

Townsville Youth Crossroads**A community based intervention proposal for youth crime issues in Townsville, North Queensland****Introduction**

1.1 Townsville Youth Crossroads (TYC) is a group of dedicated professional and community based individuals who have come together to develop a long term solution based on community justice systems. This collaborative strategy reflects the legislature, the courts, tribunals, dispute resolution practices, the legal profession, and the recognition of community response. The membership of TYC is diverse, with current Youth Justice Group members, mediation experts, criminologists, and respected Elders and others of the community. TYC is offering fiscally sound, alternately funded, data driven, community led youth justice policies to break the cycle of criminal activity, avert prison expenditure and make our communities safer.

1.2 The first step in this intervention strategy is the implementation of an Indigenous Youth Murri Court, (IYMC) through appointing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders as Magistrates Court Justice of the Peace. Their role is to divert young people away from detention and treat their behaviour as a combination of social issues, rather than just a criminal issue. IYMC seeks to integrate the administration of Traditional Lore more closely within the confines prescribed by Western Law. This approach is not new, but a principle that integrates both therapeutic and preventative law into one system. This will bring self-determination and accountability to the local and regional Indigenous communities within our region.

1.3 This innovative approach seeks to offer tangible solutions to youth crime. Using the IYMC as a starting point, the community sanctioned approach will change the direction of these young people, through Townsville Youth Crossroads acting as an advocacy and referral hub:

- By engaging currently available agencies through referrals
- By assigning mentors trained in mediation and mental health support
- By providing peer to peer support system, Big Brother, Big Sister
- By offering other interventions identified through appropriate assessment and consideration of circumstances by the IYMC

1.4 Townsville Youth Crossroads (TYC) is proposing a holistic approach, acknowledging factors that impact on the individual from birth to adulthood. Each young person will be individually screened by trained Elders, considering their current living situation and family structures. This collaborative approach can promote both compliance and behavioural change, using evidence based resources.

1.5 By starting a two year trial of the Indigenous Youth Murri Court, within the next few months, positive indicators like less youth crime will be the key performance indicators. TYC will act as the pivotal assessment and referral point at entry into the court system. The next step is to engage family support programs targeting the adults and improve collaboration with existing programs and agencies. The program will integrate different programs and foster family commitment to the plan.

1.6 Through our recent communications with external providers and industry partners, there has already been collaborative engagement, identifying funding opportunities in this space. A dovetailing of industry sectors through employment, and onsite training opportunities were proposed. A list of available partner programs and agencies is attached.

Proposed Interventions

2.1 The Townsville Community Justice Group (TCJG) in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island community members of Townsville, propose the introduction of an Indigenous Youth Murri Court (IYMC) in the Townsville district in line with the following structure.

2.2 The court would be presided over by a panel of two Indigenous Justices of the Peace. They would be supported by two Elders, the Police Prosecution Officer, the young offender's legal representative and the young offender's parent / family.

Townsville Youth Crossroads

- 2.3 The IYMC would best suit entry level youth offenders who are attending court for minor offences, summary offences, and youth that both the police and youth lawyer believe will benefit from the IYMC Townsville Youth Crossroads program.
- 2.4 This model of IYMC would also strengthen the 'Local Solutions to Address Youth Crime' recommendations, that is, **3. Support parents**, **8. Support school attendance**, and **13. Strengthen mentor programs**.
- 2.5 Mentors (Big Brother, Big Sister) would be paid for their time while actively supporting the youth, who are registered in the program, as they are the keystone to this concept of court-community collaboration.
- 2.6 The aim of the IYMC is to make suitable orders for the young offender to attend and engage in appropriate programs. There are existing programs being under-utilised in our region. TYC will be the hub for the young offender to get support and guidance about their individual plans.
- 2.7 The initial step is a 12 week term with progress reports given to the court every month. This 12 week term will be endorsed in an effective culturally sensitive model. It will identify where the behavioural change will be most likely and connect with the agencies currently funded to engage with the youth.
- 2.8 Should the young offender decide not to engage with the programs, they would be returned to the higher court.
- 2.9 The offender would be sentenced by the IYMC on successful completion of the ordered programs.
- 2.10 The current Queensland structure of the Adult Murri Court is sufficient to support and manage the proposed IYMC including all forms, reports, evaluation process etc with a few adjustments, most notably the agency referral relationships.

