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JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair
Mr MC Berkman MP
Hon. GJ Butcher MP
Mr RD Field MP
Ms ND Marr MP
Mr PS Russo MP

Staff present:

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER (ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME) AMENDMENT BILL 2025

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Wednesday, 7 May 2025

Townsville

WEDNESDAY, 7 MAY 2025

The committee met at 5.31 pm.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025. My name is Marty Hunt. I am the chair of the committee and member for Nicklin. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. With me today are Peter Russo MP, member for Toohey; Russell Field MP, member for Capalaba; Natalie Marr MP, member for Thuringowa, who would be familiar to many of you; Michael Berkman MP, member for Maiwar; and the Hon. Glenn Butcher MP, member for Gladstone, who is substituting for Melissa McMahon MP, member for Macalister. I also acknowledge other local members of parliament in the room, Janelle Poole and Adam Baillie. Welcome. Thank you for coming along.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

The Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in court. All witnesses are therefore reminded not to refer to matters before the criminal courts in their evidence. This has been an issue in the past. I really need people to understand that if somebody has committed an offence against you and has been charged but it has not been resolved by the court yet, you are not permitted to talk about it in a public hearing so please do not do that. As chair, I also ask members and witnesses to observe standing order 117, which restricts the naming of at-risk children. Importantly, evidence today should not readily identify a child who is subject to either the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Youth Justice Act 1992.

I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are being recorded. A transcript will be published in due course. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone to turn their mobile phones off or to silent mode at this time. Finally, the committee notes that today's hearing could be triggering for those who have been affected by crime. If any witnesses today require a break during proceedings, please indicate. Please also approach the secretariat if today's proceedings raise any issues for you.

Our program had the Townsville Chamber of Commerce representatives appearing first. We have an apology from that representative, Heidi, as she is unwell. She was very keen to come and represent the community here tonight but she has no voice. She has written a submission for the committee to consider supporting the bill. I acknowledge her for that. With that in mind, we have decided to use the 25 minutes that was allocated to hear from the 25 other registrations we have had if people are here. I will call you up one by one. Considering we have 25 people wanting to speak tonight and 70 minutes allocated for that purpose, please keep it as short as possible. I will run a timer for three minutes. I hate cutting people off, but please be mindful that there are a lot of people who want to speak so try to keep your contribution as short as possible.

SURHA, Ms Enid, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Ms Surha: My name Enid Surha. I am the chair of the Townsville First Nations Community Council here in Townsville elected by the community. I have my co-chair sitting with me. I will quickly read out our concerns with regard to this bill.

How is Adult Crime, Adult Time to be imposed on our young people going to make Queensland safer? In Townsville, First Nations and Torres Strait Islander children are the highest offenders and in Cleveland Youth Detention Centre we know that around 90 per cent of those incarcerated are our young people. What makes the amendment to the bill achievable for young people who do adult crime

to do the adult time? Some of our young people in this town are not with their parents; they are under the guardianship of government departments such as Youth Justice and Child Safety and under their supervision. Some of the young people are also not from this community—they are from other regions, remote and rural—and brought here via Child Safety for those reasons with youth justice.

I am actually going to go to the rights of the child in Queensland. There are 54 articles. I particularly think of article 1, all children have rights. We have to have the best interests always be considered for the child—article 3—and they should not be discriminated against as well because this to me seems to be a little bit very harsh. Also I think they are supposed to be protected from violence. I know there are kids here who are actually doing this to the community, but they also have rights to be protected. They also have the right to health—to be healthy. Some of our children who are in situations are suffering from trauma, in particular our mob. Intergenerational trauma carried out from the past has not been addressed. Some of our children have had health issues that are not diagnosed such as fetal alcohol syndrome or some other cognitive disabilities that they have. Sometimes there are leaders in these groups and then there are the followers and we need to also maybe look at that.

I think the current funding for youth, through JAG, is about \$500 million over five years for short-term programs, and the majority of these kids are not short-term. They have to be long-term programs. Taking a young person out of community for three weeks is not going to fix a lifetime of trauma for these children. It cannot be mended in three weeks. We need to teach our young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys and girls how to be good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men. The best position is our own good Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women in this community as well as elders and any other community if this is going to go statewide.

CHAIR: I am loath to do this, and I am going to have to do it all night, but if you could wrap up in the next 10 seconds or so that would be great.

Ms Surha: One of the things that I think should be looked at is putting the money not into this but into looking at their health and getting assessments done in this town. We have that. Use existing organisations and existing programs such as TSCAG, community organisations, FASD clinics. They are actually here, so why not put the dollars into that and make changes and not punish them to do this time because it is not happening.

CHAIR: Thank you for your submission. Thank you for coming along. For anyone who does not get quite enough of their say, we can still accept emails. If you want to put more towards the committee for its consideration you can do that in writing as well via email.

PHILLIPS, Mr Jeff, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak. I have been in Townsville for 19 years now and I have seen youth crime get worse and worse, especially after the youth justice laws were softened by the previous government. I understand this government is toughening them up and I see some good stuff being done there, but I do not think it goes far enough. The early intervention programs do not seem to be capturing the majority of the kids. It is good when they do work, but once a kid has committed a crime that is gone—that early intervention is gone.

I think the biggest problem is that the magistrates are letting kids off too easy. They need to be held accountable. When they are, it might give other kids the opportunity to change their ways so they do not go down that same road. I think the government should look at legislating for mandatory minimum custodial sentences, not raising maximums, because no-one ever gets the maximum and there is too much leeway there. I think for a first offence there might be some leeway, but for breaking into houses and stealing cars, carjacking and those sorts of offences, I think even on a first offence it should be probably a six-month custodial sentence with no room for the magistrate to have any leeway. That way those kids can be captured and work out where the problem is and then programs can be put to those kids to try to combat that going any further.

For repeat offenders, those who have committed more than one offence and who have shown that they are not responding to those programs, I think a mandatory two-year custodial sentence should be imposed—no early release, no discounts. That is what is going to make Queenslanders safer because while those kids are off the street they can be dealt with and rehabilitated and put through whatever programs they need to try to get them sorted out and for that two-year period the public is not at risk from that child. People will argue that that just puts them in the university to learn crime, but they are already learning it on the streets. In there they might learn the theory, but on the streets they are getting taught the theory and the practical side of things by their peers who are taking them down that road.

I know other people want to speak. I had a lot I wanted to say. One other thing I will add is that we have been victims of crime. My wife was bashed by five kids, aged 14 to 17, at 4.30 on a Friday afternoon because they wanted to steal her car. She parked in the Woolworths car park. They saw her park the car there. She went across the road to the doctor. They hid in the church and when she came out from the doctor they came out and kicked the crap out of her on the footpath and took her bag. She had her keys in her pocket, but we found the bag and all her belongings scattered around the car. The police did arrest them. All of them were repeat offenders, except for the 14-year-old. I think if that 14-year-old had been taken away from all those kids, because they are all locked up for a period of time, it might have given that 14-year-old a chance to correct their ways.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Phillips. I appreciate you coming along today and giving us your views.

Mr BUTCHER: Excuse me, Chair. Is this committee hearing not going to ask any questions of any submitters?

CHAIR: We are trying to get as many people as possible to have a say. If you do have a question, indicate. We obviously cannot question each of the 25 witnesses. This section of it is a community forum style. There are other witnesses coming along.

GUINEA, Ms Christy, Private capacity

Ms Guinea: Thank you for allowing me to speak. I am a schoolteacher and a long-term Townsville resident. I wanted to speak on two points: firstly, the promises made at the election and the legislation plan with Adult Crime, Adult Time; and, secondly, what that looks like for our community as a whole.

