

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

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I can assume that there will be a substantive push from many people to punish offenders via incarceration. There are, however, an infinite number of studies, here and abroad, that refute the value and efficacy of this approach, particularly with respect to youth. This approach may make some members of the public feel good that 'justice has been done', but it will likely have the opposite effect in terms of crime deterrence over the long term, not to mention the negative toll on people's lives. I fully concur that consequences are critical in any effort to modify behaviour, and that presently such consequences are virtually zero, with offenders mocking police, the judiciary, and the public through flagrant repeat offences. The lack of meaningful consequences is driving this problem. This cannot go on, for everyone's sake, including those committing the crimes. Many of the kids perpetrating crimes come from non-supportive, non-positive role-modelling, sometimes violent environments so it's often not their fault that they've turned out the way they have. Some may be natural reprobates, but I bet many just need a chance and the right guidance. Treat them like criminals and that's exactly what they'll become, destroying their lives, their victim's lives and costing us all way more in the long term. For that reason, I am proposing a system of escalating consequence as a deterrence and remediation solution. My suggestion, which certainly needs fleshing out, is based on the principle of improve the person, improve the world. No shortage of essential but inadequately addressed services beleaguers our communities, whether it be caring for an elderly person's yard or replanting degraded land. The State should develop a system of such projects that offenders are required to participate in upon a determination of guilt. The list should be diverse to provide variety, relevance to offence, and alignment with offender skills and interests. The extent of time assigned will obviously depend on the seriousness of the offence, previous record, prospects for future transgressions, and personality profile of the offender. The judge, supported by professional social worker/psych evaluations, can determine penalty-appropriateness case by case. The objective is to levy "real" consequence in terms of demanding work, while also developing skills, community consciousness, and hopefully pride in the work completed. The service required should constitute a genuine deterrence factor. This is not blind punishment - this is personal remediation. If the offender reoffends, the ante is upped for the next round of community service. If they planted 1000 trees the first time, they're required to plant 3000 the next time. This approach is intended to deliver community investment, crime prevention and personal remediation. Of course, it will require funding and resources to support new supervising staff, guidance and psych professionals, social workers, etc. But if done well, if properly (not token) resourced, it will arrest the cycle of crime and community angst. How much is that worth? We're certainly paying a lot now, to a degree that communities everywhere are tired of. It's costing public money now and it's certainly costing private money (for cars burnt, property stolen) not to mention police and judiciary frustration and considerable community angst. What's the relative cost of spending \$50,000 on an intervention now versus offenders spending the rest of their lives incarcerated at \$50,000 per annum? Something has to be done, how about something that works?