

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

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Youth On-Country Rehabilitation Proposal

Paul Jordan
General Manager
International Vi
ABN 785 230 68103

1 Tassel Pl
Twin Waters
QLD 4564

www.internationalvi.com

0402 138 343

1. Introduction:

The management of the rehabilitation of young offenders in Queensland is a significant community issue and it is imperative that we respond with a holistic and forward-thinking approach, as incarcerating young offenders only ensures a greater chance of their longer-term life of crime and imprisonment. This does not benefit the community nor the government and certainly not our children.

This proposed alternative will serve as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change by focusing on the rehabilitation, education, life-skills development of young offenders, and then the on-going life support to help grow their lives as good members of society who give back to their communities.

2. The Problem

- a. Many young offenders face detention because there are no other options open to the court.
- b. There are many offenders currently in watchhouses as they wait for a space in detention centers.
- c. There are offenders that are given bail, as there are no spaces in detention centers, and they return to a dysfunctional home environment that can reinforce criminal activities.
- d. Youth offenders held in remand facilities awaiting court appearances undergo no rehabilitation and then may be released on time served back into their dysfunctional environments.
- e. The rates of recidivism suggest that the current process of remand and detention just isn't working.
- f. Many youth offenders lack credible role models or an environment that instills life values.
- g. Detention presents a safer option to remaining in a dysfunctional / violent home environment for some young offenders.
- h. Many young offenders lack the understanding of consequences.
- i. Early diversion to an on-country program works much better than detention.
- j. In many cases, young offenders are victims of their circumstances that they didn't choose.
- k. There is a significant youth homeless problem in Queensland where there are not enough safe places for the homeless youth, so the youth live on the streets and some then resort to crime simply to survive.

3. On – Country Rehabilitation

It is proposed a cohort of 20 specially selected youth offenders within the age group of 14 to 17 be given the option of detention or on-country rehabilitation. It's important the offenders decide for themselves to accept the on-country rehabilitation program rather than detention as it ensures a commitment to the process; whereas those sent to on-country rehabilitation without the offenders buy-in are unlikely to embrace the process and would then be returned to detention.

The on-country rehabilitation would take place on The Farm. The Farm is a remote, working cattle station in Central Queensland. The choice of location is deliberate as it ensures a supportive environment for young offenders to learn, grow, and connect. The Farm removes offenders from an environment that may have a negative influence on their behavior. The location of The Farm and the size also makes leaving a challenge.

The Farm promotes our values – structure, meaning, teamwork, and empathy. These values are promoted in every aspect of The Farm life and create a positive environment that is likely new to the members, but one they will grow to embrace and use for the rest of their journey.

4. The Farm

The Farm is a 1200-acres working cattle farm with a carrying capacity of 300 head of cattle. Fruits and vegetables will be grown on The Farm, and an extensive chicken population will deliver eggs and fresh chicken for the table.

Special facilities will be built to accommodate the 20 members, including:

- **Accommodation Block.**
Two accommodation blocks will be built. Each block will contain 11 rooms to house 10 member's rooms, 1 mentor room and a small kitchenette. Each room will be fitted with an ensuite bathroom (toilet, shower and basin).
- **Kitchen and Dining Facilities**
A commercial grade kitchen will be constructed alongside a dining room suitable for preparing and feeding approximately 30 people daily.
- **Training Facilities**
Just like a classroom, the training facility will be built to accommodate 20 powered workstations, a library and a workshop where practical skills are taught.
- **Recreational Facilities**
A recreational facility needs to be built to promote health, inclusiveness, and teamwork. Team sports are an important part of the rehabilitation process, as are health and nutrition. But the members also need time to relax and play pool, table tennis or use gym equipment etc.

- Internet / WIFI
Two separate systems will be available – one for the members and one for the staff. The members WIFI can be activated as a reward, but for limited time.
- Food
The food will be good and nutritious - with lots of it. Teenagers seem to be always hungry, and they'll be working hard so will have great appetites. Six meals per day will be served – breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, and a snack before bed. Good food is always a good incentive to do the right thing.
- Green Approach
The blocks will be fitted with solar power generation to provide green energy to the blocks and other areas of The Farm.
Where possible, filtered rainwater will be collected and used in the accommodation blocks and other areas of The Farm.

5. Program Objectives:

The primary objectives of the Farm will be as follows:

- Intensive:
The pace will be set from day 1. Following a detailed induction, members will be assigned mentors and responsibilities and will begin immediately. At the end of each day, members will only want a shower and bed. That fatigue is intentional.
- Consistent:
The approach will never change. Mentors will maintain a measured, calm and consistent approach to all members. This ensures the members are aware of the expectations and there are no surprises to their daily routine.
- Rehabilitation:
Provide therapy, counselling, and intervention programs tailored to the individual needs of each member to address the root causes of their behaviour.
- Education:
Re-engagement in educational programs, including literacy, numeracy, computer skills and practical life-skills development to set the members up for a positive future.
- Social Reintegration:
Prepare young offenders for successful reintegration into society through mentorship, employment readiness, job traineeships, job placement (through sponsor companies) and community involvement.

