

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

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Submission Youth Justice Reform Select Committee





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31 January 2024
Committee Secretary
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000
By email: youthjustice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Re: Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland

On behalf of Fearless Towards Success, I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee.

Fearless Towards Success (FTS) is an Ipswich-based youth organisation that takes a specialised, relational approach in providing holistic, wraparound support that meets the self-directed needs of young people caught in the youth justice system, with a specific focus on Serious Repeat Offenders (SRO's). These are the young people who I believe should be at the core of this enquiry and whose increase in offending has doubled in the last five years despite significant investment in strategies and reform to deal with them and this small number of youth offenders (20%) are now responsible for 55% of offences in Queensland. Our support centre has made significant inroads in engaging these young people and steering them on a better path to become functioning members of society, instead of impacting on the community.

The FTS support centre offers a place-based support model. A safe place to land for those leaving detention, often when a young person's safe living needs are not being met. Individuals can easily access a gateway of support, which fosters connection and a sense of belonging to encourage positive re-engagement back into the community in a non-judgmental, safe, and supported way. This support is, and needs to be, flexible and aligned with an individual's circumstances, their risks, and what they need to build on their strengths and overcome their struggles. Whilst also connecting to culture,



family/community, and country, having the chance to learn life and job skills, have a secure income, and a safe place to go in good and hard times.

Our engagement and connection with these serious repeat offenders has proved to be extremely high, with many positively help-seeking to connect with us and bouncing back time and time again for support. We believe we are the only local non-government organisation that works exclusively with these complex serious repeat youth offenders, who rarely access mainstream services.

I write this submission to the Inquiry as the FTS CEO and Founder, with five years of genuine daily, impactful long-term engagement with this complex cohort. But more importantly, at the heart of this, I write as the conduit for children and young adults to have their voice heard in the conversation around youth justice reform in Queensland as I have the privilege of working with these children and young adults every day. They have a right to participate in discussions and decisions about them. They are currently locked up and locked out of any of these discussions. Yet they are the experts on what their problems are and what types of solutions are needed. They are the forgotten ones whose story is never told.

“Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power.”

Hoskins, D. (n.d.). About us. JustLeadershipUSA. <https://jlusa.org/about/>

At FTS no support is delivered unless it is co-designed with young people, with youth evaluating its effectiveness to meet their needs; a core FTS value is “youth-led”. The suite of FTS support initiatives is embedded with neurological principles and Dr. Monique White, Neuroeducation specialist has been supporting FTS from the onset, including designing an evaluation survey that is used to determine any changes or shifts in behaviour, mindset, and attitude in young people.

I agree with the Families and Children’s Commission (FCC) Commissioner, a range of other organisations and peak bodies that the types of interventions and programs required that simultaneously strengthen protective factors and address specific risks for each individual cannot be delivered through government agencies like Youth Justice or purely by outsourced government designed programs that leave little flexibility to deliver what is really needed at an individual level. The Youth Justice department has a clear responsibility to enforce orders and report breaches of those orders and associated conditions. It is not possible to establish the long-term relationships of trust



and care required to support people to rehabilitate and make major changes to their circumstances and storyline when a power imbalance like this exists.

For that reason, FTS advocates investment in long-term support that includes involving people who share lived experiences and can therefore provide positive and meaningful understanding, advice and role modelling and who are relatable to these young people. We know that young people are most at-risk of re-offending when they first leave detention, and so we must invest in supported housing that is tied in with 'throughcare' for as long as it takes to successfully transition and stay out of detention. Young people are telling us they have had to resort to stealing a car to sleep in and can leave detention with no safe place to go.

From a moral perspective, the current approach demonstrates a lack of care, compassion, and responsibility for the children and young adults we have failed to keep safe and protect as a community. Detention is not the answer. I agree with the Justice Reform Initiative that details prison does not work to deter, to rehabilitate, or make communities safer and a significant investment commitment is needed in community-led alternatives. Just as we are currently committing significant investment in government-led solutions.

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About FTS

Fearless Towards Success (FTS) is a frontline, not for profit organisation that has worked at local level in Ipswich since April 2021.

FTS collaborated with BackTrack Youth Works in Armidale, NSW on a Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation funded participatory research project in 2020 and 2021, where 30 recidivist youth were interviewed (75% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander), to ascertain what a fit-for-purpose reintegration model would look like. From the insights, experiences and findings, FTS was founded. Since April 2021, the proposed program has been delivered; evolving and pivoting to meet the unique, individual, and complex needs of every young person that walks through the door. The initial proposed foundation framework included a Guide, Wraparound Material and Well-being Support, Choice and Accountability and Timeframe and Location. FTS has evolved over the last two and a half years, however non-negotiables in the support model, which young people constantly advise on are:

- A non-judgmental bounce-back guarantee
- It takes as long as it takes.

