

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

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A Collective Approach

CLOSING THE YJ GAP

About Every Child CQ

Every Child Central Queensland Inc. is a small, dynamic, Central Queensland (CQ) based organisation created in 2015 by a group of passionate locals to be the backbone for place-based approaches to addressing inequity in children's development in our region.

We use the most current and proven methodologies to involve all stakeholders and actors in developing a 'collective impact' approach to build upon the inherent strength of our community. Every Child Central Queensland Inc. grew out of love for our region, the families that live here and a deep belief in the adage that 'It takes a community to raise a child'.

We understand that 'we are what we are because of who we all are'. Our families are as culturally diverse as the land in which we live, creating a vibrant, yet complex, regional and rural community with its own unique blend of strengths and challenges.

We work alongside our community - to call out disadvantage, recognise vulnerability and identify opportunity. To do this, we work with our whole community, service providers and representative bodies in community, government, education and business to explore our local issues and design appropriate responses. At the heart of what we do is working with the 'full community' to construct the architecture that is required to form an environment where community members are empowered to be the drivers of change and ultimately own the future they create.

Our Vision is for Every Child in CQ to have every chance of reaching their full potential.

Acknowledgement:

Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee (CBCAC) has taken a lead role in building strong collaboration and understanding to address youth crime in the Rockhampton area. Several former and current youth and community activities have been funded by CBCAC and auspiced by ECCQ,

Introduction

A Gap in the Youth Justice System exists for the children and youth of Central Queensland. This is evidenced by the degree of reoffending and the increases in offences in recent years for crimes committed by youth in the Rockhampton and Capricornia regions and, across Central Queensland.

The reasons for this increasing gap are complex and need whole of the community to work as a collaborative to ensure that this stops here and does not escalate and persist for another decade or more. Almost a decade has gone by since Every Child CQ was launched as a powerful and robust collective to increase the opportunities for a better life for the children of Central Queensland. A decade on, and with volunteers (after hours) managing Every Child CQ with full and committed community support, Every Child CQ knows the need is urgent and are aware of the consequences of escalating youth crime in the region, with youths offending currently becoming more brazen and 'untouchable'. Small vigilante groups in the region have popped up to defend themselves and their families and property which will in turn create community divide and increased unrest. **The time for action is NOW.**

Reasons for the Gap

Addressing Youth Crime is a complex area that seems to be embedded in most communities across Australia and that it is a common issue in most developed economies around the world.

Some of the key reasons for this Gap are as follows:

1. The background of why youth commit crimes is not given enough attention. This is complex and addressed, otherwise youth crime issues will continue to escalate. Children and youth who commit crimes may experience domestic violence, sexual abuse, parental drug misuse, parental gambling, intergenerational incarceration and the casual acceptance/normalisation of familial incarceration.
2. Detention is not working. Incarceration for some youth provides a level of security – set routines, meals clothes and provides education etc.
3. Learning from incarcerated peers. Young people when incarcerated may learn from incarcerated peers and progress a criminal career.
4. Intergenerational incarceration – youth having witnessed previous or current Family members in detention (Uncle, Parent, Auntie, Grandparent etc.); may provide a sense of normalising going 'back in', which may be looked upon as favorable. May also be an incentive to re-offend.
5. Children and youth with neurodevelopment and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder disabilities are largely undiagnosed. Assessment and diagnosis of these disabilities will assist in providing the appropriate intervention for these children and young people.

Problems - Causality

1. Low levels of literacy and numeracy – children and youth who are involved in youth crime have generally low-levels of literacy and numeracy, due to low engagement or early disengagement from school, along with the following point below.
2. Parental responsibility is lacking in many families of children and youth offenders. Selected Parents / Caregivers are not valuing or understanding the importance of school education. Schools are trying to be creative in providing incentives for Students to attend school. Programs to address parental responsibility are offered by NGOs and government services, however, are limited and not consistent in

providing required wrap around and coordinated support services. Funding is mostly short term. Some children and youth have challenging home lives and escape, spending more time on streets etc.

