

yourtown Submission to the Independent Review of Youth Detention

Prepared by **yourtown**
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Introduction

While the discussion paper issued by the Review canvasses a number of issues, yourtown's experience in this area is primarily focused on developing and delivering programs aimed at reducing the likelihood of young people re-offending following their release from detention.

Therefore, our response is focused on Issues 6 and 7 currently under examination by the Inquiry:

- programs and services delivered in youth detention centres, including addressing causational issues behind their offending behaviour; and
- current cultural programs and services and their effectiveness in addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth detention.

This submission provides comment on the effectiveness of programs available to assist young people in detention, together with recommendations about how to improve these programs.

Background on yourtown

yourtown (formally BoysTown) is a national organisation and registered charity which aims to tackle the issues affecting the lives of young people. Established in 1961, yourtown's mission is to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life.

yourtown currently provides a range of 'face to face' and virtual services to young people and families seeking support. These services include:

- Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling and support service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues;
- Accommodation responses to homeless families and women and children seeking refuge from Domestic/Family Violence;
- Parenting Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young parents and their children;
- Parentline, a telephone counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory;
- Paid employment to more than 200 young people each year in supported enterprises as they transition to the mainstream workforce; and
- Employment programs which support approximately 11,000 young people each year, allowing them to re-engage with education and/or employment;

Our regional services and programs are delivered in communities which have been identified as among the most disadvantaged in Australia. These include: targeted areas within Logan, Ipswich and Redland Cities and the southern and western suburbs of Brisbane in Queensland; Greater Western Sydney and the Hunter region in New South Wales; Northern Adelaide and Port Pirie in South Australia; northern and southern Tasmania and the East Kimberley in Western Australia.

In each of these regions, yourtown works in close partnership with government, industry, education and training providers and community organisations to help highly disadvantaged young people to overcome barriers and re-engage with the community, learning and work. We specialise in working with marginalised young people aged 14-29, including those from designated disadvantaged groups. These groups include early school leavers, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people from diverse cultural backgrounds, young offenders and young parents returning to the workforce.

In relation to young offenders our services include pre-release case management, training and intensive personal support for young offenders in two adult correctional centres. Details of this program are outlined in [Attachment I](#).

yourtown also provides post-release assistance for ex-detainees to help them to re-engage with the community, learning and work and to avoid re-offending. This is delivered via individual case management, referral to specialist support services, personal development and life skills workshops, help to re-engage with formal education, job-specific work preparation training and advocacy and placement assistance through our

youth-specialist employment services. We also offer a range of specialist training and employment services for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including support from Indigenous Mentors.

Comment on Issue 6 - Programs and services for young people in detention

Identifying causes of offending

yourtown's experience is that young people involved with the criminal justice system usually have multiple and overlapping circumstances and characteristics which have led to their offending behaviour/s and place them at high risk of re-offending. These risk factors include: history of failure in mainstream education; low literacy/numeracy levels; poor cognitive function; mental health issues; poor impulse control; drug/alcohol dependency; lack of work experience and employability skills; lack of family support; unstable accommodation; coming from a background of abuse and neglect; disconnection from culture and community; feelings of hopelessness about the future, and living in regional areas characterised by high levels of unemployment, poverty, crime and the ready availability of drugs.

Many of these young people also come from a background where there is a family or community history and acceptance of offending behaviour. Young offenders often have close relatives or community connections in prison, which normalises incarceration. In our experience offenders who are first detained as young as 10 years of age may be effectively institutionalised by the time they enter the adult correctional system.

Preventing recidivism

It is our view that existing programs supporting young offenders pre and post release do not provide an integrated 'through care' intervention model. This results in many young offenders reoffending soon after release from detention resulting in further periods of incarceration. A significant reason for the overcrowding of Youth Detention facilities is the growing population of recidivist offenders.

Our research and experience indicates that any program designed to prevent recidivism among young offenders needs to address the multidimensional and interrelated causes of offending, while providing ongoing personal support over an extended period of time. Intervention models need to be designed to help young people overcome barriers and address underlying causes of offending, while building "protective factors" to guard against recidivism and core skills for re-engaging in learning and work.

Therefore, intervention models need to be multi-dimensional and designed to provide young people with an integrated range of support over an extended period of time from the point where they arrive in detention, while they are incarcerated, on release and during the process of transition back into the community. Our experience is that the most successful programs are those which are designed to enable participants to: address the underlying causes of offending; overcome barriers to engagement in learning and work; build pro-social networks; improve their core life skills and employability skills; and re-engage in formal education or secure a job with prospects for career development.