BackTrack has often been referenced in the Committee Hearings as a successful model for working with young people stuck in a cycle of re-offending. Community-led responses are what we want to see to move these SROs through criminality to a positive trajectory.

In 2023, BackTrack reported an income of \$8.6 million, with 32 full time staff and 73 personnel in total, to assist 158 young people; 37.2% of those supported had criminal incidents.

BackTrack. (2023). Annual Report 2023. <https://backtrack.org.au/read-watch/annualreport2023/>

This is what real life-long change is going to cost. However, the vast majority of BackTrack's income does not come from government, which allows the organisation to get the job done in the way they know how.

This type of positive investment is worth it, to actively engage young people to be better humans and better citizens. To have a meaningful life and start contributing to society instead of costing it, and not deny them their human rights, doing further harm, being stuck in the system, and giving them a pipeline into adult crime and jail. This is the very least, in Queensland, we can do for those >450 children we have failed to keep safe and protect in their short lifetimes.

SRO voice

- We will always go where there are people we trust
- I need somewhere to go to distract me
- I do not want to mix with people who I have done crime with, in the past
- I need an escape

- I need someone to call if I get into trouble



"It's different with FTS, they'll do what needs doing. Always chasing up what you need. That was by biggest problem before I never followed up and the people around me never followed up so it never got done and I couldn't move forward."

Understanding the SRO Cohort (Trauma-affected Offenders)

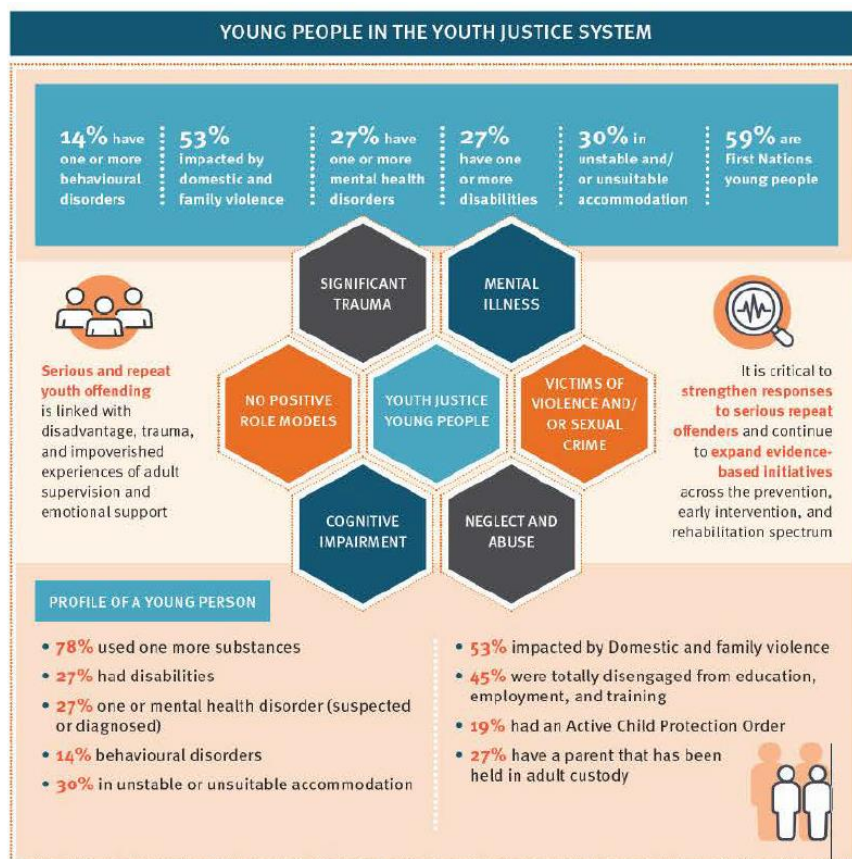
FTS shares the concerns of the Queensland Government that a relatively small cohort of chronic youth offenders are committing more than half of the crimes in Queensland.

While current youth justice programs support good results for the 45% of youth offenders committing 80% of proven offences, the remaining 20% committing 55% of proven offences are caught in a cycle of offence that impacts everyone in the community.