3. [Suicide is the leading cause of death among Australians aged 15–24](#)¹
More than 350 young people aged 18 to 24 take their own lives every year — this is more than the number who die on the roads. For every youth suicide completed, there are 100 to 200 more attempts.² Indigenous young people aged 15-17 years account for 94.4% of all suicide's deaths of the 5-17 years old cohort.³
4. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a diagnostic term used to describe impacts on the brain and body of individuals prenatally exposed to alcohol. FASD is a lifelong disability. Individuals with FASD will experience some degree of challenges in their daily living, and need support with motor skills, physical health, learning, memory, attention, communication, emotional regulation, and social skills to reach their full potential.⁴ FASD is prevalent in CQ (silent epidemic) and youth affected may be already caught up in the Youth Justice system. With FASD being a complex condition, the majority of youth are not diagnosed and/or maybe often misdiagnosed. CQ Youth Connect was the only Youth Health Service across CQ, advocating and addressing FASD at various levels (ensuring prevention, supporting assessment, diagnoses and wrap around support services) See Recommendation 3 regarding the FASD CQ Alliance.
5. Unintended teen pregnancies are prevalent in CQ – some unaware of pregnancy up to 2-3 months. On average approx. 50% of pregnancies are unplanned in Australia. As a result, many of these young women would probably have been partying and drinking in the early formative stages of pregnancy, resulting in babies born with neurodevelopmental and FASD disabilities.
6. Lack of ongoing and long term coordinated intervention and support services for a persons affected by FASD from pre-birth, post birth, pre-school, primary and high school age youth, right through to transmission into adulthood.
7. Central Queensland is low socio-economic and has a high percentage of youth.

AEDC Report - 2018

The AEDC reports whether children are on track, at risk or developmentally vulnerable across each of the five domains. Children that are developmentally vulnerable demonstrate much lower-than-average competencies in that domain.

- 29.8% developmentally vulnerable children in one or more domains in 2018
- 15.8% developmentally vulnerable children in two or more domains in 2018
- The physical health and wellbeing domain had the largest percentage of developmentally vulnerable children (14.7%)
- Within the region, Rockhampton (R) LGA had the largest percentage of developmentally vulnerable children in two or more domains (18.5%)

Capricorn region snapshot:

The Capricorn Region had a significant increase in the number of children developmentally vulnerable on Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain from 2009 to 2018. Livingstone had a significant increase in the number of children developmentally vulnerable on Physical Health and Wellbeing domain from 2009 to 2018. Rockhampton had a significant increase in the number of children developmentally vulnerable on Physical Health and Wellbeing, Social Competence and Emotional Maturity domains from 2009 to 2018.

Developmentally vulnerable children by domain by LGA, Capricorn region and Queensland, 2018.

Uniting Effort Working Group Report - 2022

Custom region / LGA / State	Domain					Summary		Children assessed
	Physical health and wellbeing	Social competence	Emotional maturity	Language and cognitive	Communication skills and general knowledge	One or more domains	Two or more domains	
	— per cent —					— per cent—		number
Capricorn region	14.7	14.1	10.7	9.7	11.6	29.8	15.8	1,554
Livingstone (S)	12.1	7.9	5.6	4.4	6.1	22.7	8.6	429
Rockhampton (R)	15.6	16.4	12.6	11.7	13.8	32.5	18.5	1,125
Queensland	12.3	11.9	10.5	8.0	10.1	25.9	13.9	61,781

The AEDC 2021 data overall of Australia stats:

Key findings for 2021 include:

At a national level, the AEDC data shows the percentage of children who were on track on 5 domains decreased for the first time since 2009 (from 55.4% in 2018 to 54.8% in 2021).⁵

Results also show a slight increase in the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable:

- Children assessed as developmentally vulnerable on one or more domain increased from 21.7% in 2018 to 22% in 2021.
- Children assessed as developmentally vulnerable on two or more domains also increased from 11% in 2018 to 11.4% in 2021.

CQ Community Collective Work

Success in addressing the issues, involves community engagement, collaboration and working as a collective to expand the work from kindergarten to Year 12, transition to adulthood education while prioritising individual needs and supports, and ensuring the development of life skills alongside the 'Three R's'.

A vital component is the need for an independent community driven 'backbone organisation' which can harness the collaboration and collective efforts of government agencies, not for profit organisations to work together to build and enable children and youth to live their best life, guide and nurture them away from the influences that lead them into crime. **Funding and support is required for a 'backbone organisation'** in Rockhampton – confirmed by the Uniting Effort Working Group project report.