Applying Intervention Strategies - "The Worst Injustice is Token Justice." Karl McKenzie

3.1 It is recommended that the Indigenous Youth Murri Court model be implemented as a matter of urgency. This will begin the strategy of a series of tailored interventions, enabling young people to turn their lives around. Many of these interventions are already in place, TYC will foster strong agency relationships.

- **A cohort of mentors** (18+ years of age) one that is a Big Brother or Sister role. These mentors will be drawn from carefully screened Indigenous and community members. They will be trained by a culturally capable and appropriate provider, in mediation, justice and mental health. They will shadow the youth throughout the journey, from first appearance through to completion of the interventions, to employment and improved self-reliance. This will become embedded community practice over time.
- The appropriate use of admonishment by the Elders who are present at the court, to reinforce the seriousness of the offences of the individual before the court. This would then be backed up with encouragement and advice from the mentors and Elders to ensure compliance with the intervention strategies and tailored programs.
- The **court mandated** use of targeted support initiatives based on individual family need using existing support services. Family involvement and investment is another key intervention often left to the individuals. This is crucial for long term success for the individual and their future.

3.2 The strategies suggested above have a low impact on legislative and economic considerations for government. Costings below show savings for 20 youth not in detention, with collaborative use of current funded programs, utilising support persons who are a part of the local community.

3.3 The government is urged to consider a trial of the IYMC in this increasingly difficult arena of community justice. The combination of the mentorship and the individual assessment process allows the IYMC and Townsville Youth Crossroads to develop a combined court-community approach, that fundamentally changes the current Indigenous youth justice sector for the better.