Queensland Government. (2023). *Brief to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee* (p.8)
<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/YJRSC-6004/YJRSC-54D8/Department%20of%20Youth%20Justice,%20Employment,%20Small%20Business%20and%20Training,%208%20November%202023.pdf>

The more we label these young people as serious repeat offenders, the more they will live up to it. What they are, is trauma-affected offenders.

The more we label our strategies to support them, with a narrative around targeting serious repeat offenders with approaches of getting tougher and punitive, the more we'll push them away from the response they truly need which is support, rehabilitation, and reintegration.



Source: 2022 Youth Justice Census Summary

From our work with these marginalised and often stigmatised young people, we understand first-hand the types of complex challenges and trauma that have impacted them, increasing their risks of involvement with the youth justice system. These experiences require the need for an approach that is holistic, strengths-based and collaborative, with them in the driving seat of their own self-directed goal planning.

However, if we are going to engage these hard-to-reach young people then we need to have an appropriate organisation that understands them and provides the services they need along with the investment by government. 100% of the young people that FTS supports have been involved in the Youth Justice system with the majority being serious repeat offenders. FTS have spent hundreds of hours each, with many of these young people, some over two plus years. We need to invest for the long haul. We also need the right investment for this cohort.

An example of government investment is a \$7.7 million 10 bed drug and alcohol facility aimed at reducing offending is below and shows the comparison in offending for the cohort researched in the study and a snapshot from QPS of a six-week blitz on youth offenders in Toowoomba.

Whilst the Ted Noffs facility is very worthwhile and will change many lives, I do not believe that it will reduce offending by SRO's. In 6 weeks, 103 offenders committed 477 offences (not yet convictions) in the Darling Downs. In 5 years the 119 high incline group studied had a total of 1224 convictions. It also states that the average number of convictions per participant were 10.29 over 5 years. I have worked with 14-year-olds who are accumulating 10 convictions a month.

This reference is not to discredit the wonderful work that the Ted Noffs Foundation provide, and their facility should be funded by government. It is simply to point out that the government's investment needs to be more tailored to the SRO cohort if it is to have genuine long-term impact.

Many SRO's have unstable and unsafe accommodation or in fact are couch surfing. Why have we not invested in a suitable transitional facility to provide accommodation and support to assist them in re-engaging back into community and find suitable employment? How can anyone hold down a job if they don't have anywhere safe to live? Why are we not also investing an equivalent \$7.7 million into accommodation for trauma-affected youth who are not only impacted by drug and alcohol misuse but homelessness and domestic and family violence?

We are, however, happy to invest \$210 million a year to incarcerate 306 youth across the three detention centres in Queensland.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of trajectory groups (n = 891) from ages 10 to 16 years.

	All clients (n = 891)	Convictions Trajectory Group		
		No or Low (n = 453)	Moderate incline (n = 319)	High incline (n = 119)
Convictions				
Age at first conviction	16.17 (2.67)	18.47 (2.61)	15.17 (1.12)	13.52 (1.29)
Average number of convictions (10–16 years)	2.65 (3.80)	0.15 (0.36)	3.34 (1.62)	10.29 (4.15)
Total number of convictions	2360	69	1067	1224
Final Treatment Episode				
31 days or more (treatment)	358 (40.2%)	187 (41.3%)	136 (42.6%)	35 (29.4%)
3 to 30 days	210 (23.6%)	93 (20.5%)	85 (26.6%)	32 (26.9%)
<3 days (control)	323 (36.3%)	173 (38.2%)	98 (30.7%)	52 (43.7%)
Male	708 (79.5%)	328 (72.4%)	275 (86.2%)	105 (88.2%)
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	379 (42.5%)	116 (25.6%)	174 (54.5%)	89 (74.8%)
Prior mental health disorder	411 (46.1%)	175 (38.6%)	170 (53.3%)	66 (55.5%)
SEIFA score	3.11 (2.44)	3.72 (2.65)	2.77 (2.24)	2.21 (1.77)
Drug types used	1.63 (2.73)	1.36 (2.51)	1.84 (2.89)	2.08 (2.98)
Average number of PALM referrals	1.65 (1.39)	1.40 (0.97)	1.82 (1.44)	2.14 (2.21)
Age at first PALM referral	17.32 (0.59)	17.44 (0.44)	17.22 (0.64)	17.15 (0.79)

