

POSITIVE FAMILY PARENTING NAVIGATION SERVICES

“FAMILIES WHO PLAY TOGETHER STAY TOGETHER”

The Positive Family Parenting Navigation Services: A Discussion Document on a Strategic Response to Address Indigenous Youth Crime in Mount Isa and Surrounding Remote Regions

Note: This document reflects the views of the Positive Family Parenting Navigation Services (the Service) only. It should be noted this document is not a solutions-based narrative but leverages from the Service's experience of working within the Indigenous social and disability sectors in Mount Isa City and surrounding regions. The information supplied in this document should be viewed as aiding the State Government in the redesign of youth justice legislation and policy outlay.

1.0. Introduction

1. This document represents the Service's business case to address the high rates of Indigenous youth crime and detention within the Mount Isa and surrounding remote regions. As a registered provider under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the Service has a significant number of Indigenous young people as clients currently engaged in the child safety and youth justice sectors who hold an NDIS Plan
2. The Service has adopted a strategic framework constructed on and around a robust planning process, efficient coordination, is collective-based, and aligned with all current youth at risk legislation and policy outlay.
3. The Service will utilise its speciality in working within and across Indigenous families and communities. The focus will be to assist the population to overcome the deficits and barriers in their lives through the delivery of culturally specific social supports and daily activities. The proposed framework the Service is focused on places innovation at the core of change, the actions are designed to be solutions-based, and the outcomes are measurable when looking to close the gaps of disparity.

2.0. Intention of the Service

1. The Service's intention is to leverage from its professional expertise and '*on the ground*' experience in working with all Indigenous young people. A special emphasis will be to engage those presenting at the negative, earliest point of entry into the police, child safety, and youth justice systems.
2. The Service is focused on assisting its external stakeholders to collectively reduce local youth crime levels. The Service will keep its focus on those Indigenous youth who are more prevalent and over-represented in current Queensland youth crime statistics.

3.0. The Major Issue of Youth Crime in Queensland

3. The rising crime rate in Queensland amongst young people, especially Indigenous youth, has created a major rethink in the way the State Government is looking to approach this issue. While the strategies being planned and implemented intend to reduce youth crime at various levels of the police and youth justice sectors, more solutions need to be found to overturn this negative pattern.
4. There is evidence to suggest the most repetitive Indigenous young offenders have a history of care and protection in both the child safety and youth justice systems. The current system does not effectively deal with their needs thus many tend to move on to offend as adults after the age of 17-18

years. This in turn places greater strains on the adult justice sector funds, services, and resources to reverse the negative trend.

5. The Service is aligned with State government's priorities for youth crime by setting its lens on those 10 % of recidivist young people who continue to engage on a regular basis in high risk criminal acts and behaviours. This is more so for Indigenous youth who remain disengaged, isolated, and marginalised living on the fringes of society.

4.0. The Impact of Youth Crime in Mount Isa City

6. Over the past 12 months, Police statistics has shown an increase in youth crime in Mount Isa City. The escalating rates of juvenile crime, particularly amongst that of Indigenous young people aged 18 years and under, shows no signs of decreasing.
7. The indicators driving the rise in Indigenous youth crime are interconnected with poverty and deprivation. Underlying factors such as substandard housing, domestic violence, welfare dependency, low health and social status, and poor food security and lack of access to critical support systems and networks are contributory factors associated with the high Indigenous crime rate in the City.
8. A large number of Indigenous youth aged 17 years and under fail to attend school leading to a large truancy rate. During daylight hours the large presence of Indigenous young people of school age frequenting the central business district remains an area of concern for authorities.
9. Recently, Mount Isa residents had the chance to have their say on proposed new laws to reduce youth crime when the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee held public hearings in the City. A large amount of information was provided to assist and aide the Committee in its collection and collation of information of local youth issues.

