

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee

REGARDING

Youth Justice Act 1992 to:

- introduce a Boot Camp Order as an option instead of detention for young offenders; and
- remove the option of court referred youth justice conferencing

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Background of our Organisation

Queensland Youth Services (QYS) has been operating in the Townsville region for over 34 years. We operate on the principle that all youth have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to be assisted without judgement or discrimination, and have access to physical and emotional safety. Our organisation is committed to social justice, cultural diversity, equity and accountability.

Over 40% of our clients are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders. Our programs primarily assist homeless youth, youth who have disengaged or at risk of disengaging from education, and young parents. One program (Townsville Youth Housing and Reintegration Service) specifically works with young people exiting detention, focusing on reintegrating them back into society through the provision of support, brokerage and accommodation.

QYS recently received a grant for an early intervention program for first time offenders, or for siblings at risk of becoming offenders. We hope to trial our strategies and program, monitoring the effectiveness of intervention over a 6 month period.

Impact of the Legislation regarding “Boot Camps and Youth Conferencing

The Townsville region, has a high juvenile crime rate, with over 4 cars a night being stolen. The Northern District had a 66% rise in crime, with youth as young as 10 years of age participating in criminal activity, car theft and property offences. The detention centre is at full capacity, therefore youth sentencing is placed on hold. With no diversionary measures from detention, the youth are re-offending whilst on remand.

QYS supports the principle of *youth accountability*, and ensuing youth understand that there are consequences for their actions. Which is why, the *removal of the option for youth conferencing is not supported*. Having youth face the victims of their crime, and to hear how their actions have impacted on the lives of those that they stole from, increases accountability. I would recommend that hearing victims statements needs to be part of the one month residential program.

Many of the youth who have participating in criminal activity, are also users of volatile substances (glue, chroming, inhalants, petrol and deodorant sniffing). In the Townsville region there is no Youth Detox or rehabilitation centre, therefore I would recommend that the residential facility include medical staff who are trained to work with substance users going through de-toxication. The *inclusion of substance use programs is supported*.

The increase in juvenile criminal activity can be attributed to intergenerational disadvantage, poverty, passive welfare dependence, poor parental supervision, substance misuse, under education, domestic and family violence and familial criminality. Therefore each Boot camp needs to be *flexible in meeting the needs of individuals* and the risk

factors to be addressed through appropriate interventions. For many Indigenous youth, the generational loss of cultural identity, and the understanding of cultural lore, has lowered self-esteem and created feelings of not belonging and despair. QYS have been fortunate to partner with “Red Dust Healing” to deliver a program that empowers Indigenous Youth to embrace their culture, and *commit to principals of respect for self, respect for elders, and respect for others*. In 2012 we delivered components of this program to 60 youth, and have observed significant improvement in attendance at secondary school. Continued *volunteering mentoring* is a key component of the “Red Dust Healing” program.

The Bill mentions that the “Boot Camp” will have a component of *community reparation*. I would foresee that the reparation, come in the form of *structured volunteer work*, conducted during the 2 month supervision order. The volunteer work should also be supported with *accredited vocational training*. Recently QYS submitted a *business case for a community based education centre*. The business case highlights that in Townsville alone there is approximately 1 900 youth between the age of 13 to 17 who are not attending school (2010 census data). A proportion of these youth would also be the youth participating in juvenile crime. The Business case also focused on using volunteer work, as hands on approach to learning, supported with vocational training, literacy and numeracy. In our practice and observations, young offenders struggle with mainstream, structured education.

Many of the youth who exit the Detention centres do not re-engage with school, they have commenced vocational training while in detention, and have little support or alternative to complete their training once they are released.

The name “Boot Camp” conjures images of youth in army boots, being yelled at, and still not thinking for themselves. QYS operates on the belief that youth need to be empowered to make the right decisions, to problem solve, and to utilise strength-based strategies. I support the principle that *strenuous physical activity* can push your body to achieve beyond your own expectations, and developing healthy bodies will be a benefit to recovering from use of substances. However this type of activity needs to be supported with *counselling and debriefing*. The activity could also be physical work, such as Jackaroo, land conservation, construction etc. The *discipline* of following a schedule, participating in chores, and *understanding boundaries* creates productive citizens and employees.

Research dictates that punishment is less effective compared to using discipline. The Boot Camp should endeavour to develop self-discipline in the young people.

Educating parents and guardians on positive parenting strategies and techniques to reinforce the interventions at the Boot Camp will effectively assist the young people to

choose a productive life without crime. One of the biggest challenges facing young people when they exit detention is that they return to the environment that enabled their criminality, an environment without structure and boundaries.

Sustaining the change has to come from within, *empowering youth* to take control of their life needs to be a focus of the boot camp.

QYS believes that a key factor to the success of the one month *residential* will also be its *isolation from communities and towns*. The remoteness becomes the virtual walls. This will also create an opportunity to incorporate *bush survival skills*, and the inner strength to use your own resources. The program can be formalised through using the Duke of Edinburgh awards.

The costs of implementing structured programs will be significantly less than accommodation of youth in the confines of a detention centre. There is potential to *build partnerships* with property owners for residential experiences, and community organisations for the supervised activities. QYS is interested in tendering for our region once this opens up. We will have gained experience from our early intervention program, with some data being available for review in June 2013.