My first point is that, despite claims on *Sunrise* and morning news just this week that crime is down, people in Townsville still feel unsafe at home and in their community. The laws, despite being out there and appearing to be tougher and changing our data, still are not having an impact on everybody. In the last six months, as I am sure plenty of people will tell you, I have personally had two vehicle thefts in our apartment complex but both were committed by adults. We have CCTV at home. My concern, working with young people, is that there is a lot of focus happening with young people and I feel like nothing is happening in the space for us where adults are still committing crimes as well. In that area, what is being done to keep our whole city running safely and smoothly? An interesting thing, which I know you probably cannot comment on, is that last year we were told that crime would be fixed by Christmas, and I do not believe that crime was fixed by Christmas at all. I am actually concerned that we are making decisions that are kneejerk reactions that will provide short-term gain but long-term pain.

My second thing is in relation to long-term planning for youth crime. As somebody who works with young people, what are the implications for people who have been incarcerated and then are meant to reintegrate into schools and school communities? This legislation seems to ignore the fact that young people are exactly that: they are young people. They do not have the cognitive ability, the life experience and the adult support in some instances to actually know to make the good decision or what the good decision even is, and I am concerned about that.

You only need to read the paper if you are not involved with young people to read about the already understaffed school systems. With an increasing range of young people with complex needs coming back into schools, it seems like a recipe for disaster for all stakeholders—schools, families, our community and our young people. Education is the key to a safe and cohesive society. We want everyone to have an opportunity to get an education because education is what changes lives, and I feel like we are short-changing young people by removing that from them. I will say, as a side note, that I know there is a very good school that operates at Cleveland.

The Premier has spoken about the Staying on Track plan. I am a fan of a plan, I am a fan of programs, but I do not know in Townsville how we are going to actually staff that. Where are the humans who are going to fill those positions? How are we going to stop recidivist behaviour? If we do not have a long-term plan for how to look after young people and how to make sure they are provided access to education, we are going to have a generational issue of young people without an education. Thank you for the opportunity.

CHAIR: You said that we were told that crime would be fixed by Christmas; I would challenge that in that the first tranche of laws would be law by Christmas. Obviously, those laws and the sentencing procedures will take time to have an effect.

Ms Guinea: Of course.

CHAIR: In terms of education, do you welcome the Premier's commitment that every child in detention will have compulsory education?

Ms Guinea: Definitely.

Mr BUTCHER: Can you expand on some of the programs you are involved with? You said you are involved with youth justice. What are you involved with?

Ms Guinea: I am a schoolteacher so I am normally involved in trying to get our young people back to school after they have been suspended, incarcerated, excluded from other schools. I know there are programs out there but it is definitely something that requires more humans.

CHAIR: I would not disagree with that and that is certainly part of the plan.

Ms Guinea: It is harder when young people have been incarcerated.

CHAIR: The Staying on Track plan is a 12-month intensive program post detention release. It has only been a couple of months.

Mr RUSSO: In relation to some of the amendments that were previously brought in, some of the rights in relation to restorative justice have been done away with. Do you think that is a wise move?

Ms Guinea: I am going to speak personally as Christy, not as anybody who is employed by anybody else. No, because once you know the impact of the mistake you have made, the damage you have done, the crime you have done, it certainly changes your next step. It does not happen for everybody, but there is a very common phrase in education where we put faces on the data. When people do the wrong thing and actually get to see the impact, that certainly can help change their ways.

Ms MARR: Just to follow on from that, seeing where we have been in the last 10 years of crime being more violent and occurring more often, do you think that possibly the restorative justice we had with the previous government was not working, was not getting the benefits that we need to get—

Mr RUSSO: Point of order, Chair: I do not know—

Ms Guinea: I am happy to say that I do not know enough about that to actually answer.

Ms MARR: I would like to hear the point of order, if I may.

Mr RUSSO: Well, the witness has answered the question so there is no point of order.

CHAIR: Let us move on. We have lots of people to hear from. Thank you for appearing today.

Ms Guinea: Thank you very much for your time.

WALLACE, Dr Alan, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome.

Dr Wallace: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. I have been a GP in this town for over 30 years. I am going to speak my mind. Collectively, governments in the state of Queensland have comprehensively failed to control youth crime, particularly in North Queensland. In doing so, they have betrayed two groups of victims. The first is the citizens of Queensland, who have a right to sleep safely in their beds, confident that their homes will not be invaded nor their possessions stolen, and have a right to have faith in the rule of law. The second is the kids who are committing these crimes. I take the point that there are adults doing it too, but I think that is a separate subject. These young people are among the most underprivileged in our society. For many, the lights go out at sunset because no-one has paid the electricity bill, and for kids who have had more dinnertimes than dinners, a bowl of dry cereal is a pretty good feed. That is who we are talking about. Wouldn't it be lovely if caring for these kids was simply a matter of saying, 'I'm sorry,' and buying them an ice cream? However, it is not because these kids have suffered far too much for that sort of fluffy stuff to solve the problem.

We know that raising unruly kids can be challenging. Most of us are either bringing up children ourselves or have already done so. We know from experience that the way to rear children is with love, kindness and compassion, but we also know that sometimes a child will stuff up so badly that the only kind thing to do is to be firm. In the case of constant recidivism both by the children and by the justice system, the logical initial solution is to put distance between the child and the potential crime scene. You could call that innovative, except that it has been suggested so many times before. The problem is that it has never been properly tried.

A working definition of an idiot is somebody who persists in doing the same thing over and over again and hopes for a different result next time. Does that ring any bells? For these children's sake, it is time the idiocy stopped. Most of them—and wouldn't it be nice to say all of them?—will turn 18 one day. On that day, the world will become an even uglier, more unfriendly and more sinister place for them because we have failed to prepare them for it. Stopping the idiocy will require strong action from government. Those who will have to change will be loud in their condemnation of any alteration to the status quo. Those who have permitted this travesty to happen habitually race to high moral ground that they have neither right nor reason to occupy and patronise and pour scorn and derision on the rest of us who, seeing that the system is broken, seek to fix it.

The common people of this city turfed out all of their sitting MPs at the last election and by large margins. Their view on youth crime—that it is unacceptable in volume and degree—is well known, so the government must see to it that the will of the people is acknowledged and firmly and successfully acted upon. Where existing law is inadequate, further measures must be legislated to ensure the people's wishes are granted. Those in the system who cannot or will not change must be redeployed to other tasks. Innovative solutions must be adopted and adequately funded, subject to them demonstrably meeting their targets.

Ladies and gentlemen from the government, I implore you: this problem will only be solved by doing things radically differently. Please, these children need to know that their actions are unacceptable and will be met with firm measures which will ensure they are unable to reoffend, at the same time—and this is equally important or more important—as measures are taken both before and after offending, before birth in many cases, to show them a brighter future and to allow them a better and less sinister way in which to live. Only then will we have discharged our duty to them. To do otherwise is to guarantee that history will judge this generation no more kindly than it has the perpetrators of the stolen generation. If you do this, then without extra effort or expense our streets will be as safe as once they were, people will be secure in their homes, their property will not be pilfered or destroyed and we will all regain our confidence in the rule of law.

CHAIR: Thanks, Dr Wallace. As there no questions from the committee, I thank you for your contribution. We have reached the point in the hearings where Miya Services were to give evidence but I got word that their flight was delayed. We will continue with public witnesses and when they arrive they can appear.

FORBES, Mr David, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Mr Forbes: My name is David Forbes. I am a barrister of 30 years practice and I have been a resident of Townsville for 10 years. Although I am a barrister, I do not practise in criminal law so I do not purport to be speaking to the committee today about anything to do with the practice of law in juvenile justice. Rather, the focus of my remarks to you today is on education.

I know probably more than the average barrister about education and primary education because about nine years ago my wife and I discovered that our daughter is dyslexic. It took us many years to find out why it was that she could not read but her younger brother could. No-one in the education system or the health system could tell us the answer. Eventually, after seeing many professionals, we took her to an educational psychologist here in Townsville who diagnosed our daughter as dyslexic. The happy end to this story is that that inspired my wife to become a dyslexia therapist. She works from home, and over the last eight years I have seen hundreds of children come to our home and I have seen their lives transformed by the therapy that they receive from my wife. This relates to juvenile justice for reasons that I will explain in a minute.

