

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

**Submission No:** 196  
**Submitted by:** Youth Affairs Network of Queensland  
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Youth Justice Reform Select Committee  
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Dear esteemed members of the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee,

I am writing to represent the [Youth Affairs Network of Queensland](#) (YANQ), the preeminent organisation within Queensland's youth sector. With over 700 members spanning the breadth of Queensland and boasting 37 years of dedicated service as the peak body for youth-related matters, we bring unparalleled representation and expertise to discussions surrounding youth issues, youth justice and particularly in relation to highly marginalised demographics.

This submission carries the full endorsement of YANQ's elected management committee, acting on behalf of our statewide membership.

In contemporary discourse, many peak bodies and non-governmental organisations have prioritised mere presence over principled advocacy, inadvertently contributing to what the sector has become which can be described as a "non-profit industrial complex." This trend has regrettably marginalised genuine social movements. Unlike these entities, YANQ operates with an unwavering commitment to advocating fearlessly for marginalised youth and their communities. Our actions are not dictated by transient political favor but are firmly rooted in our [organisational values](#).

Regrettably, over the past 12 years, successive Queensland Governments have sought to stifle our voice, the sole truly representative voice of the youth sector in Queensland. YANQ was initially defunded under the Newman LNP Government and, despite assurances during their opposition tenure, the Labor administration has failed to reinstate our core funding.

Consequently, YANQ operates predominantly as a volunteer-driven organisation, hampering our ability to fulfill our peak body functions and participate effectively in consultative processes.

We have observed with concern the scramble for attention and potential funding within various NGOs. Many individuals positioning themselves as experts lack firsthand experience

with the issues they address. Their proposed solutions often rely on theoretical frameworks and trendy concepts devoid of practical efficacy.

Reflecting on the evolution of youth work in Queensland, we note how shifts in funding guidelines and the purported professionalisation of the sector have displaced individuals with lived experience, replacing them with well-meaning yet inexperienced professionals. This transformation has left a void in effectively engaging with highly marginalised youth, leading to a neglect of those we have termed "outcome unfriendly" – a demographic disproportionately represented within the youth justice system.

Genuine youth work necessitates voluntary engagement, rooted in trust between young people and youth workers. Such trust is rarely established between marginalised young people and government-appointed officers, despite rebranding efforts. Consequently, government-funded entities often prioritise easily manageable cases, neglecting those most in need of support.

While acknowledging the importance of addressing broader youth issues, we emphasise the importance of trust-building with highly marginalised young people, achievable only through skilled practitioners with lived experience. Trendy methodologies such as "trauma-informed" approaches or "wrap-around services" often fail to resonate with highly marginalised young people, who reject patronising overtures.

Furthermore, the gradual erosion of dedicated government support structures, such as the Office for Youth, and peak bodies like the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition and Youth Arts Queensland, has compounded the sector's challenges. This divestment has left the youth sector largely paralysed, exacerbating the very issues it seeks to address.

We advocate for a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to youth issues, championing the reestablishment of the Office for Youth to spearhead policy development and coordination. This holistic framework is imperative for crafting effective youth justice strategies.

While we recognize that our concerns extend beyond the purview of this committee, we contend that addressing these systemic barriers is fundamental to any meaningful reform in youth justice. We urge the committee to engage with YANQ and our knowledgeable membership to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges hindering support for marginalised young people.

Yours sincerely,



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