

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

**Submission No:** 115  
**Submitted by:** Craig Coleman  
**Publication:** Making the submission and your name public  
**Attachments:** See attachment  
**Submitter Comments:**

Submission to:

**Youth Justice Reform Select Committee**

By:

Craig Coleman OAM, CSM

10 January 2024

Within the corrections system, military style bootcamps without proper structure and outcomes are not likely to reduce crime. People do not change their behaviour just because someone yells at them for extended periods of time and forces them to do push-ups and meaningless tasks as punishment.

Military recruit training is intended to prepare and train new recruits in basic military skills at the start of their military careers. This training is arduous, physically challenging and places recruits in uncomfortable situations due to the authoritarian approach of recruit instructors, strict schedules and new processes designed to orientate the recruit to the military system and instil instinctive obedience, self-discipline, teamwork, and cooperation – essential characteristics of soldiers in battle and high stress situations.

The authoritarian approach is used as part of a tool kit by experienced recruit instructors, to assist in making basic training more efficient, effective and the basis for further training. Significantly, the boot camp approach works with recruits because they are volunteers who have the incentive of a well-paying military career after their initial training is complete.

**Alternative Solution**

An alternative solution is to establish, fund and run programs that allow young offenders to be trained to undertake tasks which will make a real difference in communities when assistance is most urgently required i.e. flood response, bush fire response, drought response.

I have been involved in the planning and implementation of similar programs in post-conflict and disaster response situations:

1. Employment of former soldiers to clear landmine in Cambodia.
2. Utilisation of youth gang members to assist in the response operation in Haiti after the 2009 earthquake.

**Cambodia**

In Cambodia after decades of conflict, the former soldiers from all warring factions were provided with training and jobs to clear the millions of landmines and unexploded munitions which littered every part of the country. These former soldiers were mostly young men with no formal education, who sometimes had no family and were disengaged from normal society. They were never trained as professional soldiers but had belonged to one of the many politically aligned military factions. They were fed and sheltered and in return they had performed military actions on behalf of their faction.

With the establishment of the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) in 1992 the former soldiers were trained then integrated into a single military style organisation and performed work for the benefit of all Cambodians. This approach gave former soldiers a sense of purpose and regular payment and allowed them to reintegrate with society instead of taking up a life of crime and further contributing to Cambodia's poor situation. These young men (and some women) became the heroes of Cambodia for undertaking the dangerous, yet very important task of clearing the deadly land mines – a job that others didn't want to do.

The CMAC training utilised selected methods used in recruit training in Australia, New Zealand and Canada and was designed to build teamwork, confidence, safe practices, and discipline while working in the mine-affected communities.

## **Haiti**

In Haiti in 2010, immediately following a catastrophic earthquake, Wyclef Jean, a Haitian born R&B musician stepped in to assist by recruiting certain youth gangs to create safe passage of critical supplies into areas where established aid organisations could not make deliveries.

Wycliffe used his influence (through his music) with gang members to convince them to do good work for the benefit of their families, communities and the entire country of Haiti. This was a radical approach outside of conventional thinking.

Wycliffe and his charitable foundation, Yéle Haiti, then developed an outline program which would employ the gang members to clean up the damage from the earthquake including clearing building and road debris, removing rubbish, and releasing pooled water to remove the risk of waterborne disease. The program was designed to use manual labour with the use of machines only where they were available. The program would train the gang members with little formal education in the use hand tools and simple planning and operational techniques to get the work done. Regrettably, the program was unable to be implemented.

## **Queensland**

In Queensland, we do not have Cambodia's land mines or Haiti's earthquakes, but we do have rising incidence of natural disasters including storms, floods, fires, and drought.

A program to train youth to assist in clean-up operations after a disaster would provide a sense of purpose, confidence, and an income along with skills to perform the work and the potential to undertake further education and training.

Participants would be volunteers who would undertake training in a location away from distractions. The training would be undertaken as a component within a broader solution including counselling, health and fitness, life skills, substance abuse treatment and education related to the task requirements.

The program would be delivered by ex-service personnel, subject matter experts, and cultural and community leaders and include selected components of military training to develop teamwork, self-discipline, fitness, cooperation, and organisational skills.

After successful completion of initial training, trainees would transfer to the workforce component which would be established to provide employment and ongoing assistance to the young men and women. The workforce would coordinate and cooperate with Queensland State Emergency Service and Queensland Reconstruction Authority amongst others. An extension of the program would be to undertake tasks to prepare for natural disasters.

## **Program Value**

- Successful participants would return to their own community or another community and be an asset instead of a liability. They would have purpose and a positive focus and would become role models for other youth.
- Participants would have employment and growth opportunities and be less likely to re-offend due to the positive prospects on offer.
- Participants would have the necessary skills to be able to work within an organised group and provide support to natural disaster response.
- The program would provide Queensland with a trained workforce to assist in disaster response and make the State less reliant on the ADF for disaster response assistance.

- The program would reduce the incidence of reoffending of youths with a short history of crime and, if established as an early intervention component, would prevent youth from ever engaging in crime.

The program would only work with appropriate funding and acceptance that the youth crime fix requires a long-term approach and will not be completed during a single election cycle. It therefore must have support from a broad cross-section of members of parliament.

### **Craig Coleman OAM, CSM**

I am a former engineer soldier and officer in the Australian Army who now owns and operates Axinto, a business providing risk management and project solutions in conflict, post-conflict, and difficult environments around the world.

My military training experience includes recruit instructor at the Army Recruit Training Centre and development and delivery of training to soldiers, officers, and civilians. My military operational experience includes a leadership and senior advisor role in the Cambodian Mine Action Centre.

My post-military experience includes delivery of project services in defence, mining, construction, humanitarian, and development sectors. In 2010 I assisted Wyclef Jean and Yéle Haiti to develop a plan to use youth gang members to clean up damage caused by the earthquake.