What I have seen and what I know is that dyslexia is a neurological condition. There is no cure for it but there is treatment available for it. One of the reasons illiteracy is much higher in our society and throughout the western world is that about 30 years ago in America a new theory of reading pedagogy was developed which is called the whole-word theory. Probably all of you at the table were taught to read the same way as I was at school, which is that we were taught that particular letters make particular sounds and when they are put together with other letters they make particular sounds. That was thrown out with the whole-word theory. We have now sacrificed a generation of Australians to learning to read the wrong way. Most children can figure it out anyway, but those who are dyslexic or who have other learning disabilities do not. My wife's business has been picking up those children our educational system leaves behind.

The Youth Justice Act contains a schedule of principles and the first principle is the protection of the community. That, of course, is what all criminal law is meant to do. I commend the government on changing the law to bring in longer sentences for juvenile offenders because, clearly, the previous regime was not working and community protection has to be observed.

Another principle in the Youth Justice Act is to give children education. As the previous witness observed, our detention facilities contain schools, principals, teachers and more than your average number of special support teachers. In October 2023, the previous government introduced a new policy of synthetic phonics to be used in our school system. In other words, the government threw out the now thoroughly discredited whole-word reading system. The governments in South Australia, Tasmania, New South Wales and Victoria have all done the same thing. Thank God, the next generation will not be sacrificed to this now discredited theory.

Here is where this intersects with youth justice. Prisoners, in both our adult and our youth systems, have very high rates of illiteracy. Illiteracy is very much higher when you do not teach children how to read. Children are more likely to misbehave at school. Children are more likely to have anxiety, to not concentrate and to be completely left behind in, say, grade 6, if they have not learned how to read in grade 1. What the government needs to do is to retrain all the educators in the youth justice system so that they learn how to teach blended synthetic phonics. I presume that is what they are doing with the education system overall as part of the change in policy that was brought in in October 2023, but it is going to take some resources.

I know there are organisations that teach how to do this properly. One of them is the Dyslexia Association Australia, which is based in Sydney. They do a five-day course. A couple of weeks ago I heard a story about a Queensland teacher who did this course and had very mixed feelings at the end of it because he had been teaching all his professional life and he said, 'I can't believe I spent my whole career teaching children how to learn to read the wrong way.' At least that teacher realises now that what he was doing was wrong and he knows how to do it properly. It does not take teachers a long time to learn it. We need to get this into our youth justice system.

A number of the students my wife teaches are teenagers. They can still learn how to read if they are 14, even if they are completely illiterate. Basically, it is just a matter of teaching them like they are five-year-olds. Once you teach kids in detention how to read, they can start learning everything else, they can stop misbehaving so much while they are in detention and they can be given hope. Then they have a much better chance of rehabilitation.

CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Forbes. I am happy to wind that up if you do not mind and go to questions.

Ms MARR: Do you agree with the second tranche of the Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation that we are inquiring into today?

Mr Forbes: Yes, I do, because the second tranche contains very serious offences and there is no sign yet of—it is too early to tell. On Sunday night, my 88-year-old widowed neighbour, who lives alone, had two teenagers break into her house and take money from her. That happened right next door to my house while I was sitting with my family and friends on my deck. We did not even see them. The police were there in minutes but they were gone.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I call forward the next witness.

HALL, Ms Alana, Private capacity

CHAIR: Ms Hall, I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Hall: Tonight, I am going to speak to you as a victim of crime. I moved here three years ago from Tasmania. I really love Townsville, but I am extremely concerned about the youth crime here. I want to stay here, but I was a victim of crime in my home. I live in a four-storey apartment, on the third floor. At two o'clock in the morning I had an intruder come into my home and steal the car keys. That intruder scaled three storeys to get in through my glass sliding door. He broke in. I never thought—ever—that my home would be broken into at that height. I believe that the intruder had just been released from jail, so he was on the rampage again. He had the ability to scale other large buildings around Townsville.

It has become quite terrifying to me and my husband. We do not sleep very well. We listen for noises every night. We have had to spend a lot of money—thousands of dollars—to put in security screens and security lighting. Other people in our complex have had the same thing happen to them. What can I say? It has just been quite terrifying.

CHAIR: Do you support the tougher laws that are being brought in?

Ms Hall: Definitely. As an ex-teacher, I agree entirely with the last speaker. There has been terrible injustice done to children in the education system over the years with the lack of phonics in reading. I am all for rehabilitation, but serious crimes need serious enforcement and consequences.

CHAIR: Are you supportive of the commitment to compulsory education in detention centres?

Ms Hall: Extremely, yes.

Ms MARR: I want to thank you for your time and for talking to us today because I know it is not that easy. We are speaking to people like yourself because we want to put victims first. That is one of the reasons we are doing this. Thank you very much.

Ms Hall: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for your time, Alana.

RENNICK, Mr Phil, Principal Lawyer, Rennick Lawyers

Mr Rennick: Prior to taking over and opening Rennick Lawyers, I was a police officer for 21 years. The majority of that time was served here in Townsville. I am one of very few lawyers who defend children before the Childrens Court of Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you for your service. I invite you make a statement to the committee.

Mr Rennick: Before 13 December, 2024, the laws were quite weak in relation to children. I want to relate a couple of examples from recent times to try to let victims of crime and the people sitting behind me know that times are changing.

The two examples happened only a couple of weeks ago, on 23 and 24 April of this year, in the Childrens Court here in Townsville. A young person aged 15, who would normally have received something in the range of three to six months, received a nine-month sentence for the unlawful use of a motor vehicle. It involved one vehicle where he was the passenger in the vehicle, not the driver. There was no dangerous driving involved. That just shows a big change in the penalties that are being handed out. The following day, when a young person had 48 offences—24 before 13 December and 24 after 13 December; he had a bit of history—he was sentenced under the old regime for the first 24 and received six months detention, and for the other 24 offences, after 13 December, he received 18 months imprisonment, or detention as we call it in that jurisdiction.

The thing that encouraged me to come along today was to say to the people sitting behind me, the victims of crime, that times are going to change. As long as the courts continue to give increased penalties, it will do one of two things: drive down the crime rate or take the main offenders out of the action for a while. The result will be a decrease in crime.

I am probably being a defence lawyer sitting here saying that, but I am not only a defence lawyer; I am also an ex-police officer—like you, Marty. I am also a father and a grandfather. I own a business; I own property; I own cars. I do not want to see Townsville being portrayed the way it has been for the past few years, where crime has been out of control. Kids are running amok. It would not have happened in my day, in the eighties and nineties, when I was a policeman here.

Thank you for listening. That is really what I wanted to say. Hopefully, the message will get to the public. In the next three or four months I think you will see a decrease in crime.

CHAIR: In your experience as a defence lawyer—and you did allude to this—the time between the offence and when it is dealt with in court can be some months.

Mr Rennick: That is true. It is usually a bit quicker with children. The idea is to get it done quick so that either the kids are not in detention too long or their matters are dealt with, whereas adults may take a lot longer.

CHAIR: In the published submission from the Human Rights Commission they make reference to the fact that this will put strain on the court system because fewer children will be likely to plead guilty. Is that a concern, do you think, as a defence lawyer?

Mr Rennick: No, do I not think that is a concern. It is indoctrinated into them that there is no penalty so they plead guilty quite freely. I am sure the committee and people behind me have seen the bragging on social media. It has become a real problem. It is sort of like a badge of honour to commit these sorts of offences.

CHAIR: You have not seen a reluctance or change of advice in terms of legal advice of pleas or otherwise because of the new laws?

Mr Rennick: No, definitely not.

CHAIR: Pleas of guilty generally result in a discounted sentence.

Mr Rennick: It does, and it flows on from not only juveniles but adults as well. The usual rule is that if you plead guilty you only serve a third and then the remainder is supervised in the community, either on parole or on supervised orders for juveniles.