FLOW CHART

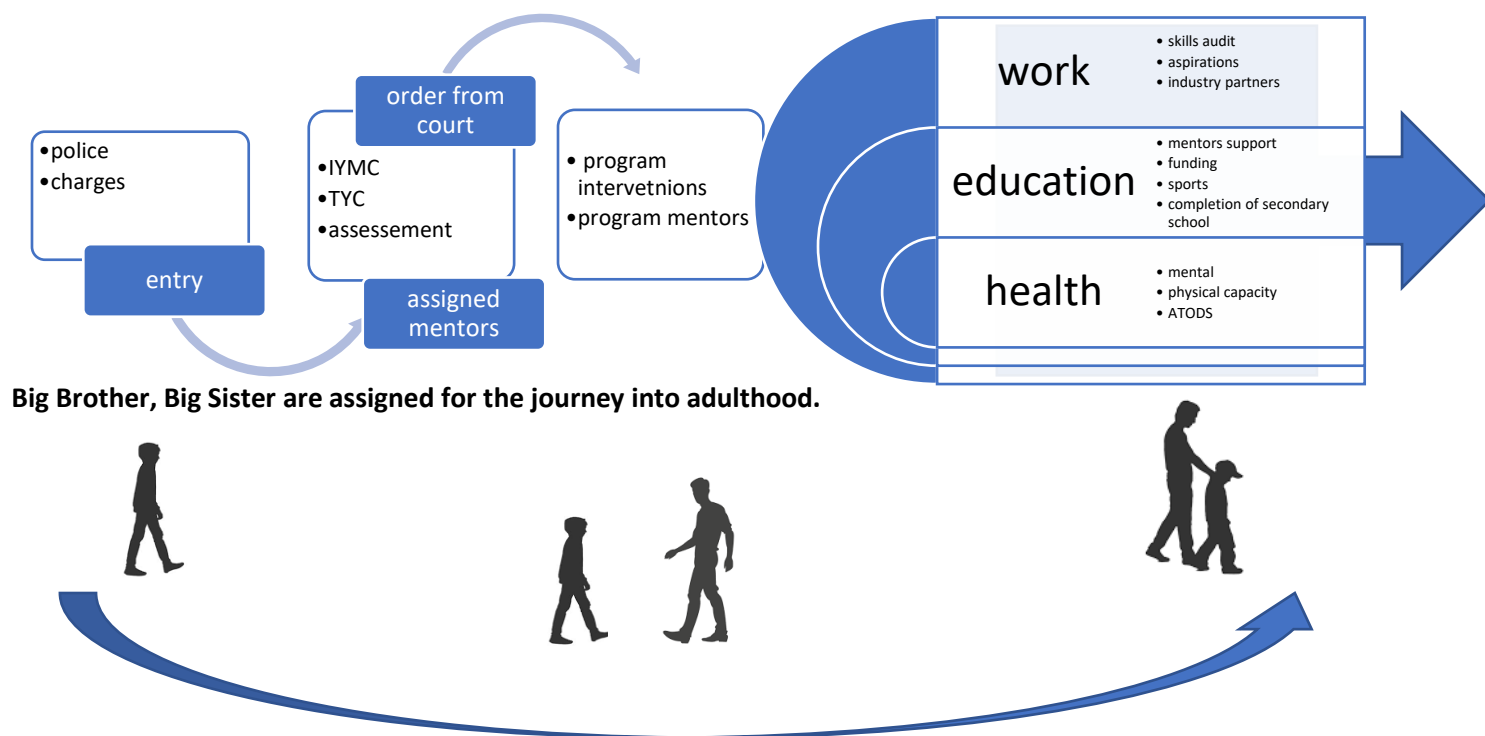




Figure 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020, Youth detention population in Australia 2019, AIHW, Canberra.

Budget costings per annum, where 20 youth are diverted from detention. Costing derived from latest annual reports and ancillary government statistics.

Group	Cost	Per unit costs	Cost TYC intervention	Total Savings / annum
Magistrate per annum	318 000			
Bail house Townsville Per annum	3,300 0000			
Detention centre per Individual per annum, including infrastructure maintenance	287 000 @1 pax (x20) 5,740 000			
Magistrate Court Justice Peace		30 000 x 4	120 000	
Training to JP, cultural mediation, mental health first aide.		5 000 x 40	200 000	
Admin/referral		35 000 x 2	70 000	
Assessment professional		80 000 x 3	240 000	
Youth mentor		25 000 x 20	500 000	
Community mentor		25 000 x 20	500 000	
Totals	\$ 9 645 000		\$ 1 630 000	\$ 8 015 000

Community organisations and NGO's already engaged on the ground across the community.

Townsville Community Information Centre

- https://www.cictownsville.com.au/search/page/2/?geodir_search=1&stype=gd_place&s=Youth&snear&sgeo_lat&sgeo_lon

• My Community Directory

- <https://www.mycommunitydirectory.com.au/Search/Directory?what=Youth%20&where=&service=0&category=0&location=13314&radius=50&council=68&state=QLD&PageNo=1>

• Project Booyah - <https://projectbooyah.com.au/>

• Gr8Motive - [Gr8motive | HOME | Indigenous Community Services NFP](#) - [CONTACT | Get in Touch Gr8Motive](#) - [OUR PARTNERS | Gr8motive](#)

• Department of Youth Justice – ATSI Young People – On Country Programs - <https://www.youthjustice.qld.gov.au/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-young-people/country-programs>

• Qld Government – Youth Justice Community Programs and Services - <https://www.qld.gov.au/law/sentencing-prisons-and-probation/young-offenders-and-the-justice-system/youth-justice-community-programs-and-services>

Ancillary services in Townsville currently providing interventions:

- TAIHS Lighthouse: Youth After Hours Diversionary Service
- TAIHS Youth Shelter
- TAIHS Youth Support Services
- Reconnect Program, QYS
- Transition to Success, YJ
- On Country Program, Gr8motive
- Townsville Fire Community Youth Program
- Outreach and Residential Care, ITEC Youth (coming soon)
- Proud Warrior
- Cultural Camps, Garbutt Magpies

References

- Strategic Business Case: Alleviating pressures in youth detention (March 2019)
- Report on Youth Justice (2018) – Bob Atkinson
- Working Together Changing the Story: Youth Justice Strategy 2019-23
- Concurrent development of the Youth Justice Strategy and Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan (2019)
- Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system, House of Representatives
- Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Commonwealth Parliament (2011)
- Addressing the Increase in Remand in Queensland's Adult and Youth Justice Populations, Dr Karen Gelb,
- Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney-General (2017) Youth Justice Review and Strategy, Penny Armytage and Professor James Ogloff AM, Victorian Government (July 2017)
- Report of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory (November 2017)
- Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria, Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria (March 2018).
- Government of Queensland (2018) Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023, Parliament House, Brisbane
- Government of Queensland (2020) Youth Justice annual summary statistics: 2014-15 to 2018-19, Parliament House, Brisbane
- Halsey, M.(2018) Child Victims as Adult Offenders: Foregrounding the Criminogenic Effect of (Unresolved) Trauma and Loss. British Journal of Criminology. 58: 17–36
- Van Aaken B. (2020) Getting Out – Going Straight? The narratives of men and women leaving prison: an intersectional analysis. Doctoral Thesis for the University of New South Wales, Sydney
- Widom C.S (1989) CHILD ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND ADULT BEHAVIOR
- Research Design and Findings on Criminality, Violence, and Child Abuse First published: July 1989