

Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024

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Inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024 - Submission

This submission addresses the urgent need for a transformative approach to youth justice in Queensland. Recognising the limitations of the current system, this document outlines the significant opportunity presented by the upcoming legislative reforms to create a more effective, humane, and just system for young people. Drawing upon extensive research, successful models, and the voices of young people and communities, a roadmap is presented to guide the government's actions towards achieving lasting positive change.

The Opportunity for Meaningful Reform

Queensland stands at a pivotal point in its approach to youth justice. The confluence of a growing demand for change, coupled with the government's commitment to introducing a new single Act for youth justice and care and protection, provides a unique opportunity to enact meaningful and lasting reform. Sources highlight the systemic failures of the existing system, characterised by high recidivism rates (between 84% and 96% of young people reoffend within 12 months of release) and the disproportionate impact on Indigenous youth. These failures demand a bold reimagining of youth justice, moving away from punitive measures towards a system that prioritises rehabilitation, reintegration, and the empowerment of young people and their communities.

A Roadmap for Change: Guiding Principles

The following principles, informed by evidence-based practices, successful models, and the lived experiences of those affected by the youth justice system, should guide the development and implementation of the new legislation and accompanying programs:

- **Shifting the Focus from Punishment to Rehabilitation:** The core purpose of the youth justice system must be to rehabilitate young people, equipping them with the skills and support they need to lead fulfilling lives and become contributing members of society. This requires a fundamental shift in mindset, moving away from the notion of “adult crime, adult time” and recognising the developmental needs and potential for change inherent in young people.
- **Embracing a Holistic Approach:** Successful rehabilitation requires addressing the complex interplay of factors that contribute to youth offending. These factors include family dysfunction, domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol use, education disengagement, mental health issues, housing instability, and poverty. A holistic approach necessitates collaboration across government departments and community organisations to provide comprehensive support that addresses the root causes of offending.
- **Empowering Communities and Centering the Voices of Lived Experience:** Sustainable solutions must be grounded in the communities most affected by youth crime. This requires meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensuring their voices and knowledge are central to the design and implementation of

programs. The importance of community-led solutions is exemplified by initiatives such as the Stradbroke Islander Justice Reinvestment program, which seeks to develop a community-driven strategy for improving justice outcomes for First Nations people. Similarly, the Queensland Family and Child Commission's "Yarning for Change" study underscores the importance of listening to and valuing the voices of young people in contact with the youth justice system.

- Adopting a Developmental Approach to Crime Prevention: Investing in early intervention and prevention is essential to reducing youth offending. This includes supporting families, creating pathways for education and employment, and providing accessible mental health and substance abuse services. By addressing risk factors early on and promoting protective factors, we can prevent young people from entering the justice system in the first place. The success of programs like Resolve, a community-based early intervention program in Logan, demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach in reducing risk levels and increasing young people's hopefulness.

Concrete Steps: A Path Forward

Building upon these guiding principles, this submission recommends the following concrete steps to operationalise the transformative vision for youth justice in Queensland:

1. Refocusing Resources and Infrastructure: Instead of prioritising the construction of new detention facilities, the government should redirect funds towards:
 - a. Refurbishing existing youth detention centers: Upgrading facilities to create more therapeutic and rehabilitative environments.
 - b. Investing in community-based programs: Expanding and replicating successful initiatives like the ReKindle Youth Justice Project in Brisbane, BG Fit's CAMPFIRE program in Mount Isa, and the Stradbroke Islander Justice Reinvestment program.
2. Adapting the Diagrama Model: Pilot programs should be established to adapt and implement the successful Diagrama model within the Australian context. The Diagrama model, developed in Spain, has achieved low recidivism rates through its emphasis on therapeutic interventions, education and skill development, and community integration. This approach aligns with the need to shift the focus from punishment to rehabilitation, recognising the potential for change in young people.
3. Implementing a Dedicated Post-Detention Transition Program: The current system lacks adequate support for young people transitioning back into the community. This contributes to high recidivism rates as young people often face challenges accessing housing, employment, education, and other essential services. A dedicated 12-month post-detention transition program, as recommended by the Queensland Family and Child Commission, would provide intensive, individualised support to facilitate successful reintegration. This program should incorporate in-home family interventions, facilitate effective engagement in education, training, and employment, and address the criminogenic factors in the young person's life.