6. Sustainable Approach:

To achieve long-term sustainability, we propose the following strategies:

- **Small Scale:** Numbers should be kept to no more than 20 as this ensures focus on each person's issues and development.
- **Mentors to members ratio** will never be less than 1 – 5. For On-Country programs this ratio is deemed sufficient.
- **Collaboration:** Collaborate with local communities, law enforcement, schools, TAFE, and social services to ensure The Farm is integrated into the broader ecosystem of support.
- **Employment Opportunities:** Establish partnerships with multi-national businesses and local businesses to provide employment opportunities and traineeships for the rehabilitated youth upon their graduation.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Continuously assess the effectiveness of our programs and adapt to changing needs and best practices.
- **Minimal Term** of six months is recommended to ensure a solid foundation of values are established.
- **Scalable:** We can replicate this model across other properties in Queensland in order to give more young offenders a better chance at life.

7. Life on the Farm

This is a working farm, and all members will be expected to contribute to the farm daily. We will grow fruits and vegetables for consumption, lucerne and hay to feed the livestock. We will raise a small flock of sheep for meat, and a heard of Droughtmaster cattle which we periodically send to the sales yards. We raise chickens for eggs and meat.

7.1 Our Approach

Always calm. Voices will not be raised. While many of our mentors are former military, the militarised approach will not be used, regardless of the members response and attitude. We believe members have spent much of their lives being yelled at, being spoken down to, possibly bullied in a dysfunctional environment, and we will not reinforce this behaviour.

Life on the Station encourages teamwork and promotes a family environment where each member grows to realise their small contribution to life on the farm is essential for the daily successes. Members will learn to rely upon each other for support and the accomplishment of goals.

7.2 Training

Members will be exposed to all skills on the farm as well as other life skills from day one. The Farm will work with TAFE and other training institutes to ensure each member is able to gain a certified skill prior to graduation. Just like a school day (only a lot longer) there will be a timetable of activities to include the following core skills and selected specialist skills.

Core Skills

- Reading, writing, basic mathematics
- First aid certificate
- Microsoft Office Programs – basic computer skills
- Jackeroo/Jilleroo – animal husbandry, horse riding
- Catering / Housekeeping – preparing meals, cooking, cleaning.

Specialist Skills

- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Electrician
- Mechanics – service farm machinery
- Personal Training – health and fitness will be part of the daily program.

7.3 Giving Back

Members will be encouraged to give back – to make amends for their mistakes. Excess crops and meat from The Farm will be delivered to those in need by the members. Meals will be prepared and delivered to those in need. Members will give back to the local community for 2 hours on Sundays – the low intensity day; assisting someone who needs help, perhaps the elderly. Of course, all these activities will be highly supervised and only occur when the member is deemed ready.

8. Life after the Farm – Long Term Care and Support

It is vital members experience a smooth transition to the community after graduation with a very soft landing.

Members returning to their previous environment upon graduation are at risk of re-offending if those environments are dysfunctional, and so should be sent to locations distant from their previous lives so they may establish new lives and social networks. Others will need the support of their families if this environment is suitable, and the member is now cognisant of their previous mistakes.

The Farm program doesn't end upon graduation; just as a good parent wouldn't send their teenage child to a remote location without checking in and offering advice and support as and when required. Members will need support to ensure they are given the best chance of adapting to their new lives beyond the Farm within society. Indeed, there will be some members who will require support for the entirety of their lives.