Mr BUTCHER: Thank you for coming tonight. It is good to hear from a lawyer. You mentioned two cases where the first one was given a three- to six-month sentence to a nine-month sentence and then a six-month to potentially an 18-month sentence. Just talking about good behaviour and getting out early, out of those two, do you really believe that the offences will hold them in jail for nine months and 18 months?

Mr Rennick: No.

Mr BUTCHER: When will they be back out on the streets?

Mr Rennick: About half for both of them—after 4½ months for the one on nine months. You must remember that he will be on a supervised order once he is released.

Mr BUTCHER: About half the time, you say?

Mr Rennick: About half the time, 50 per cent.

CHAIR: Which is more than half the shorter sentence.

Mr Rennick: In those days they would have had to do shorter again, so they are definitely serving longer periods in detention.

Ms MARR: Thinking of victims again, we will have two new courtrooms and another judge coming on soon. Do you think that will assist us with getting these cases through a lot quicker: one, getting the kids out of watch houses sooner; and, two, victims being able to have their cases heard sooner? Is that an advantage, do you think?

Mr Rennick: It is definitely an advantage, the more services we have to push these things through. It is a bit like a pendulum. For too long it has been going towards bleeding hearts, or the soft approach. This approach is a bit harder and it is needed. It is putting the focus back on victims of crime, and that is where it needs to be at the moment.

Mr RUSSO: Do you have much to do with the Cleveland detention centre?

Mr Rennick: Yes.

Mr RUSSO: Can you tell us what happens there?

Mr Rennick: To be honest with you, Mr Russo, in some respects it is better than where some of these children come from. The facilities are far better than some of the homes these young people live in.

Mr RUSSO: Do you know where the majority of them come from?

Mr Rennick: They come from all over North Queensland: from the missions, Mount Isa, Townsville and all surrounding areas.

Mr RUSSO: Do you know what programs they have inside the detention centre?

Mr Rennick: I know that there are educational programs. There are also programs targeted towards the Indigenous young people who are in there. There is training; there is sport. I know that a local football organisation has had a bit to do with the kids in Cleveland.

Mr FIELD: You were saying before that the youth of today have changed a little bit. In our situation, 4½ years ago a youth killed three of our family.

Mr Rennick: I know your situation.

Mr FIELD: He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, to serve 60 per cent. He is only there for six years, to be released on the anniversary of the death. At that particular point in time I said that there is something seriously wrong with the system when somebody can kill three people and only get six years jail. Times have changed. That was 4½ years ago. As we are moving forward, the sentencing is being increased. I have always said that the sentence needs to be harsh enough that it acts as a deterrent. Do you see that with these new laws? Whether they are the ones that came in on 13 December or these other 21 amendments we are putting in now with those increased sentences, do you think that will have a detrimental effect on some of these juveniles?

Mr Rennick: No. There has to be a deterrent.

Mr FIELD: That will act as deterrent?

Mr Rennick: I think it will. It will take some time. I think one of the people asked the question about a lag time. We are now just starting to catch up with that. I saw that in late March, early April and onwards. Kids are going to get more time in detention. What happened before 13 December is now all sorted out and it is only these ones where they are going to get more time.

Mr FIELD: I think to a degree most of the general public do not understand that offences committed before 13 December are still dealt with under the old laws and that will take six to 12 months to filter through.

Mr Rennick: It is starting to happen now, Russell. That is those couple of stories I told earlier. It is only going to get better for two reasons: the main players are going to be taken out for longer or they are going to go, 'Hey, we are getting hit with a bigger stick.'

Mr FIELD: I totally agree. Thank you.

CHAIR: There were media reports of kids using social media taunting the Premier and naming him. Is word getting out? Is that your experience?

Mr Rennick: They use social media all the time to brag. It is the way they get caught. The police get their phones and find their social media accounts and that is how they get identified in a lot of cases.

CHAIR: In your experience, are these young people talking about the new laws?

Mr Rennick: Definitely, yes. I think that is why they were taunting the Premier.

CHAIR: That is what I was getting at.

Mr Rennick: Exactly. They know it is coming.

Mr FIELD: If the new laws stop one kid from stealing one car and killing one person, they have done the job.

Mr Rennick: Yes. About five years ago—we are just about coming up to the anniversary—a child drove a stolen vehicle through a roundabout not far from here and killed four kids in that car. We have had others killed and others injured. It does not seem to serve as much of a deterrent, which is unfortunate.

Mr BERKMAN: As a lawyer, you obviously appreciate that in none of the circumstances we are talking about is anyone going to be locked up forever. They will be back in the community at some point. I think everyone here appreciates that. Are you concerned about the many decades of research and evidence that shows that the earlier a kid is incarcerated the more likely they are to pose a risk to the community on release and, on top of that, very relevant local data that shows that kids coming out of Cleveland have very high recidivism rates and often reoffend more seriously?

Mr Rennick: Everything you have said is correct. I am not downplaying all of those things that are very important. It probably comes back to parents doing their job better and intervention at an earlier stage. I heard you mention education with the previous speaker. All of those things are important. It has now got to the stage where we have so many victims of crime that we have to try to find a balance. Everything you have said is correct, but also you have people who are scared to death. There is a magistrate here who says to the kids every day, 'The community has had a gutful.' I could not say it any better.

I understand. As a lawyer, I do not want to see kids institutionalised and I do not want to see kids scarred for life. I do not want them to be recidivist offenders. For years—I have been in Townsville for about 38 years, either as a policeman or as a lawyer—I have seen kids go right through the system. Back in the days when they were 17 and they were adults then they progressed on to Stuart Creek instead of Cleveland. If we can do something to stop them now, hopefully these crimes make them think about what they are doing and hopefully the penalties they get will deter them from future offending.

Mr BERKMAN: The reality I am trying to get at is that the research and the data suggests that tougher penalties and more time incarcerated does not prevent that future offending. The rationale is that for the period they are in detention obviously they cannot affect other people in the community at that point, but how do you respond to the research that says that when they are released—and they will be released—they will pose an even greater risk to the community and we will end up with a less safe community overall?

Mr Rennick: I am not a psychologist and I am definitely not a child psychologist. I understand where you are coming from, but that pendulum for too long has swung the other way. We have swung too far to caring about—not caring about the kids, because we all care about the kids because none of us would be here otherwise, but they have to have a deterrent. As a father and a grandfather, I can tell you that my kids have had boundaries. That is exactly what has to happen here with these kids and hopefully they will not go back out and reoffend. I understand where you are coming from, and you are 100 per cent right, but what about the victims? What about the community? It is just weighing up where that lies. At the moment we need to get law and order back under control.

CHAIR: In terms of the evidence the member for Maiwar is alluding to, Mr Gee, the director-general of the youth justice department, gave evidence and tabled a report—a rather comprehensive metadata over 40 years report—which in layman's summary says that detention done right and programs in detention do actually have results and that some of that older research is flawed because it is under an older system of detention. Would you agree that detention done better, with 12-month intensive supervision and report post detention, is a better way of trying something new?

Mr Rennick: Most definitely. That study has been around for a long time and there are lots of people who talk about it, but there has to be something put in place to assist the victims, to stop these kids from committing crime, and what you are saying about detention done properly is correct. For years we just locked them away and did not do anything and, to be honest, we are doing that with the adults. Adults on remand cannot do courses; they cannot do anything that helps them rehabilitate until their matters are finalised. For the children in detention, on day one at Cleveland they are doing educational courses, sport, getting back into a more positive lifestyle while they are in detention. Like I said, kids are better looked after in detention than in some of their homes.

CHAIR: I am sure you would have seen as a police officer, as I did, that when 14-year-old kids wrap themselves around a tree in a stolen car—I feel like we have let them down.

Mr Rennick: Yes. I was a detective senior sergeant when I retired and I had seen everything from fatal accidents to children being killed. One of my last murder investigations was a child who had been killed by a mother. I am focused on the right outcomes for the community, the victims and the kids in the long run. However, for too long the kids have been beating me out of the courthouse.