Source - Influence of a residential drug and alcohol program on young people's criminal conviction trajectories Whitten, T, Cale J, Nathan S, Williams M, Baldry E, Ferry M Hayen A, Published in Journal of Criminal Justice, (available online Dec 2022)
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0047235222001519>



Toowoomba Community Safety Public Forum, February 15, 2003

Slide - Toowoomba Community Safety Public Forum	Ted Noffs Research
103 young offenders	119 high Incline group studied
6 week period in the Darling Downs	5 year period
477 offences (not yet convictions)	1224 convictions over a 5 year period

Families and Children’s Commission (FCC) Commissioner, Natalie Lewis, recently stated, "Our system punishes vulnerability rather than addresses it, and compounds trauma rather than heals. This is largely because the support and intervention that would actually make a difference exist beyond the criminal justice system. Lewis, Natalie. (2024, January 29). "Our system punishes vulnerability" – Queensland Commissioner urges alternatives to incarceration". Dechlan Brennan, National Indigenous Times – <https://nit.com.au/29-01-2024/9505/our-system-punishes-vulnerability-rather-than-addresses-it-qfcc-commissioner-urges-alternatives-to-youth-incarceration>

FTS support Youth Justice efforts to develop a trauma-informed youth justice system and respectfully requests the opportunity to bring the voice of serious youth offenders to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee to enable the reflection that supports trauma-informed practice.

We believe our relational, person-centric approach delivers real change for SROs, which in turn reduces crime, affects fewer victims, and saves taxpayer money.

Over the last five years of working with these young people, my insights from their feedback, is, a one size fits all approach doesn't work with serious repeat offenders. They don't respond well to a traditional case management approach which might include weekly or fortnightly check-ins and high staff turnover where they have to re-tell their story; if they are honest enough to share it. They don't engage well with mainstream organisations so referrals to additional community service providers where they have not established a trustful relationship may not prove successful. There is also a fear of judgement when the wheels fall off, which they will, many times sometimes, before they get back on track.

YOUTH JUSTICE REFORMS REVIEW – MARCH 2022

As presented in table 53 in the Youth Justice Reforms Review March 2022, the amount of SROs on bail who engaged in outsourced services funded by Youth Justice decreased to only 4% from 23% in 2020.

Table 54 of the Youth Justice Reforms Reviews outlines the amount of high-risk young people who engaged in outsourced services funded by Youth Justice also decreased to 4% down from 19%. This decrease is evident that young people do not engage and complete the programs Youth Justice refer them to do.

Table 55 reflects the number of families of high-risk offenders who receive support through an outsourced Youth Justice service. It is to be noted that this number is 0. Youth Justice has outsourced 0% over the past 4 years to these families which can only be described as a system failure.

Atkinson, Bob. (2022). *Youth Justice Reforms Review – Final report*.
<https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/about-us/reviews-inquiries/youth-justice-reforms-review-march-2022.pdf>

What SROs need are trusting relationships and people who care about them and who are accessible. People they can relate to. FTS believes that former offenders have a pivotal role to play in this space, especially those who have endured the same pitfalls and have managed to turn their lives around and can become a good role model and mentor.

Serious repeat offenders are demonised by the media, police and community. The fear in the community is driving government to more punitive initiatives that move us further away from the solution and marginalize them even more.

These children and young adults have nothing to lose. They do not fear detention. We need to give them something worth losing. Punishing these SROs doesn't change their behaviour or give them the skills to change their criminal trajectory.

All good intentions on the inside are quickly dissolved once they are released and influenced by homelessness, peers, drugs, stigma, community. Many young people tell me they are back in a stolen car the night they get out of detention. They may engage and complete every program whilst in detention; what else is there to do? However, the downward pressures on the outside such as reporting and curfews, are time and time again too much for them to navigate, especially in cases where they do not have family support. I have heard stories of young people attending YJ reporting appointments in a stolen car, so they won't be breached.

We need to get this approach right because we will always have a cohort who slip through early intervention and diversion. Diversion in itself is not supporting a change of life.

“We can't arrest our way out of this problem.”

Marchesini, George. (2023, February 1). “Former Queensland corrections boss Keith Hamburger says 'urgent' change needed to fight youth crime”. Sarah Richards and Kate McKenna, ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-01/qld-government-not-taking-youth-crime-advice/101918246>

SRO voice

- My mates are my family, they might get up to no good, but they all I got
- If one of us is doing good, we want to be a part of it
- I'll go with family or a mate to steal a car to look out for them, even if it means I might get caught
- If I've nowhere to sleep, I've stolen a car to sleep in
- Now I'm happy, I don't want to let FTS or myself down



“If I had a legit car I could get a job, if I had a job, I wouldn't need to steal cars and sell drugs to make money.”