5.0. What Does the Service Identify Are the Local Issues

10. From its experience and observations of Indigenous youth participating in high risk behaviours in the City, there is a distinct lack of leadership and supervision within the family dynamic, fractured households, social *'idleness'*; and poverty as the underlying major issues. This, allied with poor parenting, high truancy, and peer pressure, also contribute towards the problems.
11. Sending the young offender back to family and community to heal and rehabilitate may not necessarily be productive as many of these families and communities will most likely be dysfunctional. The social environment is generally underpinned by poverty and deprivation that generate high risk factors that continue to escalate the more they remain unattended.
12. The majority of youth services in Mount Isa City are generally well funded however, there remains a fracture between services to effectively communicate and consult in the shared allocation of funds, the proper use of existing resources, the cross pollination of knowledge and skills base, file information sharing, and the practice of sharing synergies.
13. Services remain firmly entrenched in working in their designated sectors i.e. health, social, education, justice, child safety. While there is discussions between the entities, these are usually confined to large organisations who receive the bulk of State and Federal funds, and government departments leaving smaller services feeling insignificant.
14. Communication and consultation between the Government and Non-Government Organisation Sectors remains static.
15. There are a wealth of smaller providers and parties – both Indigenous and non Indigenous – working within the social and youth sectors who remain isolated from the key discussions but nonetheless produce a positive and effective product. These parties need to be formally identified as they provide critical knowledge of Indigenous families and communities.

6.0. Indigenous-Led Solutions to Address Indigenous Youth Crime

16. Engaging elders, Indigenous practitioners, cultural experts, and Indigenous people of note with experience of working within Indigenous families and communities, is vital towards addressing the wider determinants associated with Indigenous youth offending. Such expertise needs to be relevant and devoid of politics, family and community issues, and personal problems. Strengthening the Indigenous response to be strategic, as opposed to being reactive, will ensure an all inclusive and collective response to address issues.
17. Indigenous families and communities need to be properly engaged in a way they are made comfortable in the conversations and their voices heard. Coordination of such forum needs to be

managed to ensure everyone has a voice, their voices are heard, proper solutions identified, and personal issues are avoided.

18. The connection between culture and country is intrinsic in the healing model. Delivery of culturally strong responses should reflect a truly authentic experience of connecting Indigenous people to the lands of their origin, and traditional values unique to their communities.
19. More attention needs to be focused on those programs and services currently operating on country. Whether these are Indigenous or non Indigenous should not be a point of discussion. The focus is there are skills-based programs operating remotely, healing centres that connect culture with country, cattle stations, bush camps, and country retreats that need to be formally recognised and supported by funders.
20. In the previous point, funders must ensure there is a real value in these services and programs achieving measurable outcomes to ensure tax payer monies is invested in initiatives that provide solid solutions to aide in the planning and sustainability of current and future initiatives.
21. As the Traditional Owners of the Land, the Kalkadoon Nation needs to '*get its house*' in order to play a leadership role in the design of an Indigenous-led strategic response to address the current rates of Indigenous youth offending and incarceration.
22. Building more detention centres is not the solution. Innovation – not containment – should form the framework. Healing-based facilities and Indigenous-led approaches need to be investigated, and a proper investment strategy designed to explore this proposal further. Aligning a new policy framework should form the basis of effective communication and consultation between the major funders and stakeholders.

