

Youth Justice Reform Select Committee inquiry into youth justice reform in Queensland

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My son has been involved in youth crime since he started using drugs at age 11. During his early teenage years my son would often run away from home where other adults would harbour him to try and “help the poor boy”. He lived in a decent home – I work in social services, have good boundaries and am involved in church life, although he lived in two homes as his mum and I are not together. He would get access to drugs away from home – almost everything he could get his hands on. I spent hours either driving around the streets looking for him or call the Police who had no power to bring him home if they identified him as “safe”. Because of the drugs, dealing with him started to become violent. Throughout this time I sought the support of social workers, school chaplains, guidance officers, psychologists and specialised programs such as Reconnect, ASHA, Noffs Street University which he engaged in. His behaviour fluctuated but ultimately the crime continued. Before too long at his mother’s house and at my house, especially while using drugs such as ice, we would be the victim of assaults and willful damages. There was also an incident where he threatened a member of the public with an axe. The assaults on his parents involved physical bashing, punching, swearing, abuse, bashing cars, punching holes in the wall. He also pulled a street knife on his sister. This type of behaviour also spilled out at school where he would threaten teachers and other students. Involvement in mainstream schooling could not be maintained and he moved through about 4 different schools. There were at least two youth justice sessions for the violent offences when we followed through with reports to Police – at both he would show remorse and then be back to it months later. I remember during the second youth justice process (after being assaulted and having to get medical treatment) I demanded the process put some kind of good behaviour order in place for my protection. They said this was not possible. I argued with Police and the Youth Justice people till I was blue in the face about him getting no consequences for his behaviour, I wrote to the Police Minister, Youth Justice Minister, local MP’s, the Premier, Child Safety (He was putting himself and everyone else at risk of harm and they were useless) and Health (He was constantly being admitted to hospital due to drug use and being violent, then being released a few hours later). I reported all of this to the authorities numerous times.

Support Services including drug services were engaged throughout this time. They were helpful, but did not prevent further crime. Eventually I just had to stop contact with him when he was 16 for my own protection and a Youth Justice Education Program saw some improvements in him and we reconnected after. But after graduating and getting a job while 17, he was back on drugs. Lost his job and then got done for having drugs and having a knife in his car. As he was already going to rehab again, he pleaded his case with the court and got off these charges with a warning. The court noted that not a single incident has been placed on record against his name, which I find astonishing considering the police warnings, police reports, youth justice processes, my endless pleading to put consequences in place – just as I had tried to do at home. This is why the statistics on youth crime are incorrect. 1) Offences occur and youth justice or the courts ultimately don’t record the offences so it doesn’t reflect the actual level of crime in the community 2) There is no longitudinal follow up on whether the programs are effective at all levels - youth justice, support services, etc. Improvement may occur short term but deteriorate long term. Now 18, he’s back on ice. Was out with some 16 year olds a couple of months ago and although he made it home (with drug induced psychosis) his car didn’t - his 16 year old mates took it for a joy ride and drove it into a pole. He’s also been giving 16 year olds drugs. This week he walked out of detox after being in there for only 3 or 4 hours. Involuntary services don’t exist in Queensland no matter how much the

person is at risk to themselves or others. We have had around 10 years of poor social policy and broken systems in Queensland – our education system is failing boys, child safety is useless, health services are poorly designed, crime is out of control. It not only creates an unsafe community, but it impacts families. Every member of my family is impacted by my son’s behaviour. Youth Justice doesn't work long term. Any reform needs to occur not with the "experts" (who have had their shot and failed) but needs to be co-designed with those who have lived experience - the Victims, Parents, Community, etc. Long term evaluation needs to occur and the system needs to be held accountable for failure. The community is fed up with this issue. My recommendations are:1) Identify boys off the rails in our schools and offer them non-mainstream alternatives early. From early primary school - high school is far too late.2) Improve Child Safety so it actually addresses children at risk of harm. Their responses have been poor for far too long.3) Make harbouring a runaway child an offence. Too many kids run away from home to another parent's house where they get access to drugs and are exposed to crime. Parents have no power to return them home above the age of about 14. Make it an offence for a child to runaway to another adult, without permission (with the exception of a child protection issue). 4) Involuntary drug rehab for minors at risk of death, exposure to sexual abuse or severe harm due to drug use. Have better drug responses to youth. Harm minimisation lowers the bar and just fuels youth crime. Have a broader range of interventions for youth involved in drugs. 5) We need a Department for Men. Boys/men have poor education levels, high rates of crime, violence, homelessness, suicide. The total neglect of boys and men while these issues escalate is insane. 6) Introduce a community development grants program targeting youth through local community organisations. We need local bespoke responses to youth crime. Increase innovative community-led responses to youth crime.7) Rethink the entire Youth Justice system. It doesn't work and is poorly evaluated. At the very least good behaviour orders for youth should be introduced. Youth justice continues to fail and yet we do the same things over and over. Thanks for listening to my experience.