Ms MARR: Looking at the crimes over the last 10 years—they have become more aggressive, more often and more violent—do you believe that would have continued without these changes? Do you believe that the consequences of these tougher laws against these repeat offenders will work and will stop them feeling like they can get away with it forever?

Mr Rennick: I think it is probably a little too early, but I think you are right and it will eventuate like that. We have had some horrific crimes in Townsville where women have been held up with rocks and knives to steal their cars or grab their handbags. Over my 38 years as a policeman or solicitor, I have only seen it getting worse. Hopefully, these laws will curtail that a little.

Ms MARR: I probably should have phrased the question differently. The fact that we have had these children start with opportunistic crime—it was just petty crime—but they have been getting more aggressive, more violent and more often, do you think that is because they know they have been able to get away with it for such a long time?

Mr Rennick: Definitely. If there is no deterrent, they are going to commit crimes, and that is why in time—and I think another three or four months—we will actually see a difference.

Ms MARR: I look forward to that.

Mr BUTCHER: Part of the Adult Crime, Adult Time legislation that was put through before Christmas was rolled gold early intervention programs that the government talked about. As of today, there still have not been any contracts delivered for rolled gold early intervention programs. What are your thoughts on the timing and how long it has taken? Do you support some of the rolled gold intervention programs that they are looking at doing?

Mr Rennick: I am all for it, but I think Townsville is probably the wrong place to ask that question, simply because we have had a serious rain weather event up here. We have had over three metres of rain in Townsville. We have had disasters, we have had bridges washed out, we have had a lot of problems that have taken away the little bit of time to roll those things out. I am sure they are going to get to that and I am all for it. It probably has taken longer than we may have thought, but you can put that down to some natural disasters, I think, over the wet season.

Mr BUTCHER: I am pretty sure right throughout the state has had the same problem.

Mr Rennick: Yes. I can only talk for Townsville.

Mr BUTCHER: What do you see as rolled gold intervention for youth justice and the youth system here in Townsville? What would that look like for you?

Mr Rennick: There are already a number of programs in place. I am probably not the best person to ask that because I get a bit blown away with some of the courses they have running already, especially in the Indigenous area. They have cultural facets to them, and they are good for the kids to get to respect their elders and to get back to country and learn a bit about their culture. Those sorts of things are really good. I am probably focusing on First Nations people because they make up the majority of the children in detention. Those sorts of things can get them having a bit of respect in themselves and their community and respecting their elders. I do not know if this is across the state, but we have elders sit in the Childrens Court and sometimes after a sentence they can talk to the young person and tell them why they should not be doing what they are doing. These are respected elders in the community. Those sorts of things are good. With the rolled gold courses, I am sure we can always do better.

CHAIR: As we roll out improvements in early intervention, you make the point that there are current programs. It is not like there is nothing happening in early intervention. Certainly, PCYC and all sorts of things happen along the way. Obviously, these things take time for governments to roll out and seek tenders for and people to develop programs and do improvements in that. Members opposite want it to happen yesterday, but there are things we have to go through to do that.

Mr Rennick: There are definitely a number of courses that the kids can do.

CHAIR: They certainly left us a mess to clean up.

Mr BERKMAN: I am interested in your experience with restorative justice programs, which I am sure you would be aware have been removed as an option for both offenders and, importantly, victims. We have heard some evidence from victims and victims' advocates that they are concerned that they no longer have that avenue to pursue if they want to. Can you speak to your experience of restorative justice?

Mr Rennick: Most of the time, restorative justice fails. The reason it fails is either the child goes on and reoffends and does not commit to it or the complainants change their mind and do not want to do it. I would assume, and I do not know the figures, that it is a very costly program because they need to have the complainants and the young person in the same room. In theory, it is great if you have a child who has limited history, but by the time they get to that they are on the way to committing more offences. Restorative justice is only open to some very minor offending. Unlawful use is now a significant offence, so if you steal a car it is a significant offence. There is a case of *R v IJ* that sort of says that it is probably too serious to do restorative justice, but if you have minor stealing, shoplifting or something else then, yes, I still think it has a place. I come from the days when I was in the Juvenile Aid Bureau of cautioning kids for first-time offending. That was an appropriate way to deal with kids with very limited history and minor offending, but these kids are committing so many offences that if they were adults they would be locked up for a number of years.

Mr BERKMAN: I appreciate there are limited circumstances where it is appropriate and everyone—victim and offender—has to be willing to participate in good faith. Do you think, though, it is an option that should remain available in all circumstances so that where the stars align it is available?

Mr Rennick: Young people I deal with probably do not get restorative justice programs; it is probably more the lower end offending. They could probably be dealt with by a couple of other ways. One is the cautioning by a police officer or a court ordered conference. That could be a way of doing it instead of the restorative justice model. I think for low-end things there always has to be some sort of different alternative.

CHAIR: I note that these laws do not remove the obligation on police to caution for minor first offences et cetera. All of those powers still exist and are effective.

Mr Rennick: Yes. The caution was always effective for first-time offenders.

CHAIR: I thank you for giving evidence before the committee and for answering our questions.

PASSI, Mr Genus, Miya Services

SLOAN, Mr Lachlan, Chief Executive Officer, Miya Services

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Mr Sloan: Thank you to the members of the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee for this opportunity. I am the CEO of Miya Services but I am also the CEO of a larger group called MSA Group, which includes an organisation in New Zealand called Mana Services. Our cross-jurisdictional work gives us a unique insight into the youth justice systems of both countries, highlighting the need for reform to address crime's root causes while ensuring community safety.

The bill's expansion of Adult Crime, Adult Time to include the 20 new serious offences responds to an obvious spike in crime in Queensland, yet harsher penalties risk escalating the harm. Many of our young offenders have multiple neurodiversity issues with ASD and FASD, they have trauma and in many cases intergenerational trauma, and many have undiagnosed mental health issues like PTSD with minimal psychological services available. First Nations youth—they are about 69 per cent of the serious repeat offenders, despite being nine per cent of the 10- to 17-year-old population—face detention rates that are 27 times higher than those who are non-Indigenous. Cultural disconnection and intergenerational trauma fuel this crisis, and youth service providers lack the tools to correct behaviour in limited support roles.

Evidence shows that punitive measures fail youth. Research indicates that juveniles are undeterred by severe penalties. The Australian Institute of Criminology notes a 10 to 15 per cent increase in recidivism in adult-like settings. Queensland's overcrowded facilities—where 84 per cent of solitary confinement cases involve First Nations youth, according to 2021-22 figures—only worsen the trauma.

My key takeaway for this committee would be to understand the importance of culture as a key to the solution. I can share from my New Zealand experience—I hate to be the Kiwi who comes to Australia and shares the New Zealand views; I can appreciate that probably is not as welcomed as one would hope—that in New Zealand where Maori are a large percentage of our justice issues, the emphasis is on cultural identity, which has cut youth offending by about 58 per cent from 2010 through to 2018. We have seen that prevention funding over incarceration produces outcomes. In fact, \$1 in early intervention saves about \$7 in ongoing incarceration costs and reduces offending by 30 per cent.

Our recommendation to this committee and stakeholders is that we commend the effort to safeguard the community. We understand that there are risks but we also believe that there is a more intensive need for early intervention, for cultural programs and for psychological screening. Things like 'keep them in sports, keep them out of courts' are really good initiatives that we have seen in the New Zealand market that also apply here. Our belief is that, whilst detention is a necessity, it should not be the only or ultimate goal for juvenile behavioural correction.

CHAIR: Do you appreciate that these laws are aimed at serious repeat offenders?

Mr Sloan: I do, yes.

CHAIR: I will not disagree with you at all with regard to the early intervention. The government has made commitments in that regard, but would you agree—and I think you even said it—that there is a place for detention?

Mr Sloan: Yes.

CHAIR: And that detention done well is the important thing? Would you agree with that?

Mr Sloan: Yes, detention done well.

