

Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime, Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025

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About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: <

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>

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Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQA+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQA+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: <salvationarmy.org.au/about-us>





Executive summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Queensland Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee (the Committee) in relation to the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025.

The Salvation Army provides a range of services that support children, young people and families across Australia. These services include housing and homelessness, education, employment and training, social and community activities, drug and alcohol services, and youth justice programs. Further information about some of our programs supporting young people at risk of, or in contact with the criminal justice system, can be found in **Appendix A**.

The Salvation Army holds the firm view that responses to children and young people who offend, must be compassionate, holistic, and prioritise safeguarding.

We identify the critical need for all people, including children, young people, and families, to live in communities which are safe and supportive. Whilst we recognise the damaging impacts of offending, we also acknowledge that by transforming how we respond to young people who offend, we have the unique opportunity to ensure that every child and young person feels supported and empowered to thrive.

This submission responds to the Bill and emphasises the need to:

- Ensure all responses address the individual needs of children and young people, and do no further harm;
- Embed, respect and uphold the rights of children and young people in all legislative and administrative justice processes; and
- Shift the focus of interventions targeting children and young people who offend, toward support and rehabilitation rather than punishment and incarceration.

At the heart of our submission is the need to prioritise the unique needs, rights and best interests of children and young people when designing, developing and delivering justice responses.

The Salvation Army has made **three** recommendations for the Committee to consider. A summary of these recommendations follows.



Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

1.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime Adult Time) Bill 2025 not be passed.

Recommendation 2

2.2 The Salvation Army recommends that Queensland Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.

Recommendation 3

3.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the Queensland Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth crime that are holistic, community-led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should be sustainable, and leverage existing, quality, youth service infrastructure to expand support capability.

1 Aligning justice responses with the best interests of children and young people

- 1.1 The Salvation Army welcomes the Queensland Government's commitment to community safety and acknowledges community concern about crime rates in Queensland. We also maintain grave concerns for rising popular sentiment that governments across Australia need to get 'tough on crime'. We caution that the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime Adult Time) Amendment Bill 2025 (Adult Crime Adult Time Amendment Bill) carries significant risks for communities, families, children and the young people of Queensland.
- 1.2 Consistent with the intent of the Queensland Government, The Salvation Army maintains that every person deserves to feel safe in their community. While recognising the damaging impact of crime on victims, survivors and communities, our experience tells us that incarcerating young people does not effectively reduce crime.¹
- 1.3 Children and young people who encounter justice system responses often present with a range of complexities, and we know that many have been victims themselves. This suggests, and evidence tells us, that children experiencing the greatest disadvantage are disproportionately impacted by hardline justice responses that exacerbates disadvantage.²
- 1.2 We continue to advocate against policies that stipulate penalties analogous to those administered to adults. Interventions for adults will not work for young people who require individualised and developmentally appropriate responses. Such measures undermine and erode youth justice rehabilitation efforts and contradict the principles of safeguarding children.³
- 1.3 We are deeply concerned that increasing the available sentences for children, across a range of offences under the Adult Crime Adult Time Amendment Bill will be counterproductive and traumatic for children and young people, and increases the risk of:
 - Creating a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing youth offending; and
 - Causing further harm to children and young people across Queensland.

Recommendation 1

- 1.4 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Making Queensland Safer (Adult Crime Adult Time) Bill 2025 not be passed.**

¹ Peak Care Queensland. (2023). *Youth Crime – Get Smarter, Not Tougher*. <https://peakcare.org.au/get-smarter-not-tougher/>.

² Malvaso, C., Day, A., Cale, J., Hackett, L., Delfabbro, P., & Ross, S. (2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Among Young People in the Youth Justice System. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651_adverse_childhood_experiences_and_trauma_among_young_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso.short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20cut%20E2%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.

³ Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Cornwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56. [https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53.](https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53)

2 Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years

- 2.1 Most children and young people who offend engage in relatively low-level conduct. Often behaviours are impulsive, opportunistic, and driven by peer pressure with most children and young people desisting over time.⁴ Children who engage in more serious or persistent harmful conduct form a minority and have generally been exposed to many more risk factors.⁵
- 1.5 Consistent with the advocacy of the Raise the Age campaign, which The Salvation Army is a supporter, we maintain that the minimum age of criminal responsibility must be raised to 14 years, without exception.⁶ We recognise that the incarceration and removal of children from support networks is damaging. Children who face increasing periods of time connected to the justice system risk becoming entrenched. Holding children under the age of 14 criminally accountable is untenable for the following reasons:
- **Childhood Development and Criminal Culpability.** Developmental evidence demonstrates that children under 14 cannot have developed sufficient cognitive capacity to assume criminal culpability.⁷ This affects several skills including impulsivity, cognitive reasoning, and consequential thinking, all of which can be linked with offending behaviour.
 - **Reducing Recidivism.** Children's engagement with the justice system is a risk factor for future offending.⁸ In particular, contact with the justice system before the age of 15 is a strong predictor of later offending.⁹ This experience is magnified where children are incarcerated alongside adults or justice system responses mirror those provided to adults.
 - **Protecting the Rights of Children and Young People.** All levels of Australian government are responsible for ensuring legislative and administrative processes be implemented such that they respect and uphold the rights of children and young people, based on international guidelines.¹⁰

Recommendation 2

- 2.2 The Salvation Army recommends that Queensland Government raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022-23). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/latest-release>.

⁵ Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Comwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

⁶ Raise the Age. (Undated). *About the Campaign*. <https://raisetheage.org.au/campaign>.

⁷ Cunneen, C. (2017). Arguments for Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility. *The University of New South Wales, Research Report*.

⁸ Shirley, K. (2017). The Cautious Approach: Police Cautions and the Impact on Youth Reoffending. *Crime Statistics Agency*. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-09/apo-nid108381.pdf>.

⁹ Weatherburn, D. & Ramsey, S. (2018). Offending over the Life Course: Contact with the NSW Criminal Justice System Between Age 10 and Age 33. *Crime and Justice Statistics*. No. 132. NSW: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/BB/2018-Report-Offending-over-the-life-course-BB132.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). (2007). *General Comment No. 24, replacing General Comment No. 10: Children's Rights in Juvenile Justice*, CRC/C/GC/24.

3 Reconsidering the Government's approach to young people who offend

- 3.1 Many experiences of the criminal justice system and incarceration are inherently traumatising, whether for victims of crime, alleged perpetrators or for those convicted of a crime. The Salvation Army urges the Queensland Government, and governments across Australia, to reconsider punishment-oriented approaches and policies responding to young people who offend, shifting the focus of interventions instead, toward support and rehabilitation.
- 3.2 We identify a critical need for responses to be underpinned by strengths-based principles and grounded in trauma-informed frameworks, including:
- Responsiveness to the impacts of trauma;
 - Safety and transparency;
 - Healthy relationships which prioritise choice, collaboration and mutuality; and
 - Empowerment and capacity building.
- 3.3 Responses must be focused on addressing the root causes, risk factors and drivers of crime under prevention and early intervention models. There is also a need to support children who engage in harmful or offending behaviour to develop a better understanding about the impact of their behaviours on others, through education and diversionary responses.
- 3.4 Frontline justice responses, police interventions, and incarceration remain a reactionary response to children and young people who offend. Well-timed and high-value, prevention, early intervention and diversionary programs are crucial to address the needs of young people who offend holistically, reduce recidivism and in turn, increase community safety. These approaches are also preferable to ensure a reduction of the costs that more intensive and invasive approaches, such as youth justice supervision and incarceration, have on children and the community.¹¹
- 3.5 We support strategic investment into integrated and evidence-based services that meet the unique needs of children and young people who are at risk of, or who offend. It is critical that these services are well-equipped and resourced to deliver quality support.

Recommendation 3

- 3.6 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Queensland Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth crime that are holistic, community-led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should be sustainable, and leverage existing, quality, youth service infrastructure to expand support capability.**

¹¹ Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). (2007). Cost Effectiveness of Early Intervention. *AICrime Reduction Matters*. No. 54. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/crm054.pdf>.



4 Conclusion

- 4.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide a written submission.
- 4.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory

April 2025

Appendix A The Salvation Army's Youth Services

The Salvation Army's Independent Schools, Queensland

The Salvation Army's Independent Schools are special assistance schools located in North Brisbane and Ipswich areas. The schools work with young people aged between 14 and 18 years who have disengaged from mainstream education due to individual, relational, or social factors (such as trauma, mental ill-health or family breakdown). The Salvation Army has data that demonstrates how we to support young people to re-commence their education.

