

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

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Youth Crime Parliamentary Committee Submission - Rockhampton

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Committee Secretary
Youth Justice Reform Select Committee
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the committee's inquiry into Youth Justice Reform in Queensland.

About Our Space

Our Space is a small youth crime prevention project located within the Stockland Rockhampton shopping centre. The project was begun by a group of service providers responding to youth crime increases around the shopping centre and engagement with youth about how we could best respond to anti-social behaviour and criminogenic patterns. We would argue that this was in response to the lack of engagement from locally and recurrently funded Youth Support Services, both government and non-government, and First Nation Services.

Through the consultation with youth conducted in 2018, it was found that youth needed their own space to use and access. In 2021 "Our Space" was launched in its current tenancy (provided free of charge by Stockland Rockhampton). Since its inception Our Space has steadily grown to now service on average over 40 young people per session (usually between 3pm and 5pm), with 44 percent of those being from First Nations backgrounds.

Our Space provides a range of services in a welcoming environment including:

- Referrals to other existing youth service providers such as headspace, lives lived well, flexible learning options, transition to work programs and more
- A safe space for young people to access when out of home after school

- Refreshments and food when possible
- Access to contraceptives, pregnancy tests and feminine hygiene products
- A range of prosocial activities including gaming, arts and crafts, pool table, air hockey table
- Peer mentoring and access to a youth worker for advice in a non threatening manner

Since opening the space in 2021, the space has continued to fight for ongoing sustainable funding and currently has support from Stockland Rockhampton to continue its operations however we are still seeking ongoing sustainable funding to ensure the project remains and continues to assist youth to make pro-social choices and access help when required.

Key Issues

Access to recurrent funding

Our Space has been a key outcome of the Rockhampton CBCAC (Community Based Crime Action Committee). The working group from the committee was the group that established the project from its inception and remains to assist the Service Manager oversee and grow the project. CBCAC has provided funding to ensure the ongoing operation and initial employment of the Our Space staff. The CBCAC funding is mainly aimed at supporting new initiatives to develop to respond to youth crime and assist prevention.

The CBCAC funding is now called CBCA and managed through the Youth Justice (YJ) Grants Team. The transition to YJ is understandable, but the processes are not timely and flexible to meet local needs. For example, Our Space applied to the new CBCA YJ grants round that closed in December 2023, to fund more youth support workers due to the increasing youth engagement, but to date, Our Space has not been notified by YJ Grants of the outcome.

Stockland Rockhampton have also supported the project in-kind and with funding, however Stockland are seeking further commitment from government and other businesses to assist with the ongoing funding of the project.

The Our Space Service Manager applied for the Youth Justice Community Innovation Partnership Grant in 2023 to assist with ongoing funding for additional staff, programs and operational costs in 2023. This application was denied and also all the other Rockhampton applicants to this fund were also denied funding. The only project funded in Central Queensland was based in Woorabinda and this project is yet to go ahead (<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/97570>).

In order to continue and build on the work we have already done we would like to seek ongoing government support or a longer commitment, rather than seeking funding yearly, which takes up a significant amount of time and resources.

In particular the Rockhampton community (and in particular Our Space) needs funding that:

- Is responsive to local community need
- Can be provided to auspiced organisations
- Can be provided to organisations with or without DGR1 status
- Is timely and able to be acquitted on a regular basis

- Provides a key contact to talk to about enquiries (not just an email address that doesn't respond to requests)
- Provides funding for multiple years (to ensure sustainability of service provision)

Engagement with other service providers

One of the key differences with the Our Space project is that the service is a hub model that provides linkages to other key youth services providers throughout the CQ region. Relationships with other service providers and engagement from them in the Our Space project is key to create those linkages and provide youth with a pathway to access services.

- Our Space has a working group with members from the following committed organisations:
 - Stockland Rockhampton
 - CQ Hospital and Health Service (CQ Health)
 - UnitingCare
 - headspace
 - Lives Lived Well
 - Queensland Police Service
 - Carinity Education

At points in the past 3 years we have also had organisations attend from organisations such as:

- PCYC
- Darumbal Community Youth Service Inc.
- Murri Courts Rockhampton

We have continually invited a range of stakeholders, especially local Indigenous led organisations to be involved in the group, especially in order to gain valuable cultural insights. We have struggled to get representatives from organisations that we would find value in working with such as Darumbal Community Youth Services Inc., Darumbal and Enterprises (DPAC). We also find that Aboriginal led organisations often avoid working together on projects and avoid engaging with other organisations for larger events such as Mental Health week in 2023. Two separate events were held last year, even when the Indigenous led organisations were invited to be a part of organising a community event held at Kershaw Gardens.

We hope that the Parliamentary Committee can look at mandating these relationships and ensuring that rather than fighting over funding, programs and events, a collaborative approach can be taken to tackle youth crime in Rockhampton.

What the youth are telling us

Our Space can see up to 1000 youth per month using the service. The majority of youth causing issues from from disadvantaged backgrounds, experiences with the child protection system, homelessness, neglect, trauma, limited education and disengagement from the education system. In addition to increasing numbers of youth accessing the space, we are also seeing an increase in the number of First Nation children utilising the service. Currently on average, we have around 44% of young people who identify from a First Nations background accessing the space.

Some of the common requests for support we receive include:

- Access to transport home, to a family or to a friends home
- Access to food or money for food
- Money for a bus ticket
- Sanitary items for girls
- Contraception or pregnancy tests
- Requests for support to access alternative accommodation or housing

Recommendations

1. Increase the implementation and funding to early and mid-tier intervention and family support programs that support parental capacity to respond to child behavioural challenges and the effects of trauma. All efforts should focus on addressing the root causes of offending.
2. Advocate for regular and transparent reporting on financial usage and outcomes from Youth Support Services with recurrent Government funding. Tie recurrent funding to specific outcomes, such as improved health, education, or employment rates or less offending.
3. Funding to be flexible, timely and fit for local community responses to youth crime issues. Timely funding means that the resources can be accessed quickly and efficiently, without unnecessary delays or bureaucracy.
4. Introduce locally led multi-stakeholder panels for young people at risk of offending and address social indicators of risk like Multi-agency Collaborative Panels (MACPs).
5. Encourage First Nations-designed and led initiatives but ensure they are accountable for the funds.
6. Advocate for First Nations Services to be more responsive to local crime needs and submit regular reporting about their community and stakeholder involvement in reducing youth offending.
7. Encourage First Nations Services and other key youth services to operate outside existing 9 to 5pm operating hours to meet the needs of youth especially when there is a demonstrated requirement for services at that time (including public holidays and weekends).