points raised.

Yours faithfully



Stephen Vines  
**Queensland State Director**