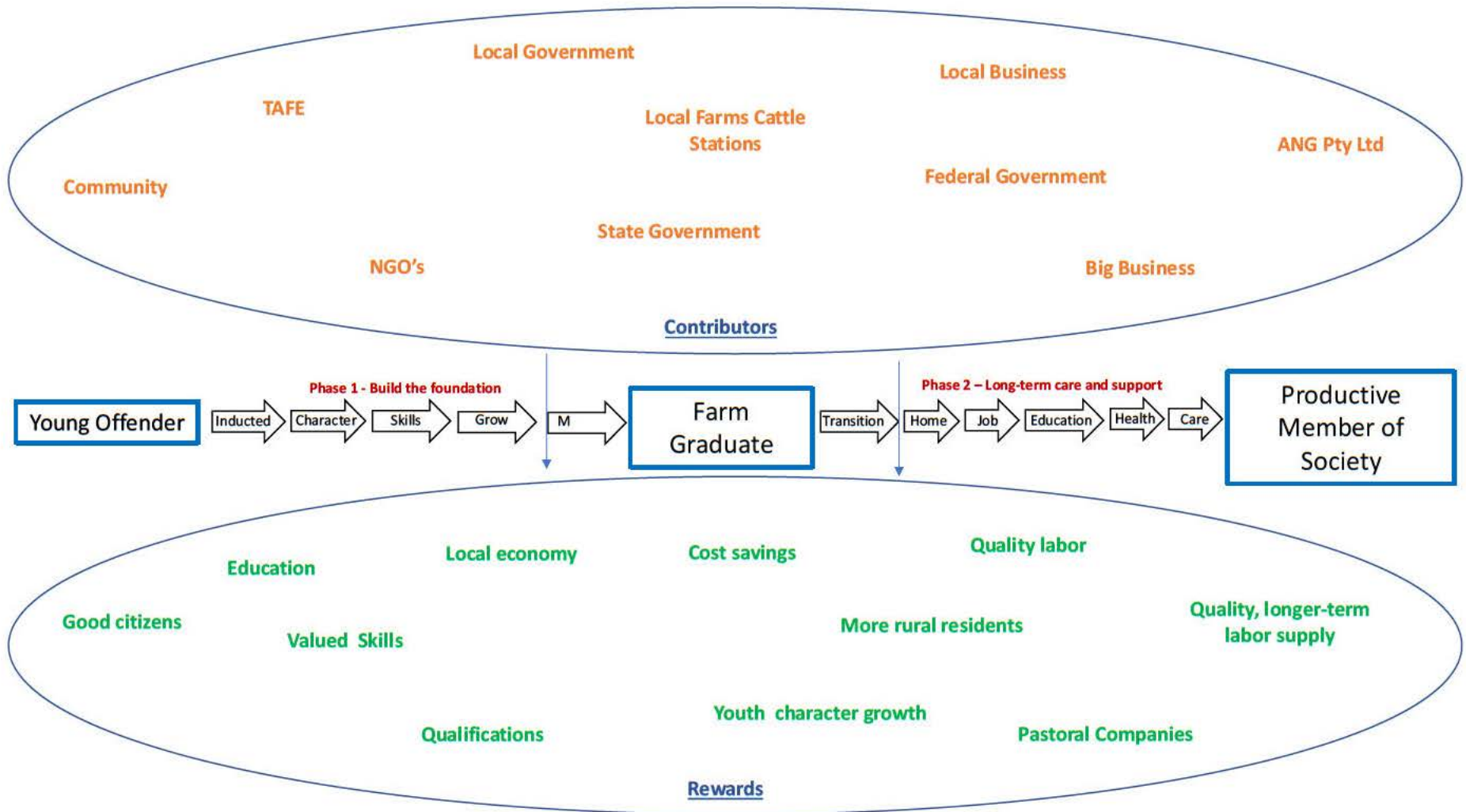
Members will need safe and appropriate housing, employment and / or education, and health care.

Options:

- Traineeship with a mining company in a remote location including suitable accommodation.
- Job placement with a local business or local farm.
- Return home to families if the family environment is deemed suitable and the member chooses to take that path.
- Remain at the Station in a paid role as a station hand and youth counsellor/mentor to those new members at the Station.

Regardless of the post-Farm-option selected, all members must receive on-going government support through a network of social workers whose role is to be there and offer support, direction, and encouragement when it's needed.

9. Value Chain



10. Payments

Members will need money to get their lives off to a good start upon graduation. To this end, members will be paid a fee per day, and this will be released to each member on the final day at The Farm.

It is recommended the spending of these funds be overseen by the appointed social workers.

11. Transparency

The Farm and the cattle station operate as two separate, for-profit business entities. Members will be exposed to the workings of the cattle station and can be trained to work on a cattle station, but there are dedicated farm hands who are employed to manage and work the cattle station business.

12. The Farm's Mentors

The Mentors on The Farm will be a diverse mix of genders, race and backgrounds.

12.1 Helping our Veterans

There are many retired veterans who have a lot to offer and need employment and purpose. This type of work is perfectly suited to retired military and police personnel as they appreciate the discipline and consistency required of such an establishment.

12.2 First Nations

A vital component will be the involvement of First Nation people as Mentors. It's important for the members to see great examples of what success looks like by being guided by those of similar origin.

Be exposed to First Nation Mentors can only be positive for all members, regardless of their heritage.

13. Funding and Budget:

The anticipated cost will be in the vicinity of \$630 per day per member and includes:

- Three meals per day
- Three snacks per day
- Work wear
- Toiletries
- Safety footwear and other PPE
- Recreational wear
- The construction of accommodation blocks with individual rooms with bathrooms.
- The construction of a commercial kitchen and dining room
- Recreational Room and facilities
- Training rooms
- Vocational training allowance per member
- Purchase of additional vehicles
- The purchase of 20 training computers
- Member allowance
- Specialist mentors
 - Youth Counsellor
 - Nurse
 - Qualified trades persons
 - Vocational leader
 - Cook
 - Mentors

14. Conclusion:

The establishment of The Farm with a focus on rehabilitation and life skills development in a remote farm setting is an innovative and comprehensive solution to the issue of youth crime in Queensland. We believe that by investing in our youth and providing them with the values and tools for personal growth and social reintegration, we can make Queensland the safest state in Australia.

We eagerly await the opportunity to discuss this proposal further and work collaboratively with the Government to address this critical challenge. Together, we can shape a brighter future for Queensland's youth and communities.