A framework already exists for a 'backbone organisation' in Rockhampton - [Every Child CQ](#) – established in 2015 (see Recommendation 2. of this submission). This incorporated organization managed by volunteers needs to be funded to enable vital work to be undertaken to prevent and reduce youth crime and to enable every child to have every chance at success.

Many dedicated people are working extremely hard (many currently frustrated) in Government agencies and not for profit organisations trying to address the causation of youth crime (with knowledge that there is a link between youth crime and DV) with response approaches, limited. Government organisations and not for profit representatives are constrained by organizational boundaries and program requirements/KPIs and therefore, can only provide their capacity/resources in small measure. The impact and importance of a collaborative capacity building, prevention and support and pathway services is essential to success.

Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee (CBCAC)

CBCAC has taken a lead role in building strong collaboration and understanding to address youth crime in the Rockhampton area. Several activities have been funded by CBCAC and auspiced by ECCQ,

Three major background projects through CBCAC that scoped, defined and proposed priorities for addressing youth crime in Rockhampton through a collaborative local effort are as follows:

1. The **Pathways Project** to define what support programs are available in Rockhampton. This project revealed that there were 99 programs being operated by 35 agencies, departments & NFP's in Rockhampton and that there was very little **formal** collaboration or integration across the agencies and programs.
2. **Community Development Workshops**. Developed a co-designed common understanding of what was required for a community driven approach to addressing youth crime.
3. **Uniting Effort Working Group project** which used the MindHive platform to access national and international expertise in answering questions that defined the blockages to developing a collaborative effort across government, not-for-profit agencies and community. MindHive then identified key themes and ranked these in order of importance.

International Working Examples

As our youth crime rate increases, we need to look outside Australia at international working models for answers to long standing and complex issues in addressing youth crime.

Mentioned by Dr Wallace Taylor, PhD at the Rockhampton Youth Justice Reform hearing on 27 February 2024, was the [Glasgow City Council](#) (Scotland) approach to youth justice. “Youth Justice in Glasgow is about ensuring that young people who display difficult and challenging behaviours, including offending, are given the supports and opportunities required to remain safely in the community, to change their behaviour, to reduce their vulnerability and to make positive choices for the future. A multi-agency Youth Justice Strategy Group in Glasgow has responsibility for planning and strategic development of services for young people involved in offending. All of these agencies share joint responsibility for implementing the Youth Justice Strategy and ensuring that Glasgow's young people achieve the best outcomes in life.” Link to the [Glasgow City Integrated Services Plan 2020-2023](#) ⁶

“The Scottish Government’s approach to early intervention aims for all children to have the same opportunities. In addition, the following focus remains pertinent to EEI:

- Key to supporting prevention is agencies working together to provide support
- Prevention and early intervention does not mean early interference by the state at national or local level
- Key part of any early intervention policy is building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure the best outcomes for themselves
- Moving from intervening when a crisis happens towards prevention, building resilience and providing the right level of support before problems materialise
- Universal services, who cater for all children, must have the capacity and skills to engage all children and young people throughout childhood and as young adults - even those who may be challenging and reject first offers of help.

The findings of the Edinburgh Study strongly reflect the Kilbrandon philosophy that we should be responding to children’s needs not deeds - that often children involved in offending behaviour are our most traumatised and victimised individuals (McAra & McVie, 2010), and should be responded to as children first (Case & Haines, 2015), (Case & Hazel, 2023).

The Children First, Offenders Second (CFOS) approach developed in Wales and England highlights four principles:

1. Promoting children’s rights and adults’ responsibilities; prioritises children’s rights, strengths, capacities and potentialities, making the facilitation and realisation of these the primary responsibility of the adults with whom they work.

2. Promoting desistance and inclusion; promotes children's strengths and capacities as a means of facilitating desistance, restoration and inclusion. 3. Promoting diversion and systems management; emphasises diversion and child friendly systems management as vehicles for promoting positive behaviours/outcomes for children, and avoiding the potentially criminogenic consequences of system contact. 4. Promoting relationship-based partnerships; is underpinned by children's participation and engagement, which is driven by positive relationships between the child and practitioner."

