

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

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Youth Justice Reform Inquiry

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit recommendations to the youth justice reform inquiry. Music programs, backed by substantial evidence of their benefits for adolescents, are increasingly incorporated into community and detention centre programming worldwide. A variety of participatory music programs, including songwriting/rap workshops, music technology courses, group improvisation sessions, instrumental lessons, choirs, and Balinese Gamelan ensembles, have been shown to be particularly powerful in youth justice settings, across settings, countries, cultures, and languages. Music has been shown to:

- Foster high levels of youth participation and engagement, enhancing program retention and completion.¹
- Support positive identity and social development, including forming meaningful and pro-social connections with program facilitators.²
- Reduce antisocial behaviours, cognitions, and peer associations, while also strengthening protective factors such as re-engagement with family, community, and education.³

This submission responds particularly to **term of reference #2C** focused on effective programs to address youth offending. Holding qualifications in music education and criminology, and with over a decade of experience investigating the benefits of music for youth, I am co-founder of the *International Music and Justice Inquiry Network (IMAJIN)* comprising over 100 scholars, musicians, justice system representatives and staff, and ex-incarcerated individuals across 20 countries. I also lead the national *Access to Music for Inclusion and Equity (AMIE)* think tank which conducts high impact research to influence public understandings and drive policy outcomes that secure musical opportunities for children and young people regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. My colleagues through IMAJIN and AMIE and I would be happy to provide further evidence or information to the committee if requested.

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¹ Caulfield, L., Jolly, A., Simpson, E., & Devi-McGleish, Y. (2020). 'It's not just music, it helps you from inside': Mixing methods to understand the impact of music on young people in contact with the criminal justice system. *Youth Justice*, 22(1), 67-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473225420938151>; Parker, A., Marturano, N., O'Connor, G., & Meek, R. (2018). Marginalised youth, criminal justice and performing arts: Young people's experiences of music-making. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(8), 1061-1076. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1445205>

² Barrett, M. S., & Baker, J. S. (2012). Developing learning identities in and through music: A case study of the outcomes of a music programme in an Australian juvenile detention centre. *International Journal of Music Education*, 30(3), 244-259.

³ Clennon, O. D. (2013). How effective are music interventions in the criminal youth justice sector? *Community music making and its potential for community and social transformation: A pilot study. Journal of Music, Technology and Education*, 6(1), 103-130. https://doi.org/10.1386/jmte.6.1.103_1; Faulkner, S., Wood, L., Ivery, P., & Donovan, R. (2012). It is not just music and rhythm . . . Evaluation of a drumming-based intervention to improve the social wellbeing of alienated youth. *Children Australia*, 37(1), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.5>

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Background: The potentials of music for justice-involved youth

Entrenched inequity, high rates of reoffending, and acute concerns for children's wellbeing highlight the imperative for a pro-active approach that prioritises diversion and primary prevention to keep young Queenslanders out of detention centres and support them to become fulfilled, healthy, and socially engaged citizens. Long recognised as an important resource for adolescent self-regulation, identity development, social connectedness and wellbeing,⁴ music has been welcomed by community youth organisations and detention centres around the world as a powerful medium for transformative change. This submission outlines the mounting evidence base for the benefits of music programs as community-based primary prevention strategies or as supports for youth in detention.

Music as a primary prevention strategy

The concept of primary prevention can be best understood through a public health model that seeks to prevent problems in communities before they occur.⁵ Through this paradigm, a strengths-based approach can equip youth with practical, social, and vocational skills, strengthening the protective factors against offending, and addressing risk factors with aims to promote healthy development, resilience, and social connection. Music has been seen as an effective means to reach disengaged youth, providing a safe space for young people to explore who they are, assume agency in decision-making, experiment and take risks safely. Furthermore, group music-making in particular fosters pro-social skills as young people are required to negotiate, listen to each other, and work together with others.⁶ Recent research suggests that community-based music programs reduce youth offending and antisocial behaviours including aggression, self-harm, and violence, also changing young peoples' perceptions of offending lifestyles.⁷ This aligns with evidence that primary prevention programs are most effective when tailored to individual communities to provide youth with meaningful and relevant activities. Music programs can provide young people with vital experiences of success, persistence, learning, and collaboration, forging new cultural and community connections.⁸ In the Australian context, music programs with young people at risk of coming into contact with the youth justice system have been particularly effective in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with positive results impacting individuals, families and even transcending to the community at large⁹.

⁴ Bartleet, B. L. & Higgins, L. (Eds.) (2018). *The Oxford handbook of community music*. Oxford; Tarrant, M., North, A. C., & Hargreaves, D. J. (2002). Youth identity and music. *Musical identities*, 13, 134-150

⁵ Fagan, A. A., Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Farrington, D. P. (2018). Community-based prevention of youth behavioral health problems. *Oxford Scholarship Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190299217.003.0001>; Middleton, J. (2013). Prevention of crime and violence: Evidence-based crime prevention—a public health imperative: a review paper. *The Lancet*, 382, S74. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(13\)62499-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(13)62499-x)

⁶ Bartleet, B-L, Kallio, A.A., Roveda, A. & Spence, J. (2023). *Creative pathways for juvenile justice An overview of current evidence and literature*. Creative Arts Research Institute, Griffith University; Faulkner, S., Wood, L., Ivery, P., & Donovan, R. (2012). It is not just music and rhythm . . . Evaluation of a drumming-based intervention to improve the social wellbeing of alienated youth. *Children Australia*, 37(1), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2012.5>

⁷ Bone, J. K., Bu, F. . . & Fancourt, D. (2022). Arts and cultural engagement, reportedly antisocial or criminalized behaviors, and potential mediators in two longitudinal cohorts of adolescents. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 51(8), 1463-1482; Parker, A., Marturano, N., O'Connor, G., & Meek, R. (2018). Marginalised youth, criminal justice and performing arts: young people's experiences of music-making. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 21(8), 1061-1076.