CHAIR: There was evidence provided by—and you might have heard me before—the director-general of the youth justice department. He tabled a report of 40 years of metadata analysis which showed that intervention programs like the ones you are talking about that are done in detention for those kids who are the high-level offenders are more effective in detention than in the community. Would you dispute that evidence or do you accept that that could be the case?

Mr Sloan: To be fair, we have probably done a lot more work in New Zealand than here in Australia. We have seen the results of greatly delivered programs within the youth justice detention facilities in the New Zealand context. The key that we have seen, however, is that the relational wealth needs to extend beyond detention.

CHAIR: Say that again, sorry?

Mr Sloan: The relational wealth. One of the key principles here is: how do we engage this young person and their family for a long-term outcome? Detention is a particular point in time. It is very rare that a child goes from minor offending to a massive issue overnight; there is usually a lead-up. Without the early intervention, those things get bigger and bigger over time. Once you have those programs in youth detention, they are great because you are in a controlled environment and the child has no choice in some respects but to engage—not that it is forced upon them, but the environment creates that for them. What happens when they exit? We realise there are programs post exit that have been proposed and that have been looked to be rolled out in the community—

CHAIR: There is Staying on Track, with \$175 million.

Mr Sloan: It is a significant investment; I do not wish to diminish that. The challenge is that 12 months is not necessarily going to be the right amount of time to follow that program through to get a long-term outcome.

CHAIR: It is a lot better than 72 hours, though, wouldn't you agree?

Mr Sloan: Absolutely, I do not disagree. If we are going to look at the impact of them going into detention, whilst we may get some outcomes in detention and we may get some immediate results post detention, it is really about the long-term tail of the relationships that are developed while the child is in detention doing the programs in detention.

CHAIR: Absolutely. I would suggest that the 12 months of intense supervision and support would carry on past that date.

Mr Sloan: Absolutely.

Mr BUTCHER: Today we visited a local PCYC and we were talking about kids being involved in sport—I think you mentioned some of the programs you have that get kids involved in sport. The previous Queensland government had the program of FairPlay vouchers of \$200 per kid to get them into sport. I asked them today what it would mean to the PCYC, which runs programs like boxing, soccer and others, if that funding would end. They said it would be detrimental to youth offending in a place like Townsville. Can you share a little bit more about that involvement of getting those kids into sport and the local content around what that would mean? How many kids do you believe would utilise those vouchers to keep them in sports and keep them active, rather than going and knocking off cars?

Mr Passi: I might start by giving a quick introduction of myself. I have 18-plus years working at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre in various roles. I have worked across Closing the Gap initiatives in Townsville, partnering with JCU Hospital. I am a cultural man from the Torres Strait and am very deeply rooted in this community.

To your point about those vouchers—and I think there was a comment made by the previous speaker—the unfortunate thing in the community is that the services that do exist that come under the mainstream banner are often culturally unsafe for our young people and their parents to access. One of the things I have seen in my 18 years across working with young people at risk, our vulnerable young people, is that they continue to reoffend because they do not know anything else and there is no support. We as a community are very reactive rather than proactive. I will give you a real example.

There was a young fellow whom I looked after in Cleveland for many years, from a 10-year-old boy till he was 18, and he followed the system up to the adult system. He often reoffended because it was safer for him to be inside the centre than it was for him to be at home. As Lachlan mentioned, I think this wraparound support needs to be looked at. We talk about preventive measures all the time, and I will talk quickly about the health system.

We do not do enough work in the health system to close the gap on the preventive side. I managed a team across the PHN footprint up and down the coast. We were often being reactive when our elders would end up in hospital ready to amputate a leg. There was not enough work in the preventive space around education. I will speak to First Nations people. Education is not a priority for our people, so often literacy and numeracy is not a key thing. When we talk about language across housing—and I am the current chair of Yumba-Meta Housing, a social housing enterprise—English makes it quite hard for our people to access services. There is one story I want to share in answer to your question.

There was one young person from Aurukun who was in the detention centre. He was three years in the centre and was a great artist. Over the three years he spent in the centre, government agencies and community organisations came and bought artwork off him. By the time he was ready to be released three years later, after serving time for some serious offences, he had a big load of cash. Part of his plan for reintegration into the community was for him to go shopping. I personally took him shopping before he was released. As you can imagine, being a young person in a big city outside of Townsville

the Aurukun community, he bought the Nike hats, the Nike bag and the shoes et cetera. The unfortunate side of that was that when he was released and went back to Aurukun and walked off the plane, eight-, nine- and 10-year-olds looked at him like he was a rock star because he had all this gear. It is a system thing. These are real stories of my experience in this space.

In terms of the access to some of the funding for the sports, when we have families, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, who have three, four, five or six children, \$200 is a great boost but oftentimes the additional cost of the uniforms and the shoes et cetera leaves a lot of families out of pocket or unable to afford those sorts of things. It is a great initiative and does keep some kids in sport but not all kids, so they actually miss out.

CHAIR: On that point, there are some excellent free sporting programs around. I worked on the PCYC at Mornington Island, for example. Kids go there every day, participate in structured and unstructured sport and have a great time.

Mr Passi: In the remote communities like that where the PCYCs are active in those communities it is fantastic. Unfortunately, there is a brand in the urban—

CHAIR: The police beat?

Mr Passi: Yes.

CHAIR: I worked on Palm Island and Mornington Island and found the kids in the community to be very engaged. I think the police have done a good job of building those relationships in those communities. Just on Mr Butcher's question about vouchers for sport, it is also important that we provide free structured and unstructured activity in the communities.

Ms MARR: You have been talking about rehabilitation and early intervention programs that have been occurring over the last 10 years of the previous government and here we are with more violent, more aggressive and more crime. Do you believe we have to do something to make change? It is just not working. We did go to the election saying we were going to be tougher on crime and we were going to put victims first. We looked at early intervention, rehabilitation and detention as the whole package. This is not just about putting kids in detention; this is about the worst of the worst of those who keep reoffending. Do you believe we have to make some change? Nothing has worked for 10 years. It has just gotten worse time after time.

Mr Passi: I agree. Statements have been made about detention being better, and I think that is a key part of it. We talk about elders being an integral part of this journey.

Ms MARR: I agree.

Mr Passi: There are challenges with that such as in terms of the blue cards.

Ms MARR: I am very aware of that.

Mr Passi: Even though the elders want to be a part of this journey, they are unable to because of those sorts of challenges. I worked with many different levels of young people up to the real serious offenders. I say it is a revolving door: once they leave the youth space they end up in the adult system. There is a real need to base it or call something—we can talk about culture. When you have young people who were not raised in culture—this is my personal opinion and my journey—from a very young age and you then try to bring them back to culture, it does not fit. There is a whole heap of work. The other thing Lachlan mentioned is that it is not only the young person's journey; it is the whole family's journey. The family has to be part of that young person's journey to break the cycle, and it is a cycle.

Mr BERKMAN: We really appreciate your time this evening. Firstly, I do not want to lean too hard on the rivalry across the ditch or anything, but I am intrigued by the fact that we appear to have had to import expertise from New Zealand in this space. Does that tell us anything about where we are at in Queensland in terms of properly investing in and supporting place-based, culturally appropriate supports for at-risk kids?

Mr Sloan: It is probably worth mentioning that I was not welcomed from across the ditch because of some expertise that I was going to bring. It was probably more that we saw an opportunity to take back a lot of the success we had in the New Zealand market and apply it here. We were welcomed, which is appreciated. We are a residential care provider here in Townsville. We operate 12 residential homes for, at any given time, anywhere between 16 and 26 children ranging in complexity from family groups to highly complex young men and women.

I do not think it is like we have brought some sort of magic silver bullet from New Zealand. I think it is that an element of the cultural side of the New Zealand market is perhaps more developed than what we see here in Australia and it is just much more a part of our everyday lives in New Zealand as far as the cultural reflection is concerned. Whenever we engage in service delivery in New Zealand, Townsville

because of the community we service being predominantly Maori or Pasifika, there is always that starting point of begin with culture first and work your way through with a cultural lens to an outcome. A lot of that at the cultural level really talks to the breakdown in the family and the importance of reunifying family. We always talk about there being two clients: the child is the immediate need and needs to be protected and safeguarded from some of the other factors, but then there is the wider family group. Eventually, irrespective of what you do, the child will return to the family. If the family's needs are not addressed and/or their trauma is not addressed then ultimately it is very difficult to be successful long-term with that child.