7.0. Pre and Post Remand – An Alternative Approach Requiring State Intervention

23. The remand of a young Indigenous person poses a very severe issue. Many youths have to wait for a placement which means they may be placed into a secure youth justice facility in the interim. There they mix with other young offenders who have been sentenced. Sometimes they wait for months without a resolution or plan for them.
24. Young Indigenous offenders entering and exiting detention are generally sent to family members who are just as destitute in their parenting roles, or locations and communities that are deprived and isolated to critical support systems and networks. Major remedial action to correct this issue needs to be undertaken to change the current '*revolving door*' system.
25. The recidivist nature of the current youth remand model requires immediate attention as to what works best to address the high nature, prevalence, and drivers causing the high rates of Indigenous youth crime. One strategy is to actively engage with Magistrates in the provision of information on those services and culturally appropriate and authentic Indigenous programs that address the need and symptoms at there point of origins.
26. A full Intensive pre and post intervention strategy while in remand, and the post release period of the young person transitioning back into society, is needed. As noted in the previous point, sending an Indigenous young person back into dysfunctional families and communities without the proper care and supervision contributes to re-offending and incarceration. This gap needs to be bridged PRIOR to the release.
27. One solution the Service identifies as potentially bridging the divide at the post release stage is sending Indigenous young people into a program operating on country for a period of 7-8 weeks to transition them into family and community. During this period it is envisioned the individual will gain knowledge on basic life skills to aide them when returning to family and community. Again, this process can be determined by a pre Court Order directing the individual to attend.

8.0. The Intersection Between Young Indigenous Offenders and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

28. As a registered NDIS service provider, the Service currently works with young Indigenous people engaged in the youth justice and child safety systems and holding an NDIS Plan. By having an NDIS Plan, the Plan its elf has crucial information towards addressing the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the individual and setting and achieving their life goals and aspirations.
29. The opportunity exists for young Indigenous people holding an NDIS Plan to access a variety of psychological, services, health and social assessment systems, and occupational therapists in the provision of information that best articulates their recovery journey. These early intervention strategies will provide a unique key source of information for practitioners to identify the genesis behind individual's negative behavioural problems.

30. The NDIS is a solid scheme for Indigenous young people to rehabilitate and heal given the proper planning and coordination however, in the climate of today, delivering daily supports and activities to this population continues to be fraught with a multitude of issues and barriers relating to:
- The lack of family structure resulting in sub-standard monitoring and poor reintegration.
 - Government departments working in isolation.
 - Policy deficiencies that need urgent review.
 - The transitioning of the young offender from detention back into the community with no proper coordination, poor communication and consultation pre and post release, and the proper supports not being available upon their release.
 - Poor leadership within families and communities to maintain remedial actions.

9.0. The Functioning Role of the Mount Isa City Council

- 31. As local Government, the Mount Isa City Council have a strong leadership role to in leading a localised strategic response to address youth crime within the City boundaries.
- 32. The Council has limited funds and resources to fully fund a youth initiative however, this doesn't mean the Council shirks its duties, rather it strengthens its position to leverage off Federal and State Governments through effective communication and consultation it already has with the general public.
- 33. The Council has a key role in the planning and designing of strategies and actions that are strengths-based (as opposed to the deficit-thinking model), Solutions must be carefully thought out, be achievable within both the long and short terms, have measurable outcomes, and benefits the whole of the community.
- 34. The Council and local Member for Parliament are major players in the articulation of information and resources to identify better ways to utilise these to address localised problems.

10.0. Appropriately Designed and Operated After Hours Dedicated Youth Service

- 35. Young people who remain a high risk to society operate 24-7 without time limits. The majority of Government and Non-Government organisation services working with young people operate within traditional work day periods commencing 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Much of the youth offending behaviours occurs outside of these hours.
- 36. To address this negative trend, there needs to be a well planned, strategic response to design an appropriate youth orientated support service dedicated to address the 'after hours' problem. Replicates from past endeavours can be sourced as a valuable base of evidence in order to identify both the strengths and areas for improvements of a proposed after hours dedicated youth service. Addressing the high incidence of youth offending remains a 24 hour job.

11.0. Auditing of Existing Mount Isa City Youth Services

- 37. A full audit of existing services and programs currently receiving State Government funding needs to focus on what that particular service's core business case is, evaluative tools to measure success – or identifies gaps in service provision – and whether tax payers funds are utilised properly.
- 38. An internal audit from independent sources will ensure a fair process in the evaluation.