⁸ Homel, R., Freiberg, K., Branch, S., & Le, H. (2015). Preventing the onset of youth offending: the impact of the pathways to prevention project on child behaviour and wellbeing. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 481(481), 1-10. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi481>

⁹ Wright, P., Down, B., Rankin, S., Haseman, B., White, M., & Davies, C. (2016). Big hART: Art, equity and community for people, place, and policy. Murdoch University. https://www.bighart.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/BighART_Evaluation_ArtEquityCommunity.pdf

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Music for youth in detention

Young people are among the most avid music consumers and makers in society. Teenagers in particular are at formative stages of identity development, and often turn to music in navigating rapid biological, psychological and emotional change. The creative potentials of music programs such as rap/songwriting workshops in youth justice settings have been seen to provide young people with important resources to reflect on past experiences and behaviours, find new ways to express anger and process frustration, and to re-narrate themselves as creative rather than destructive beings. Music programs have also been noted to play an important role in reshaping young peoples' relationships with formal education¹⁰ and adults in positions of authority, particularly if programs are responsive to young peoples' diverse cultures, needs, and abilities.¹¹ In a recent analysis of empirical, international studies on music in custodial settings, I identified numerous common benefits for youth across geographical region, language, culture, and gender. Music was noted to provide incarcerated youth with a creative outlet to process trauma; build confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of accomplishment; learn professional skills; develop a sense of autonomy; improve self-control and emotional regulation; enhance capacity to engage in and persist with learning; generate a sense of hope and goals for the future; and establish trust between peers and authority figures.¹² Music programs are often one of the few spaces wherein youth in detention can be creative and express themselves freely, enabling them to process hardships, reckon with the impacts of their offending, and explore who they might be becoming. These understandings of music as part of an identity development process make it imperative that youth can make their own musical "decisions instead of being compliant"¹³ when participating in music programs, even if these seemingly contradicts institutional or social values. Through a partnership approach focused on creativity and collaboration, young people can be guided to lead meaningful and lasting change in their own lives, bettering their chances upon release.

As punitive and risk-oriented youth justice approaches are increasingly recognised as ineffective (with sentencing increasing the frequency and severity of offending¹⁴), music programs may support more child-centred initiatives that strive to keep children out of custody, assist youth to address their offending behaviour, foster connections to culture and community, and empower young people to change their own stories. It is in line with this evidence base that I make the following recommendations for consideration:

¹⁰ Barrett, M. S., & Baker, J. S. (2012). Developing learning identities in and through music: A case study of the outcomes of a music programme in an Australian juvenile detention centre. *International Journal of Music Education*, 30(3), 244-259.

¹¹ Kallio, A.A. (accepted 29.10.23). Shaping musical affordances for incarcerated youth. *Music Education Research*; Henley, J. (2014). Musical learning and desistance from crime: The case of a 'Good vibrations' Javanese gamelan project with young offenders. *Music Education Research*, 17(1), 103-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2014.933791>

¹² Kallio, A.A. (2022) The transformative potentials and politics of music in juvenile justice settings. *Music Education Research* 24(4), 405-416.

¹³ Cain, T., and Cursley, J. (2017) You Need to Find the Slot Within the Person Where the Music Fits: A Social Awareness and Development Pedagogy in a Young Offender Institution. In *Teaching Music Differently Case Studies of Inspiring Pedagogies*, (pp. 55-71). Routledge.

¹⁴ Motz, R. T., Barnes, J. C. ... & Moffitt, T. E. (2020). Does contact with the justice system deter or promote future delinquency? Results from a longitudinal study of British adolescent twins. *Criminology*, 58(2), 307-335.

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Recommendation 1

Engage music to support youth as part of primary prevention strategies

Leverage existing infrastructure and government funding across multiple portfolios (e.g., Communities, Health and Mental Health, Multicultural Affairs) to ensure that all young people have access to culturally responsive, participatory community music programs.

- Secure multi-year funding for existing or new music programs offered by not-for-profit and other community organisations to facilitate long-term program planning and consistent delivery for youth.
- Fund professional development opportunities for music, culture, youth justice and community health professionals to inform the design of culturally appropriate, trauma-informed music programs that can best meet the needs of young people and to inform relevant stakeholders of the potentials for music to reach disengaged youth and support broader primary prevention strategies in communities.

An example of a music program that has been highly successful in addressing youth offending is Big hART's work in the Pilbara region of Western Australia (see Bartleet et al. 2023 attached to this submission).

Recommendation 2

Implement music programs to support youth in detention

Support positive youth identity and social development and enhance wellbeing through participatory, culturally responsive, and creative music-making initiatives for all young people in detention centres.

- Ensure that all youth in detention have access to regular, participatory group music programs. For music programs to be most effective, research suggests that access to music should not be based on privileges associated with behaviour.¹⁵
- Employ music facilitators (through existing organisations or via youth detention centres directly) who can engage youth in culturally responsive music-making activities.

Banksia Beats, at Banksia Hill Detention Centre Western Australia, is a highly successful program that supports youth to develop music skills and record music across a variety of styles. Young people are afforded freedom and agency in musical decisions, and work together to bring their musical ideas to fruition.

¹⁵ Kallio, A.A. (accepted 29.10.23). Shaping musical affordances for incarcerated youth. *Music Education Research*; Barrett, M. S., & Baker, J. S. (2012). Developing learning identities in and through music: A case study of the outcomes of a music programme in an Australian juvenile detention centre. *International Journal of Music Education*, 30(3), 244-259.