Conclusion

The time for action on Youth Justice is HERE....EVERY DAY! Both for victims and for perpetrators! Government policy and community inequity will continue to drive downward spiralling of community safety, vigilantism, violence and very poor outcomes for particularly young people.

Stop passing the buck between governments, the community needs action NOW! Communities are ready to part of the solution, rather than being told by Governments. It is those living in community every day that understand causation, the need for sustainable programs across society, working with those on the fringes and providing lasting support instead of "one hit wonders", that just chew up funds. COMMUNITY must be true partners and at the centrepiece of discussion and action to bring lasting change. We are ready, with mechanisms in place. We just need to have governments stop the rhetoric, get rid of the politics and make clear, decisive and practical decisions,our COMMUNITIES, FAMILIES AND CHILDREN'S FUTURES DEPEND UPON IT.

Recommendations:

1. To establish a Youth Justice Improvement Board in Queensland to work with Youth Justice Improvement Action Groups in each region within Queensland.

This recommendation is inspired by the international [Youth Justice Improvement Board](#) model set up by the Scottish government under their strategy - '[Preventing Offending: Getting it right for Children and Young People](#)', published in June 2015.

“The Board is chaired by Michael Chalmers, Director of the Scottish Government’s Children and Families Division, and includes senior representation from a wide range of organisations including Police Scotland, COSLA, SCRA, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) as well as education, health and third sector. The Board also involves young people in meaningful ways.”

Rockhampton already has a well established structure with Every Child CQ and the United Effort Working Group under Rockhampton Community Based Crime Action Committee (CBCAC) which has taken a lead role in building strong collaboration and understanding to address youth crime in the Rockhampton area.

2. Provide funding (bi-partisan support – 5 year pilot) for growth and expansion of Every Child CQ (to play a significant role in leading the Youth Justice Improvement Action Group)

Every Child CQ (ECCQ) was established in 2015 and currently receives funding from CBCAC for a number of activities including a highly successfully Youth Engagement program in partnership with Stockland Rockhampton - 'Our Space', and other half-yearly community engagement activities. Management of ECCQ is currently voluntary due to lack of adequate funding for staffing. A Program Manager and Coordinator for ECCQ were funded for a short time however, these roles have not been funded for many years. ECCQ was formed after extensive community consultation and engagement with government, community, education and business sectors with the focus on improving the wellbeing and life outcomes for children and youth in Central Queensland. Robust governance arrangements were established as was the implementation of a strategic plan for ECCQ. The supports and structures for ECCQ to advance and expand are established, as is the collective and collaborative structures of the aligned Uniting Effort Working Group and CBCAC.

3. Support for the establishment of a Neurodevelopment and FASD Clinic in Central Queensland to provide intervention for children and youth in Central Queensland as part of the wrap around services needed to give every child every chance to reach their full potential.

The FASD CQ Alliance sought funding for establishment of a clinic but unfortunately was unsuccessful. The successful grantee, University of Queensland Neurodevelopment Clinic will be partnering with FASD CQ Alliance to provide training for health professionals and needed resources.

Research conducted by Carol Bower and colleagues in 2018, surrounding Western Australian detention centre suggested that “the high burden of FASD and significant neurodevelopmental impairment found among youth sentenced to detention, highlights the need for policy and practice responses to efficiently identify these individuals in detention and the wider justice system; to provide appropriate rehabilitation and therapeutic interventions during detention and following release, and to ensure the justice workforce is suitably skilled to work with individuals with significant neurodevelopment impairment” (autism spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual disability, motor disability (cerebral palsy), seizures, learning disabilities (dyslexia), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)).

References:

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare - Suicide & self-harm monitoring;
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/populations-age-groups/suicide-among-young-people>
2. [Health Direct Australia](#) – Youth Suicide
3. [Black Dog Institute](#) – We are not part of the Problem – We are part of the Solution.
4. [Better Health Channel](#) – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
5. [Department of Education](#) - Report now available: 2021 Australian Early Development Census
6. [Glasgow City Integrated Services Plan 2020-2023](#)
7. [CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW: POLICY, PRACTICE AND LEGISLATION](#)
[Section 10: Early and Effective Intervention](#), June 2023, Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice, Scotland.