Giving SROs a voice

Understanding the motivations and external influences that drive young people to commit crime is essential in developing a trauma-informed youth justice. These are deeply entrenched patterns of behaviour, influenced by a complex range of factors.

Our experience shows that working with each person as an individual establishes strong relationships of trust, while facilitating a pathway for SROs to change their offending behaviours from the time of release from detention.

This requires community-based and community-controlled services and programs that are young person-centred, trauma aware, healing informed, and empowerment-aimed.

The types of innovation required to design and run services and program models that actually work to engage, support and rehabilitate people involved in SRO requires their active involvement from start to finish. Just as we deeply understand the experiences and perspectives of victims of crime, we must do the same for the people committing the crimes at all levels of the YJ service system. At present they are the most important stakeholder and yet they have no seat at the table.

Serious repeat offenders provide FTS with a youth voice, providing advice on youth-focused services through their valuable lived experience of detention and programs. Evaluation and feedback supports FTS to pivot away from initiatives that are not meeting needs and design new ones that do meet the unique, complex needs of the serious repeat offender cohort.

SRO voice

- I give up asking for help if people keep saying they are going to help me and don't
- We will always go where we trust people the most
- What's wrong with all of you's (service providers) is none of you are open when we want to get up to no good
- I like somewhere that feels like a home, is welcoming and stress free



"We are sick of the same old programs, give us something we enjoy doing and have a say in and we'll do them."

The current approach

Investment into youth justice has been steadily increasing since 2015, with \$1.4b invested to 2023/24* and a further \$446.4 million* allocated to YJ in the five-year period from 2023/24. At the same time, while the total number of children and young people involved in offending has decreased, there are significant increases in the average daily number of serious repeat offenders and proportion of detention centre nights consumed by serious repeat offenders.

*Queensland Government. (2023). Youth Justice: Key information – fact sheet (pg.6). https://desbt.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/18116/youth-justice-key-information.pdf

Key statistics from 2018–19 to 2022–23



Source: Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training. Youth Justice Key Information: 2022-23 https://desbt.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/18116/youth-justice-key-information.pdf

With 55% of youth crime committed by just 20% of offenders, the current policies and programs are failing trauma-impacted serious repeat offenders, victims of crime and the wider community. After such a huge investment into Youth Justice since 2015, strategies are not hitting the mark with this hard-to-reach cohort.

In Bob Atkinson's Report on Youth Justice, 2018, it said "there is small cohort of children who commit a large proportion of crime. Queensland Youth Justice data from 2016-2017 shows that 10% of child offenders are responsible for 43% of all offences.

Atkinson, Bob. (2018). Report on Youth Justice (pg.27). <https://www.dcssds.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/reform/youth-justice-report.pdf>

In 2023, SROs are trending upwards with 20% of youth offenders now committing 55% of the crime in Queensland. What we are currently doing is not working with this complex cohort.

Queensland Government. (2023). Brief to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee (p.8) <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/YJRSC-6004/YJRSC-54D8/Department%20of%20Youth%20Justice,%20Employment,%20Small%20Business%20and%20Training,%208%20November%202023.pdf>

Youth Justice is supported with 40+ community partners state-wide and regionally. With all these partner services the government and Youth Justice Department should be provided with a huge amount of information and data relating to the needs of SRO's.

Queensland Government. (2024) Youth Justice funded services.
<https://desbt.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/partnerships/funded-services>

Many of the current policies and programs are not relational based, nor do they provide engagement autonomy, repeated positive experiences, or enable flexible and adaptable support to meet individual current need.

Instead, we have adopted a one-size fits all approach and FTS would like to assist the Inquiry to understand that without a relational model that builds trust and investment that directly goes into supporting a young person practically, emotionally, and neurologically, then we will continue to not hit the mark with this cohort.

Let's ask these complex young people where they would go for help? Who would they call? Who do they trust? The answer is highly likely not going to be Youth Justice or Queensland Police Service, despite another \$78 million invested in the Youth Co-Responder Teams.

I support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service' lens they shared in their Submission to the Inquiry, that the Youth Co-Responder Team model is problematic. Through my experiences with serious repeat offenders, you cannot be a legislative enforcer targeting these young people with tougher measures and then switch hats to try and establish trust and rapport.

The Youth Co-Responder teams may very well provide a great service to the low-medium offender, however despite 71,000 interactions since 2020, SRO numbers have increased.