Just going back to your earlier comments, I do not want to present like we are living in some sort of magic fairy dust mindset that there does not need to be something done. All we are saying is that there is a lot more—and I think you already know this—that goes into what happens with these children than just that particular incident or a series of incidents. We need to think about the fact that there is an element of those children such that, sure, we need to do something now and we need to safeguard the community; however, what is the long-term planning for the family and the intervention to stop the next group? As Genus rightly identified, we see the offending obviously becoming younger and younger with every subsequent decade, so what are we doing to capture them at a much earlier age, when they are much more malleable and impressionable with positive role models?

I think the misconception within the community sometimes is that they are just naughty kids. Naughty kids do not just happen; it is a series of things in their lives typically that drives them to be naughty kids. I always say to people, 'Look, if you see a young person out on the streets after 10 o'clock at night, they are typically not there by choice.' They are typically there because being on the streets and hanging out with their mates and, unfortunately, getting up to all number of things is oftentimes safer than being at home with the experience of domestic violence, trauma or sexual abuse. When we talk about Adult Crime, Adult Time and their understanding or ability to process that what they are facing at home on a daily basis is filled with trauma, that is where I see the psychological side of it is very important.

Mr Passi: To add a comment to Lachlan's point, a lot of our services, unfortunately, are nine to five services. Our young people do not switch off at five o'clock in the afternoon. There are not a lot of services out there that provide any sort of support after 5 pm. We are not talking about all night but certainly in regards to running structured programs after that time. That is something that I have spoken about for a number of years, and it has been pushed to the side.

Ms MARR: It is a very good topic to mention and it is one that is under a lot of consideration. Thank you.

Mr FIELD: I am curious as to what you were saying earlier about the youth learning English and everything else, that it is not a priority. Is that what you were saying?

Mr Passi: I will rephrase that. From my personal experience in my working life, education is the core. Not enough focus is put on education—our young people, especially in the First Nations space, going to school and having an education. That then leads to other things. I think it is more of a barrier for them. If they have low literacy and numeracy, it is not a priority for them to go to school. In my journey, I have seen so many programs set up where they are going to be offered a traineeship or a mechanics course and they walk in there with no mentoring prior to going into a program. I am not having a dig at any families, but when young people do not have a mentor in their household to guide them and teach them work ethics, to get up in the morning and go to work and all that sort of thing, there is a breakdown. Low literacy and numeracy add to the challenge for them to engage in those sorts of activities.

Mr FIELD: In a sense, there should be more emphasis put on education for the youth in the early days.

Mr Passi: Yes, 100 per cent.

Mr FIELD: Is there some way the First Nations community could encourage the youth or the grade 1, grade 2 and grade 3 children, for there to be more of an incentive to go to school to learn things and to be a better person at the end of the day?

Mr Passi: A lot of that comes back to the cost of living. That is across the whole of the country. Our families often struggle in that space. When they cannot provide food for the young people to go to school, they often do not go to school.

Mr FIELD: In a sense, education is free. Is the incentive to get the elders to get those kids to school?

Mr Passi: Yes. It is the elders supporting the families. Again, on my journey I have seen so many advisory committees and elders—we have a couple of elders in the room this evening—are asked to sit on these advisory committees. I think our elders need to have more of a say and influence in some of those decisions, rather than just an advisory body, because these are their families—they are all our families.

Mr RUSSO: Do you know anything about the Cleveland detention centre?

Mr Passi: A little bit. I was there for 18 years, so just a little bit.

Mr RUSSO: But currently?

Mr Passi: I have not kept tabs on Cleveland recently. I had not long left before they had a bit of trouble in there around some of the riots. A lot of my work colleagues were still there at that time. I spent about 10 years working on the floor and then the other eight years I went back, so I worked 10 years on the floor—

Mr RUSSO: Sorry to interrupt, but do you know anything about the current situation at the Cleveland detention centre?

Mr Passi: No.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank you for appearing today and for your evidence. We appreciate it very much. We have 25 minutes remaining. We will now move to hearing from members of the community who want to have a say.

PAGE, Ms Susan, Private capacity

CHAIR: I ask you to introduce yourself and I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Ms Page: Good evening. My name is Susan Page. My topic is about police safety and community safety. I would like to put forward a proposal as an idea for a trial for Townsville: the police get larger and bigger cars, such as Hummers. We were sitting at the lights the other day. There was a police car with its lights and sirens going. Nobody moved. My proposal is to have the police cars like Hummers—like they do in America, and they have some in Victoria—to be seen, so the police are out there and feeling safe. People can go to all these different events and see that police car there. Also, I propose there be a change to the sirens. At the moment the police, fire and ambulance all have exactly the same siren, so you do not know what is coming. You can change the siren. Leave the ambulance siren the same but change the police and fire sirens to make them more pronounced and louder. You can fix this through a social media campaign and a television campaign. This is not to make the offenders feel like they are going to be killed but an attempt to make the community feel safer. Everyone needs to feel safe. With the bigger cars travelling around—I have spoken to ex-police officers and serving police officers, and they feel the same that—

CHAIR: Ms Page, whilst I do appreciate your ideas, we do have to speak about the bill before the committee tonight which is with regard to the youth crime extra offences. Do you have some—

Ms Page: Yes, this goes on to youth crime. I think if the offenders or the young people are seeing that these cars are in the community, it may stop them from committing crime because they may feel, 'Goodness, the police are out here. They are in these bigger cars.' It is something to deter them.

CHAIR: Yes. Two of the new offences in the new tranche of laws relate to endangering a police officer whilst using a vehicle—essentially driving at police—and also impacting emergency services vehicles when using a vehicle—so ramming police vehicles et cetera—and increased penalties for that. Would you welcome that?

Ms Page: Yes, definitely. You can understand why I am talking about perhaps a larger vehicle, as it looks imposing.

CHAIR: Yes, interesting.

Ms Page: We have things happening down on the Strand. It is just a trial for Townsville. We have things happening all over. Roll them out at every function and have people see them. Drive them through shopping centres. More people would see them. It is only a trial. If the trial worked then it could be rolled out in other towns throughout Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Page. Are there any other questions to my left?

Mr BUTCHER: Thank you for coming along tonight. It takes a lot to sit there in front of a committee. The police helicopter was introduced into Townsville early last year, I think it was. Is that doing some of the things you are talking about with regard to a visual presence—the community sees it and sees things are being done; for example, chasing cars? Do you think that is working in Townsville?

Ms Page: I think it flies over my house nearly every night. As far as I am concerned, it just flies around. We go outside on the deck to watch it and we say, 'Oh, there must be something happening over there or over there.' I have not ever seen a beam of light come from the helicopter down onto the ground. It is just a whirlybird flying around. It may be helping the police on the ground, communicating to the police on the ground, but I think it sometimes just flies around. I will be honest.

CHAIR: I can tell you, they are too expensive to just fly around without a purpose.

Mr BUTCHER: The fuel bill! They would not want them just doing lappies up the main street.

CHAIR: They would be doing something, more than likely.

Ms Page: They must be. I am not being facetious in any way, shape or form. I wave to it sometimes when it is going over.

Mr FIELD: They are probably watching you do that, even without a beam of light.

CHAIR: Are there any other questions, members?

Ms Page: I feel the importance of what I put forward is to have a bigger presence, for people to see: 'Look at us. We are not the police service; we are the police force.'

Ms MARR: Considering what you are saying and hearing why you want these present, is it true to say that this has come to your thinking because the community has been feeling so unsafe for such a long time?

