

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 Committee Secretary,

CITY OF GOLD COAST SUBMISSION – YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM IN QUEENSLAND

The City of Gold Coast (City) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission in support of the State Government's *Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform* in Queensland. We pride ourselves on being a safe, active and healthy city and are committed to working closely with the State Government, Queensland Police Service (QPS) and local services to ensure children, young people and families are connected to services and supports so they address their health, wellbeing, safety and education needs. I provide the below response for the Committee's consideration.

We acknowledge focusing on early intervention and prevention is a whole of community responsibility along with the respective tiered levels of government. Working collaboratively to ensure evidence-based early intervention and prevention programs are in place to support our young people and their families allows us to collectively address the underlying factors that can lead to criminal behaviour. Younger people are more impressionable and receptive to positive influences, making it a critical time to provide guidance, support, and skill-building. By identifying and addressing risk factors early on, we can help prevent negative behaviours and promote healthier life choices. It is anticipated that investment into early intervention and prevention programs will lessen the need for punitive and justice reform youth programs and create safer and healthier communities.

In relation to this submission, the role of local government is predominantly in the early intervention and prevention space, in supporting the community service sector and advocating rather than working directly in the crisis end of support or direct service delivery, being State Government Responsibility. Hence, this submission will focus on the terms of reference relating to these areas.

Gold Coast context

The Gold Coast is a growing city that is home to 647,078 residents (ABS ERP 2022), expected to grow to 1 million residents (Qld Government 2023) by 2046. The Gold Coast is a leading tourism destination, with over 11 million visitors annually. More than 99,000 young people aged 12-24 reside on the Gold Coast, making up 15.8% of the total population. This youth population is expected to reach 171,467 by 2041 and is the target age group for City programs/initiatives. We acknowledge this submission is focused on the youth justice system which is targeted at 10-17 years olds.

In recent years, there has been significant focus on youth crime by media outlets across South-East Queensland, specifically that youth crime is increasing. The focus on negative stories increases community concern and perceptions of reducing safety and general perceptions of young people within the community. Despite media reports, there has been an overall decrease in youth offending in Queensland.

In 2021-22, there were 10,034 offenders aged between 10 to 17 years in Queensland, accounting for 13% total offenders that year. Despite this, youth offences were the lowest they have been in 10 years.

Positive cross sector initiatives and collaborative early intervention and the collective impact is pivotal in preventing youth offences and diverting young offenders from the justice system.

The City is well placed to understand the particular needs and problems for our local communities and therefore, can continue to work alongside our stakeholders in determining appropriate early intervention and prevention initiatives. Local government along with other tiers of government have a role in promoting positive messaging around population groups across the city and providing factual information to our local communities.

City led programs and initiatives

The City currently adopts a collaborative approach to supporting evidence-based early intervention and prevention with young people through various strategies. These include youth engagement and activities, community safety initiatives, planning and development, and support to the community service sector. The City is committed to the positive narrative around young people, supporting factual reporting and is committed to the role the City has in strengthening sustainable, positive outcomes for youth. Priorities include:

Youth engagement and activities:

- 2027 City of Gold Coast Youth Program provides a strategic framework to guide our youth initiatives and programs over the next four years.
- The City promotes opportunities for positive youth development and activities.
- The Gold Coast Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2022-2032 is a strategic framework and will seek to engage young people with a focus on inclusive, equitable and accessible places and spaces where everyone can participate in sport and physical activity.

Community Safety:

- 2027 Community Safety Program provides a strategic framework to guide City initiatives and programs, to strengthen community safety outcomes and increase actual and perceived safety of our community over the next four years.
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principals incorporated into City projects and facility upgrades, including the planning and design of open places and spaces.
- The City's Safety Camera Network has over 850 CCTV cameras across the Gold Coast, to enhance public safety.
- Safer Suburbs Forum (SSF), is a collaborative interagency stakeholder group which initiates and delivers actions to improve safety in the City of Gold Coast for residents, visitors, businesses and international students.

Planning and Development:

- City planning and management to create youth-friendly spaces and places whilst taking into account relevant projections for youth population growth areas.

Community service sector support:

- Supporting community service organisations through our Community Grants Program providing funding that supports community service organisations.
- Connecting community service organisations with skills, opportunities and resources through free workshops, networking and community events to build capacity and foster collaboration.

The City works with many community service organisations dedicated to supporting young people, many of which provide early intervention and prevention programs. The City has seen success with these place based and integrated responses but notes a fragility across the sector which needs to be addressed through adequate, long term funding by the State Government that allows programs and services to establish an ongoing sustainable model, utilising evidence-based practice.

Recommendations

The City identifies gaps within the early intervention and prevention space and recommends that the State Government implement the following as part of ongoing reforms to the youth justice system;

- Increase investment in evidence based early intervention and prevention programs that are led by community-based organisations;
- Establish mechanisms to ensure place based capital investment which is collaborative and coordinated. Government funding decisions should consider the location of services based on current and future demographic and statistical need, with consideration to cross border initiatives;
- Invest in long term or multiple year funding agreements to facilitate long-term viability of the organisations delivering services with strong evidence base;
- Establish a mechanism for coordinated evaluation and continuous improvement of programs across the sector to build capability, evidence base and sustainability; and
- Deliver community education and communication.

Conclusion

Young people are valuable contributors to our city and the City of Gold Coast is committed to promoting opportunities for positive youth development and activities in line with the current State Government Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023. The City demonstrates our priorities through our key strategic documents being the 2027 Youth Program, 2027 Community Safety Program, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy 2022-2032 as well as providing customer service excellence and investment and advocacy to the sector that supports youth justice.

The City remain committed to the safety of our community and will continue to plan for and respond to local need and priorities. We strongly believe that the city is heading in a positive direction for our young people but urge the State Government through this process to ensure funding of preventative services is prioritised.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I look forward to the outcome of the inquiry.

Should you require any additional information please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Tim Baker
Chief Executive Officer
Council of the City of Gold Coast