Queensland Government. (2023). Youth Justice: Key information – fact sheet (pg.5).
https://desbt.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/18116/youth-justice-key-information.pdf

SRO voice

- I need a place to live..I need a job...I need a car
- What good is a program when I need a roof over my head and a job to survive?
- It's hard to fit in reporting when I am working
- Every time I got let out, I'd do the same thing I got locked up for and end up straight back inside



"With reporting and curfews, it sets you up to fail. No-one stays home on 24-hour curfews."

The current approach:

- Is not working with the serious repeat offender cohort.
- It is not relational-based.
- Investment doesn't directly go into each individual young person's needs.
- Lacks an innovative, flexible and adaptable approach.
- For the most part is delivered by government or non-government organisations delivering government programs
 - o 69% in Youth Justice staff since 2015-16.
Queensland Government. (2023). Youth Justice: Key information – fact sheet (pg. 1). https://desbt.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/18116/youth-justice-key-information.pdf

Current funding for grass roots community-based solutions

Many Youth Justice initiatives are government designed and either delivered by government or outsourced to non-government organisations to deliver government programs, resulting in little innovation and adaptability.

Compliance and reports, outcomes that may not align to current need and low value grant amounts in a highly competitive funding arena, add to the diluting of grant funds having meaningful impact on those that need it most.

The current government funding landscape fosters an environment where non-government organisations seem reluctant to challenge the status quo, for fear of funding drought. This can lead to non-flexible outcomes and a consensus to not bite the hand that feeds you. I agree with the Queensland African Communities Council in their Submission to the Inquiry, that this funding landscape creates support models that focus efforts and resources on meeting funding requirements and compliance, rather than grant funds directly going to the people they were put in place to support in the first place. A siloed funding model doesn't enable the much-needed holistic support in many areas; social, housing, health, employment etc. which would benefit serious repeat offenders, as each one of them brings their own back-story and their own unique complex needs.

In the Queensland Cabinet and Ministerial Directory Press; Record youth justice budget puts community safety first, published Tuesday 13 June 2023 it details that the Queensland government is providing \$446.4 million in whole of government funding over five years. Within it, the overall budget for 2023-24 from the Department of Youth Justice is \$396.5 million.

Within this there was \$30 million allocated to help seniors secure their homes, \$132 million to boost police resources and \$89.7 million to address capacity issues at youth detention centres and support preparations for the two new youth detention centres. There is also a proposed \$250 million for a new remand centre at Wacol. In comparison there was only \$15 million state-wide allocated to empower communities to develop local solutions.

State-wide there are currently \$2.5 million in crime prevention grants for Targeted Responses to Youth Crime; one-off grants of up to \$300,000 for new ideas and projects that support young people who are or could become serious repeat offenders. Alongside \$5 million available, in grants of up to \$75,000 with Community Based Crime Action grants, for short term, culturally responsive community-based projects that respond to the causes of youth crime, based on identified local needs and service system gaps. <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/yigrants>

This funding is completely insufficient, short term and one off. As mentioned previously BackTrack's funding was \$8.6 million last year. The Queensland Government is offering \$7.5 million for all of Queensland. The challenge for community-led response projects is that often these styles of grants don't even support the payment of wages or basic running costs. Investment is too often focused on locking young people up instead of keeping them out.

As such, I implore the Committee to consider a funding model proposal that provides adequate investment where individual, tailored support can be delivered that can be flexible to evolve and pivot depending on a young person's need. Let us stop ticking boxes for ticking boxes sake.

The cost of detention and investment comparison

Locking a young person up in youth detention costs Queensland taxpayers \$1880 a day, or \$686,000 a year in direct costs.

Productivity Commission 2024, Report on Government Services 2024, Part F, section 17: released 22 January 2024, Table 17A.21 <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2024/community-services/youth-justice>

Currently, with three detention centres state-wide, the direct cost for around 306 beds for offending youth in detention annually is around \$210 million.

There are plans underway for two new detention centres, increasing capacity by 120 from 306 to 426. If we get to full capacity with all five, the direct cost to taxpayers will be nearly \$300 million annually. This doesn't include indirect costs for community programs, courts, police, insurance claims and victim costs.

As a community, can't we do better than spending nearly \$60,000 a month for a young person in detention? We support young people in detention with school, programs, food, safe shelter, clothing, healthcare and social connection. Yet often when they leave, they have no safe place to live, no money to buy food, clothes or access transport, limited access to health care if they don't have a Medicare card and a myriad of pressures and commitments, if they are released on an order.