Ms Page: Yes, definitely. I did not come here to speak without first speaking to ex-police officers, serving police officers and people in the community, and they have all told me that police officers should—they have a belt around their waist with all these things to protect them, but they are driving around in a Kia. I am not being rude, but what they have around their waist should be given to them in the form of a car.

Mr FIELD: I do understand. I have spoken to officers at our local police station on exactly that. There are only certain vehicles that they can get in fully kitted up. They do struggle with getting their full kit into certain makes and models of vehicles, and I think the ones that are comfortable probably do not really suit a pursuit operation.

Ms Page: I can show you photos on my phone from when I looked at Hummers in America and in Australia—they have a few in Victoria—and the police officers seem to love them. They seem to really like them.

Mr FIELD: I would love to have one too, but, in saying that, you could get four or five other vehicles for the cost of one Hummer.

Ms Page: I do not propose that every car be a Hummer. I propose that there probably would be four in Townsville as a trial and they could be here, there and over there and down in a different direction, and that way they could be rolled out. They can go to the school fete, they can go to something at Riverway, they can go everywhere and people will see them. The community need to feel safe and I think these vehicles will go towards that.

CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Page, for coming along and speaking to the committee tonight.

JUDAH, Mr Israel, Private capacity

CHAIR: Welcome, Pastor. I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Mr Judah: My name is Pastor Israel Judah. I have been a minister here in Townsville for almost 25 years. This reminds me of dealing with MP Anita Phillips way back in the day, going into Indigenous communities and those hotspots where crime was also a feature back then. I do not know how long ago Anita Phillips was in office, but we are probably talking about 15 to 20 years ago. She was the member for Thuringowa.

Ms MARR: She was the first female member for Thuringowa.

Mr Judah: I am an Indigenous pastor. I am also a missionary and go overseas to Third World countries, mainly Africa, India and the Asia-Pacific. I am here as a First Nations leader, a father and a psychology student at JCU majoring in mental, sexual and intergenerational trauma. I am a community worker and a public servant for almost 20 years here in Townsville. I was born and raised in Townsville. My heart is in this place. I have only just returned after 12 years. I have been here for 12 months or so.

The crime rate in the city cost Anastacia Palaszczuk her seat. The voice of victims started here in Townsville. It cost the former premier 10 months of her seat and, ultimately, cost Labor a landslide loss. We have Mr Crisafulli in charge. I had the pleasure of meeting him a few months ago here in Townsville when he was going out for a jog. I met him in the lobby of the Grand Chancellor. I approached him as Pastor Israel Judah. I said, 'Mr Premier, I am Pastor Israel Judah.' He greeted me very warmly. I said, 'I have a real issue with the crime rates in the city, particularly from a First Nations perspective.' Like a lot of other people have mentioned, our prisons and incarceration rates are highly Indigenous. The reports—and I spoke to Mr Baillie earlier—highly publicise that First Nations kids are at the forefront of this youth crime wave. When I spoke to Mr Crisafulli about the situation that we are facing, I mentioned a few things that he asked me to relay to Mr Baillie.

I have a personal experience of breaking the cycle. I spent seven years wrongfully incarcerated over the past 12 years so I know the system pretty well. I have been a paralegal myself and an honorary member of the Bar Association. You have to be really smart to be an honorary member of the Bar Association, for those lawyers out there. I have lived experience as a minister working on the ground, Townsville born and raised, and breaking decades of recidivism, sexual abuse, mental paraplegia, substance addiction, homelessness, poverty, unemployment, identity crisis.

We are a very young nation of 200-odd years, which means our great-grandfathers suffered colonialism. From a First Nations perspective, to achieve something that we have never achieved we have to do something that we have never done before. The further you go into Northern Australia, the more Indigenous communities you get. The more Indigenous communities you get, the more Indigenous incarceration you get. It is a generational thing, from my perspective.

From a lived experience, successfully overcoming these generational crime patterns stems from undealt with and underlying issues within each offender's family structure. We are going into the homes of those families—I am anyway, since being back. I am talking about intergenerational mental trauma, sexual abuse trauma and institutional trauma. I am a psychology student and a victim of institutional child sex abuse and have come out the other side. Until I got counselling from a clinical psychologist, I was not aware, until after 12 sessions with a professional, how there are layers and layers of trauma that one has to deal with, not to mention what you inherit from your parents and from your grandparents. It inspired me so much that I became a psychology student myself. I lost my gender identity. I was a transgender woman up until two years ago. That trauma was so significant and so profound that, when I went through my own personal trauma counselling, from a personal perspective I realised how much healing and stuff had been buried deep within the subconscious. It is so traumatising that the body has its way of trying to get you to forget it.

These are the underlying situations we go into with each offender's circumstances when it comes to crime management. The deeper the trauma, the bigger the problem. I am not speaking only from my experience. If you have come from a traumatic background or have a traumatic family where you have recidivism, you have generations of the same families doing the same crime. Especially here in Townsville, you are getting granddad, dad and child incarcerated. You have to look at a way of stopping that generational cycle. This is a generational thing. It is not going to happen overnight. I believe paying all this money to all these services and all these programs is just a bandaid solution. If you are going to try to do something—and I believe Mr Crisafulli has said that if he does not provide an outcome he will resign. Didn't he say that in one of his slogans?

If we provide specialised, culturally appropriate counselling and therapy to each individual inmate, offender or someone who is on parole, through rehabilitation and probation, as part of the judicial process and deal with the issues at home, individual by individual, family by family, community

by community, then we will win it over a generation. That is speaking from experience. We need to provide real-life solutions that will heal the spirit, the soul and the body. A lot of the talk here tonight has not had anything to do with the healing of the soul.

From my own personal experience, going through the whole process, with follow-up sessions as part of their rehabilitation, probation and parole processes, mentoring programs—I want to keep this short and sweet because of time—will direct and encourage offenders and their family members to choose and achieve better outcomes, especially those high-risk ones and the ones who are committing these horrendous crimes. We are getting teenagers now going into people's houses with knives and committing crimes that 20 or 30 years ago we never thought of. Young offenders are committing horrendous crimes and a lot of it is due to substance abuse, sexual abuse, mental abuse or institutional trauma and it is inherited as well. They see what mum and dad used to do. They see what granddad and grandma used to do. Before you know it, there is a generational thing, not to mention an identity crisis.

CHAIR: I really hate to wind you up, Pastor Judah, but maybe you could give a quick summary?

Mr Judah: I have sent this through as a written submission as well. We need a holistic approach with therapy as part of their rehab. We are trying to stop these crimes from being committed. Get those criminals off the streets, yes, but in that process get them rehabilitated because sooner or later they are going to come back onto the streets.

CHAIR: Do you welcome detention with a purpose, with education, programs—

Mr Judah: With healing, a holistic approach.

CHAIR:—and 12 months support being offered through the Staying on Track program post release as well to ensure they are integrated properly back into the community?

Mr Judah: It depends on the type of therapy because it is a generational thing. When you see the kids in youth detention, dad is in jail and granddad is in jail. The therapy has to go into the home, into the family structure, and deal with the family holistically.

CHAIR: The Staying on Track funding is being released and we encourage organisations to apply. If you know of organisations or if you are part of an organisation that could deliver the stuff you are talking about and that would be effective for that Staying on Track program, I encourage you to look at it and put in an application.

Mr Judah: Who do I contact for the Staying on Track program?

CHAIR: I can get that information to you. If you leave your contact details, I will definitely get that to you. There being no questions from members, I will have to wind up, I am sorry. I appreciate you also putting that in writing for our consideration. Thanks for appearing tonight.

Mr Judah: Thank you.

CHAIR: Has anyone who came along to speak tonight not yet spoken? Does anyone who has spoken feel as though they were not quite heard because of the time? If not, that concludes the public hearing. Thank you to everyone who participated today. I really thank the residents of Townsville. We have been up here twice in relation to these laws and had a strong community turnout as we work towards addressing these issues in your community. I thank the local members, Adam Baillie and Janelle Poole, for coming along tonight to support this hearing. Thank you to our Hansard reporter, Bonnie. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 7.23 pm.