

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

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Committee Secretary
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via email: youthjustice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Youth Justice Reform Inquiry

Horse Whispering Youth Program (HWYP) welcomes this opportunity to provide a submission to the Youth Justice Reform Inquiry. We support the Inquiry's goals to examine ongoing reforms to the youth justice system and support for victims of crime.

HWYP is an equine-assisted charity dedicated to supporting at-risk youth and families in South-eastern Qld. Since 2011, our charity has been making a positive impact on troubled youth in the Logan, Scenic Rim, Gold Coast and Tweed regions. Harnessing over a decade of collaboration with both state and private services, we deliver innovative, cost-effective, early intervention programs designed to make a lasting impact.

Early Intervention

The evidence is clear, incarcerating children is not keeping our communities safe. Nor is it helping children to rehabilitate and live a functional life. Queensland detains more children each day than any other state and has the worst recidivist rate in Australia.¹ 95 per cent of young people that go to Cleveland Detention Centre allegedly reoffend within the year of their release.²

The earlier a child is exposed to the justice system the more likely they are to reoffend.³ To keep the community safe, the Queensland Government should remove children younger than 14 from the justice system and invest in services and supports.

Early intervention programs in Queensland support children and make communities safer for everyone.⁴ Unfortunately, the Queensland Government is underfunding community led programs focused on prevention and diversion.⁵

¹ Productivity Commission 2023, *Report on Government Services 2023*, Part F, section 17: released 25 January 2023, Table 17A.26.

² Queensland Government. (2022). *Response to Question on Notice, No. 859*.
<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tableoffice/questionsanswers/2022/859-2022.pdf>

³ Sentencing Advisory Council (2016). *Reoffending by children and young people in Victoria* (p. xiii).
https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending_by_Children_and_Young_People_in_Victoria.pdf

⁴ Justice Reform Initiative. (2023). *Alternatives to Incarceration in Queensland*. (pp.18 – 27).
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/justicereforminitiative/pages/337/attachments/original/1685393777/JRI_Alternatives_QLD_FULL_REPORT.pdf?1685393777

⁵ Queensland Council of Social Service. (2023). *QCROSS: Queensland budget analysis 2023-2024, Investing in Queensland's Youth Services*. <https://www.qcross.org.au/publication/state-budget-2023-2024-our-analysis/>

Over the past 5 school terms, 156 youth were referred to our 10-week early intervention program. Services referring youth were surveyed on observation of youth behaviour pre & post intervention. Results show the following improvements in outcomes for youth:

- 48% improved engagement with educational opportunities & positive social interactions
- 29% improved emotional regulation (ability to manage & calm own emotional energy)
- 38% improved trust & connection (ability to reach out to & build relationship with others)
- 42% improved self-confidence (ability to assert oneself ie: not aggressive or passive)
- 50% improved behaviour (ability to control own behaviour & manage anger, anxiety, stress)

Survey response rate = 68% (92 of 136 surveys returned)

Respond to root causes

Children in the justice system have often experienced trauma, including being victim/survivors of domestic and family violence. There are high rates of disability and neurological conditions among children in the justice system. Many children in the justice system are from communities characterised by poverty and entrenched disadvantage.^{6, 7} Currently, the needs of children and the root causes of problematic behaviour are not adequately addressed.

First Nations led solutions

The Inquiry must explore First Nations designed and led initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to reduce overrepresentation in the justice system and to ensure Queensland meets its Closing the Gap justice targets.

Children out of watch houses

Watch houses are not appropriate for any young person. The Queensland Government must urgently get children out of watch houses, reduce the number of young people in detention and fund an alternative to the justice system for all children younger than 14. The alternative must be evidence based, trauma informed, culturally safe, therapeutic and non-punitive.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry.

Kind regards,



Glenys Woolcock
President

Horse Whispering Youth Program



W: <https://hwyp.com.au/>

⁶ Queensland Government. (2023). *Youth Justice Summary Census 2022*.

https://desbt.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0019/17083/census-summary-custody.pdf

⁷ McArthur, M., Suomi, A., & Kendall, B. (2021). Review of the service system and implementation requirements for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Australian Capital Territory (p. 7). *Australian National University*.

https://www.justice.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2072364/Raising-the-Age-Final-Report.PDF