Couldn't we use the nearly \$60,000 a month to address their needs better and use those funds to ensure they had every support in place to commit fully to walking out of the revolving door for good or at the very least significantly extend the time in between detention visits?

For successful transition to succeed with this cohort of SRO's, they need to have an active role in their own self-directed goal planning and rehabilitation. The foundation of community service and social work practice is engaging key stakeholders from the onset in program design all the way to evaluation. Yet here

we are without any voice being heard from the people who are at the very centre of our concern.

A new high school in Queensland costs around \$50 million and we are spending \$200 million on a 50-bed remand centre to get children out of watch houses. Instead, could the money not yield better results being spent building an accommodation and education / training centre for less than that with a community-led service delivery framework? Funds would then be going into much needed bricks and mortar to build accommodation to provide safe homes that provide the stability and safety required to get back on track and become employed. We currently send them back into the environment and living arrangements that contributed to them getting in trouble in the first place.

SRO voice

- Juvie is like university for criminals
- I'm not applying for bail anymore, I like it in here too much (detention)
- If I don't have a job within 48 hours, I'll be doing crime again



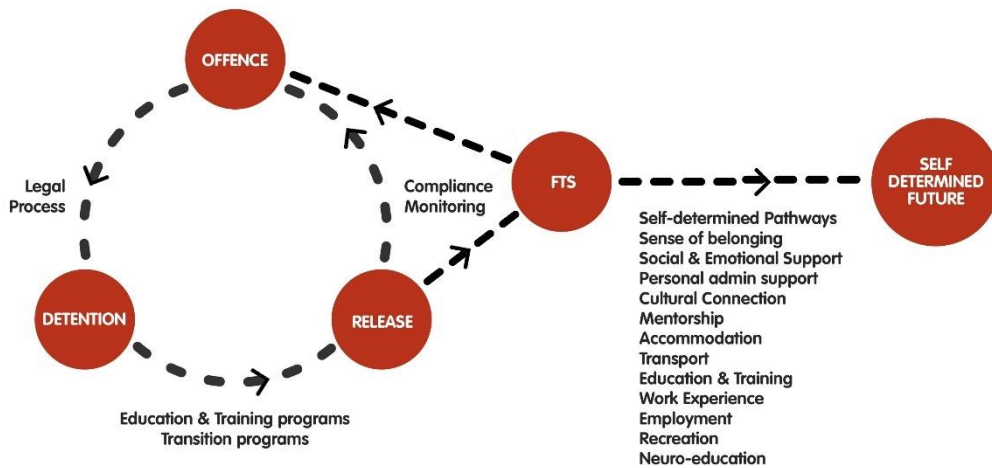
"If I get out and have nowhere to live, I'll just have to commit a crime and go to jail so I have somewhere to live, cause I'm 18 now."

What they need

These children and young adults are stigmatised and often excluded from communities because of their crimes, with the media reinforcing stereotypes and pushing an anti-youth crime agenda. These children and young adults need a circuit breaker and for some it's the family and community they've never had. Not an authoritative, punitive approach but a relational supportive rehabilitative approach that meets their needs.

An approach better aligned to restorative and trauma informed practice and neuroeducation principles. An approach that puts them in the driver's seat and a trusted caring adult riding alongside. An approach that provides genuine impact and change, not one that keeps them stuck in the system. A relational model not a compliance model.

A one stop shop that meets their social, emotional, educational and employment needs. One that draws its core focus from Maslow's hierarchy of needs and supports recidivist youth meet their physiological, safety and security, love and belonging and self-esteem needs. Laying the foundation blocks and moving them through criminality through positive, stable relationships through to self-actualisation where they can un-lock their potential and not re-offend again.



Cycle of Offence

The committee has asked several speakers at the hearings – What is the silver bullet?

Answer – trusting caring relationships that support each young person and walk alongside them on this journey to meet their basic needs and provide what they need to move through this. Support, that is tailored to their individual needs, to improve their self-worth and achieve something worth giving up crime for, whilst pulling them out of this period of criminal behaviour.

We all know their issues; the Committee has had an abundance of evidence presented to them. And yet, we still punish them.