4. Establishing a Youth Justice Co-Lab: A dedicated platform, the Youth Justice Co-Lab, should be created to foster collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing among stakeholders working in the youth justice sector. The Co-Lab would:
 - a. Connect community organisations and amplify their voices: Supporting and scaling up successful community-led initiatives like those mentioned in the sources.
 - b. Facilitate the adaptation and implementation of best practices: Exploring and adapting successful models like the Diagrama model.
 - c. Advocate for evidence-based policy reform: Challenging dominant narratives and promoting a more humane and effective approach to youth justice.
5. Investing in Data Collection and Evaluation: Robust data collection and evaluation frameworks are crucial to measure the effectiveness of implemented programs and inform continuous improvement. The government should allocate resources to track key indicators such as recidivism rates, social and emotional well-being, education and employment outcomes, and community safety. Regular evaluations, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative data, will provide valuable insights into program impact and identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

The opportunity before the Queensland Government is significant. By enacting bold reforms that prioritise rehabilitation, community empowerment, and evidence-based practices, the government can create a youth justice system that is truly just, effective, and compassionate. This roadmap, informed by the voices of young people, families, communities, and experts, provides a clear path forward for achieving lasting positive change and building a brighter future for Queensland.

Tools and resources

- [Qld Youth Justice Inquiry AI project](https://yj inquirybot.softr.app/) - <https://yj inquirybot.softr.app/>
- [Justice Co-lab vision](https://www.justiceco-lab.com/about-justice-co-lab) - <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/about-justice-co-lab>
- [National Youth Justice Inquiry mapping](https://www.justiceco-lab.com/justice-inquiries) - <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/justice-inquiries>
- [DRAFT - Justice Mapping](https://reconnected.softr.app/justice-reinvestment) - <https://reconnected.softr.app/justice-reinvestment>

Key links and stories

- <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/article/breaking-bread-breaking-chains-when-two-worlds-collide>
- <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/article/spotlight-on-changemaker-brodie-germaine>
- <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/article/connecting-communities-a-network-for-justice-reinvestment>
- <https://www.justiceco-lab.com/article/the-nature-of-power-how-control-shapes-youth-justice>

Diagrama Further Reading and Resources

1. Diagrama Foundation Overview
 - a. Official Diagrama Foundation website - <https://www.fundaciondiagrama.es/en>
 - b. A Blueprint for Change Adapting the lessons of the Spanish Youth Justice System to the Northern Territory, Report of Diagrama visit October 2019 - <https://ddhs.org.au/sites/default/files/media-library/documents/Blueprint%20for%20Change%20-%20Diagrama%20Foundation%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>
2. Academic Studies and Evaluations
 - a. Perceptions and experiences of children and young people in English Custodial Centres and Spanish Re-educational Centres: A comparative study , D Romero McGuire · 2018 - <https://uobrep.openrepository.com/handle/10547/624044>
 - b. VArrious European Research led by Diagrama - <https://www.fundaciondiagrama.es/en/research/europe>
3. International Youth Justice Models
 - a. The international Juvenile Justice Observatory (IJJO) was established as a non-profit organisation in Brussels in January 2002 by Fundación Diagrama (Spain) - <https://www.diagramafoundation.org.uk/international-juvenile-justice-observatory>
4. Economic Analysis
 - a. Washington State Institute for Public Policy: "Benefit-Cost Results for Juvenile Justice Programs" - <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost?topicId=1>
 - b. The Pew Charitable Trusts: "Re-Examining Juvenile Incarceration" - <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2015/04/reexamining-juvenile-incarceration>
5. Personal Accounts and Media Coverage
 - a. 7NEWS Spotlight - <https://7news.com.au/spotlight/7news-spotlight-kids-and-crime-the-silver-bullet-to-tackle-australias-youth-crime-crisis-c-15017386>
 - b. BBC visits Diagrama's custodial centres in Spain, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MHjnV2D31w>
 - c. Kate Bjur's, Churchill Fellowship The Diagrama Model - Spain, <https://katebjur.blogspot.com/2023/03/the-diagrama-model-spain.html>
6. Implementation Guides
 - a. Council of Europe: "Guidelines for a Therapeutic Approach to Juvenile Justice" - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-friendly-justice>

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