

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

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**Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland
Submission on behalf of *No Dramas* Youth Research Project**

**Dr Luke Price (l.price@cqu.edu.au) and Dr Linda Lorenza (l.lorenza@cqu.edu.au)
Central Queensland University**

We are the academic leads coordinating a youth-led research project in Rockhampton: *No Dramas – participatory action research using applied theatre in regional Queensland to enable youth-led communication on health and justice priorities*, funded in 2023 by a Queensland Department of Environment and Science Youth Research Grant.

This project uses theatre and short-form social media videos (such as TikToks) to better understand young people's (aged 12 to 25) youth justice and youth health experiences and priorities. This understanding is integrated with expert advice to produce community education videos that reflect the reality of youth justice and youth health in regional Queensland.

Based on the findings of the *No Dramas* project, we make the following submissions to the Inquiry:

- Youth justice must be considered in context. For youth researchers in the *No Dramas* project, that context was health and wellbeing. Participants were equally concerned with the health and wellbeing impacts of offending behaviours as they were regarding criminal justice outcomes.
- Youth justice information and engagement strategies are not reaching young people. Young people's understanding of health and justice concepts and processes is often taken for granted, but is in reality low. For example, one participant in the *No Dramas* project had no prior knowledge of their right to silence. Information and engagement is essential in diverting young people from contact with the justice system, but also for enabling 'least-worst' outcomes if that contact does eventuate.
- Youth perspectives on how to reform youth justice are insufficiently heard. The *No Dramas* project did not tell young people what they needed to know, but instead asked them what they had to say, what they wanted to hear, and how they wanted that communication to be facilitated. Participants indicated that this was a rare opportunity. We note that this Inquiry's proceedings have talked at length **about** young people, but have not thus far demonstrated the same level of engagement **with** young people.
- Regional perspectives on youth justice reform are insufficiently heard. Research and consequently informed policymaking on crime and justice focuses on the urban areas where the largest number of crimes are committed, at the expense of regional areas where that offending may have the largest impact (Rachel Hale and Alistair Harkness (eds), *Rural Victims of Crime: Representations, Realities and Responses* (Routledge, 2022)). Nationally, young people in rural communities are overrepresented in youth justice systems (Butcher et al, 'A Comparative Analysis of the Risk Profiles of Australian Young Offenders from Rural and Urban Communities' (2019) 63(14) *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 2483). We note that all public proceedings on this Inquiry were held in Brisbane, and that there is a risk once again of talking at length about regional communities without sufficiently engaging with regional communities.

In 2024, the *No Dramas* project will continue to operate in Rockhampton and surrounds, to provide young people with information and empower them to participate in research that can and should inform youth justice policymaking. It is not unusual to give young people a say in youth justice processes such as conferencing. In reforming youth justice, we recommend this thinking be extended to facilitate youth voice in youth justice policymaking that invites all young people across Queensland to participate as members of a community of young people, rather than as victims or offenders.