SRO voice

- Nowadays why would I steal a car? – I'd get six months inside and, in that time, I could have saved up for a legit car that I can use to get a job. One night can set me back six months
- 6 months ago, I'd have thought I'd be in and out of jail for the rest of my life, now I'm working, how mad is that!
- FTS truly has your back
- FTS keeps me on the right path. Fishing is a bonus. No other program does fishing. It's one of a kind for us boys. We don't want to do criminal !@#!, we have yarns, laughs and kick back

Employer voice



Maintenance Service company – YP “missed the train and caught a cab all the way to Gales rather than let the team down this morning. That’s the second time he had to cab it. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]!”. YP has been one of the most reliable, hard-working, and quick learning young fellas I have had working for me in years.”

FTS model

Based on our frontline work, insights, evaluations of support initiatives and success with these children and young adults, FTS have been pivoting and adapting a wraparound support model since April 2021. We are currently finalising an impact report; Changing Young People's Lives, which we will forward to the Committee once it is complete.

We know a one-size fits all approach doesn't work with SROs first and foremost.

Safe and stable accommodation, with 24/7 support, needs to be at the foundation of holistic long-term wraparound support.

How is it that we provide this in detention but not on the outside during transition?

How can they study, get a job or just simply function if they are homeless or living in an unsuitable home that may have domestic or family violence, substance misuse or peers engaging in criminal behaviour?

Why is it that we expect these young people to abide by programs and reporting on release when they are the most disadvantaged in terms of parental support, transport etc?

Why are they expected to wait in court for 7 hours with no support running the risk of walking out and failing to appear?

Who do they trust to call at 10pm when they are about to reluctantly get into a stolen car?

How can they reach out for help and support when they don't even own a mobile phone, or are on curfew and have restrictions on travel?

A suite of flexible, adaptable support must be built into the framework with flexible brokerage to meet each young person's unique, complex needs; including self-directed goal planning, cultural connection, peer mentoring, diversionary recreational activities, skill development and pathways to education, training and employment, once basic needs have been met.

FTS are at the stage where we need to be funded to develop this model and solutions based on the learnings and insights of what has proved successful with this cohort. At the core of its development, will, as it always is, be the youth voice.

Conclusion

What is the point of detention and programs that don't deliver change?

Measure	12 month period ending 30 June			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Young people who have a new alleged offence within 12 months following other events				
Following a Restorative Justice Process				
Proportion of young people with a new alleged offence following their Restorative Justice Process	50%	51%	54%	49%
Following the successful completion of a sentenced community-based order				
Proportion of young people with a new alleged offence following successful completion of a community-based order	72%	69%	73%	74%
Following release from sentenced Youth Justice custody				
Proportion of young people with a new alleged offence following release from sentenced Youth Justice custody	93%	88%	89%	90%

Queensland Government. (2023). Brief to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee (pg.22). <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/YJRSC-6004/YJRSC-54D8/Department%20of%20Youth%20Justice,%20Employment,%20Small%20Business%20and%20Training,%208%20November%202023.pdf>

We all know detention doesn't solve the problem. Let's put funds into the problem at a personal individual level not into two more detention centres to house the problem.

Why is it that the government is investing in accommodation to lock kids up and not into much needed accommodation to provide safety and stability when released?

We just simply aren't giving them a chance to reform. We aren't investing in them as an individual with unique individual needs. Let's stop de-humanising these kids. Let's stop using language like "targeting" them and start "helping" them.

Do we ever ask ourselves – Why are they doing this crime and what needs aren't being met in their young lives? What are the drivers of this crime?

We know the answer.

- 28 per cent of children had an active **child protection order**
- 39 per cent of children were living in unstable and/or **unsuitable accommodation**
- 45 per cent of children had totally **disengaged from education**, training, or employment
- 35 per cent had a **parent in adult custody**
- 56 per cent had experienced or been **impacted by domestic and family violence**
- 83 per cent were known to be **using drugs or alcohol**
- 37 per cent were diagnosed or suspected to **have a disability**
- 27 per cent had at least one **mental health disorder**
- 19 per cent had at least one **behavioural disorder**.

Youth Justice census information from 2021

Maybe if their trauma was visible, we might respond with more compassion and humanity. At present all we see and hear about are the crimes they are doing, not their back-story that results in the crime.

If we don't act now, in years to come we will continue to see the sad pipeline of kids being failed by the Child Protection System that then projects them into the Youth Justice System and that finally sees them as a long-term problem of the Corrections system and ultimately societies problem that we were never innovative and courageous enough to fix.

SRO voice



"You know you are worth something with FTS. In the past, I always got into something for a week or two and if it didn't work I'd just give up, but I've kept going with FTS as I feel I am worth something here."

Contact

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