The Salvation Army's education model approaches students' experiences holistically and delivers innovative, flexible and engaging learning. Interpersonal relationships are key to successful learning and supporting young people struggling with adversities such as mental and physical health, and legal matters. These relationships include those between the students and school staff (teachers, teacher aides and youth workers) and other important support people within the young person's life.

The Salvation Army's Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS), Victoria

The Salvation Army works alongside Victoria's Department of Justice to deliver YJCSS. The program provides intensive support and services for young people who are already involved with youth justice. YJCSS sees youth justice workers and community service workers operate in partnership to holistically support the young person. YJCSS recognises that young people in the justice system represent those experiencing the greatest disadvantage and supports to:

1. Reduce the severity, frequency, and rates of reoffending and prevent them from becoming entrenched in the justice system;
2. Facilitate the transition of young people in justice systems return to the community;
3. Prepare young people for adulthood by developing independence, resilience, and social connectedness; and
4. Develop the capacity of young people for meaningful educational and economic participation.

YJCSS also delivers integrated transitional housing support via the Youth Justice Housing Pathways Initiative. This initiative is an extension of the wraparound support available under YJCSS, which offers transitional housing properties and housing outreach support.

The Salvation Army's Youth Justice Group Conferencing, Victoria

The Salvation Army works alongside Victoria's Department of Justice to deliver Group Conferencing. The program is based on restorative principles and offers a problem-solving approach to offending. Group conferencing occurs between a young person who has offended and the victim, balancing the needs of young people and the community through dialogue.

The program provides a community-based rehabilitation intervention within the Children's Court during pre-sentencing. It aims to:

1. Divert the young person from intensive court-imposed sentences by raising the young person's understanding of the impact of their offending and engaging with the young person's support network;
2. Reduce the frequency and seriousness of reoffending;
3. Increase voluntary victim engagement and satisfaction with justice systems; and
4. Integrate young people back into the community following the Group Conference.

The program requires the young person's and victim's consent to engage in the process and allows both parties the opportunity to tell their story and be heard. At the conclusion of the conference, a negotiated outcome plan is agreed, which contains fair and reasonable steps to promote the support and rehabilitation of the young person.

Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle, Victoria

The Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle (CCYD) initiative is an educational opportunity that assists young people to develop insight and emotional understanding into their behaviour and its consequences. Born out of our success in delivering restorative group conferencing,¹² this Salvation Army program provides space for children to identify the impacts of offending and take responsibility for this behaviour.

Informed consent must be provided by the child or young person to engage, and they must be afforded appropriate legal representation. The process is overseen and delivered via an independent Salvation Army convenor and during the conference, a collaborative diversion plan is discussed amongst the parties and collectively agreed upon. Reoffending is less frequent and less serious amongst children and young people who have participated in the program.

¹² Victoria State Government. (2022). *Diversion: Keeping Young People Out of Youth Justice to Lead Successful Lives*. <https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2022-03/Youth-diversion-statement.pdf>.



The Salvation Army's Tools for the Trade Plus, Victoria

The Tools for the Trade Plus program is a Salvation Army initiative in Victoria that targets young people experiencing disadvantage.

The education and work readiness program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people disconnected from education and work, and at risk of offending.

The program collaborates with local police, who engage in positive and meaningful ways to develop positive, healthy relationships with young people, families and communities throughout the 10-week course.

The Salvation Army's Partnership with Government Services, New South Wales

The Salvation Army operates several initiatives in partnership with government services to ensure wraparound support for at-risk young people.

Casework Support Program (CSP)

The CSP is an initiative operating in both regional NSW (Central Coast) and metropolitan Sydney. The program involves specialised casework provided by The Salvation Army and collaborates with Youth Justice, targeting young people in contact with the justice system. CSP is designed to address criminogenic risk factors such as financial hardship, school disengagement, access to employment, or mental ill-health.

The program aims to reduce recidivism and reintegrate young people who are under youth justice supervision orders back into the community, by supporting them to gain the support, knowledge, and skills they need to engage pro-socially.

Shifting Gears Program

The Shifting Gears Program is an initiative which operates in partnership with The Salvation Army and Youth Justice. Shifting Gears originated out of a significant need for driver education programs that target the overwhelming number of car theft and related offences amongst young people in rural and regional NSW.

The education program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people and provides support surrounding driving, awareness, and making positive choices.