

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

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Miss Sandy Bolton MP
Committee Chair
Parliament House
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YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM SELECT COMMITTEE

The Mount Isa City Council (Council) welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the Queensland Parliament's Inquiry into Youth Justice Reform. Council is pleased to see the Queensland Government's renewed focus on youth crime as it is a continuing concern within the region. Council acknowledges that most youth crime can be attributed to a relatively small number of offenders. It should be noted that this small number of offenders should not tarnish or take away from the achievements of the majority of young people that are actively involved in the community through sporting groups, schools or service organisations. The majority of young people in Mount Isa are not involved in any type of inappropriate behaviour or illegal activities.

Council notes that there are however that the patterns of behaviour that are displayed on a regular basis by a small group of young people in Mount Isa. The issues include but are not limited to the following:

- Breaking and entering;
- Larceny;
- Hooning;
- Vandalism;
- Assault and other violent crimes;
- Drug and alcohol related crimes.

Despite local government holding no jurisdiction per se in relation to crime, Mount Isa City Council acknowledges the community's repeated concerns and as such Council has been actively facilitating stakeholder meetings in relation to the safety of vulnerable community members and youth crime. This submission is guided by Council's experience in this field including our previous submissions to parliament on the Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2021.

In the development of a 10 year strategy for youth justice in Queensland Council would like to highlight the following issues to the Committee. These issues may be unique to Mount Isa, although it is highly likely that these issues will be experienced by other regional cities.

Youth Agency Audit

- Council believes that there are issues around the number of services, and how they do or do not work together. This issue has been a long-time discussion point in Mount Isa. It would appear that there are a number of agencies involved in dealing with youth, however the actions of these different agencies do not appear to be coordinated in an effective manner or appropriately targeted at reoccurring issues.
- There appears to be competition for resources and funding between the different agencies which results in different agencies being responsible for different services. Considerable budgets are allocated to these services with limited accountability and key performance

indicators. Council would be keen to understand the current and future funding to be allocated to manage youth crime in the region.

Inaccessibility of Youth Services

- The issue of child safety and youth crime is not limited to business hours and, unfortunately many of the funded services within the City of Mount Isa only operate during normal business hours.
- Afterhours services would be more appropriately deal with issues created by some of the youth of Mount Isa and would potentially mitigate concerns for vulnerable community members.
- The spatial distribution of services and program delivery needs to be considered so as to ensure that services are offered where youth can access. Mount Isa despite having a population of 20 000 and a large geographical footprint does not have public transport and as such attendance at programs requires transport by private car or taxi, creating a barrier and a cost to participation.

Role of Mount Isa City Council

- Council has recently developed and has begun implementation of a Youth Strategy, identified a role for Council in providing dedicated youth resources in the form of youth workers.
- Council would welcome funding to scale its Youth strategy implantation and sustainable ongoing delivery.
- Council has identified through this strategy the need to better understand the needs of youth, especially when designing and construction infrastructure or spaces that will be used by youth, such as basketball courts, skate ramps and active play areas.
- Mount Isa City Council has a role to play in working with other groups to improve safety in the City. This would include groups such as Crime Stoppers and Safety Committees.
- Council has a responsibility to reduce crime through appropriate urban design, ensuring that new buildings and structures do not create places where residents do not feel safe or there is the opportunity for people to congregate without appropriate surveillance.
- The City of Mount Isa will continue to apply for funding to augment the existing CCTV network to ensure that the community has an added sense of safety when moving about the City. Council will work closely with the community and the Queensland Police to place new cameras in the most appropriate locations, including youth crime hotspots.

Mentoring and Education

- Council submits that there are opportunities to further explore the potential of formalised and informal mentoring. Council believes that there are motivated people in the community that would be prepared to mentor young people if the opportunity was provided.
- Culturally appropriate mentoring programs should be supported and fostered to ensure that the right role models with the relevant authority and influence are engaged.
- Additionally, Council believes that more monitoring of children should take place throughout primary schools to ensure that children are growing up in a safe and secure environment, where positive role models are easily identifiable.

Parental Responsibilities

- Council submits that there needs to more education provided or made available to parents in relation to dealing with disengaged youth.
- Youth programs currently existing could be assessed for quality outcomes and those that are showing deficiencies have the funds diverted to intervention programs that address parental responsibility and accountability.
- Early intervention and support for parents who are struggling with their children can often improve the chances for a family to avoid issues related to youth crime.

- Providing resources and training to parents may change the way parents guide their decision-making processes and make children aware of their responsibilities as a young adult.
- It may be that through training and networking with other parents that families are better equipped to manage the behaviours of their children.
- Council submits that there will be continual youth recidivism experiences if the loop of parent responsibility and accountability for this youth cohort is not addressed in a meaningful way. Enforcing court ordered formal training for parents of repeat offending youth could address accountability and responsibility issues.

School Attendance

- It is submitted that young people that attend school on a regular basis are less likely to be involved in criminal activity. Council suggests that every effort should be made to get young people to school and sustain their attendance. If this means supporting young people with uniforms, breakfast and lunch, transport, sporting apparel or financial support this should be considered.
- Educating a child is a 14-year project and it is important to identify when intervention is needed to support the child and parent go through this journey.
- Education and intervention work aimed at parents of repeat truant young could lead to a significant increase in school participation.

Reimagining youth justice infrastructure, including best practice standard accommodation for children and young people who are detained, held on remand or transitioning from detention to the community.

- Council notes that the closest accommodation for young people who are detained is located some 900 kilometres away. This has a significant impact not only on the detained young person but their family and support network who cannot engage or support the individual.

Mount Isa City Council will continue to work with the different agencies throughout the region to reduce crime and increase safety. Issues related to youth crime and community safety are unlikely to be resolved in the short term, however through a collective and coordinated approach significant sustained change can be implemented. It is worth noting that children and youth are the future and any actions or initiatives undertaken now will be reflected in the behaviour of adults in the future and potentially their children. Council welcomes the review being undertaken by the Committee and looks forward to the recommendations.

The Council's representative for this matter is Mr Chad King who can be contacted on

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