For these intervention programs to work, there are certain pre-requisites that need to be fulfilled in order for young people to benefit from participation. Typically, on their release, young people need urgent support in: accessing financial entitlements; organising to meet legal obligations; family reconnection; securing stable accommodation; dealing with psychological distress and drug and alcohol addiction. Concurrently, young people also need assistance in re-connecting with education or finding employment.¹ Therefore, **yourtown** strongly recommends that any program delivered for young offenders while in detention needs to be regarded primarily as the starting point for an integrated 'through care' intervention model as outlined below.

Designing a Throughcare Intervention Model for Young Offenders

Stage 1 – Pre-release

yourtown's experience is that the most successful young offender programs are holistic, person-centred, and strengths-based. They are designed to enable young people to:

¹ Research has demonstrated that education, training, constructive leisure activities and/or meaningful employment, empowers young people and assists in the prevention of criminal involvement (Parliament of Victoria Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, 2009; Cunneen & White, 2007).

- identify the causes of their offending behaviour
- recognise the impact and long term consequences of their behaviour on themselves and others
- find the motivation to change negative behaviours
- reduce their dependence on drugs and alcohol
- identify and build on their strengths
- improve their self-management skills
- improve their health and well-being
- improve their self-esteem, life and social skills
- build confidence in their ability to learn
- provide them with range of tools to support this change process and
- lay the foundations for a successful re-engagement with the community, learning and work

This stage should incorporate the provision of intensive therapeutic case management, coupled with individual coaching and mentoring, personal development and life skills training and planning for transition. The aim is to provide each young person with help in addressing underlying causes of offending, while building "protective factors" which can help guard against recidivism. Successful interventions also build combinations of psychological and behavioural outcomes by providing high intensity, ongoing support for young people and opportunities for early success.

The ethos of the intensive case management model is based on the capacity of close one-to-one relationships, built on mutual respect, to change the behaviour, lifestyle, attitudes and prospects of young offenders. Each young person should be offered a tailored package of personal support and supervision to help them to address the underlying causes of offending.

Following a comprehensive assessment of the needs of each young person and the development of a case plan, the role of Case Managers should be to provide a 'scaffolding' of support for each individual on their release. This would include helping each young person to develop a Relapse Prevention Plan to ensure that they successfully re-engage with the community, learning and work and avoid re-offending.

Stage 2 – Transition

This phase would commence at the point of release, at which point the Case Manager would provide the young person with support in implementing their transition plan. This would include assistance in: accessing services; securing stable accommodation; re-connecting with family; re-building relationships; addressing drug and alcohol problems; finding pro-social support groups; using public transport systems; using digital technology; managing finances; accessing entitlements and dealing with outstanding legal issues, including restorative justice programs.

Expert professional counsellors should be available to assist with: psychological assessments, intensive counselling, dealing with alcohol and drug dependence and referral to complementary programs. Young people would also be supported through access to 24/7 crisis helplines for them and their parents/carers, and close inter-agency working relationships to connect young people to other services.

Stage 3 – Preparation for engagement

Concurrently, the young person will need assistance in improving their life, interpersonal and employability skills, while building confidence, self-esteem and resilience through involvement in pro-social activities. Young people could either undertake a program aimed at helping them to re-engage successfully with formal education or vocational training or undertake work preparation training, prior to being placed in paid transitional employment with a social enterprise or in mainstream employment.

Training programs need to be highly practical and 'hands-on' and emphasise 'learning by doing' because the majority of participants have a poor history of success in traditional school or training environments. Our research has also identified that many of the clients in this cohort have undiagnosed learning disorders and cognitive problems. Training should also include literacy/numeracy assessment and remedial tutoring to help young people to develop self-confidence, improve self-esteem and build a positive future outlook. Participants would continue to receive individual support from their Case Managers during this phase of the program to ensure retention and completion.

Stage 4 – Re-engagement in learning and work

Case managers should work with those participants who want to re-engage in education or training to help them re-connect with school, TAFE or another training organisation. Where the young person wants to seek employment, local jobactive providers would provide help in securing a suitable job with a local employer in an industry with good career prospects. The case manager would provide each participant with post placement support to ensure retention.

Case managers and mentors

yourtown's experience in working with young detainees also highlights the importance of the personal link between the young person and their case manager. The case manager effectively becomes a mentor and positive adult role model who will be a 'coach' for each young person in turning their lives around. The case manager also plays a key role in assisting with transition back into the community on their release. This is particularly critical in the case of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those from Maori, Pacific Islander, Sudanese and other diverse communities.

yourtown strongly recommends that any program for young offenders needs to be delivered by teams incorporating highly skilled case managers and culturally appropriate mentors. The role of these skilled workers is to: challenge antisocial attitudes and feelings; encourage and facilitate positive peer associations; provide appropriate ongoing support and encouragement; provide coaching in problem solving skills and impulse control; address challenging behaviours and deal with safety, life skills and educational needs for the young person. Pro-criminal attitudes should be challenged continuously so that values, beliefs, and thoughts that promote or facilitate breaking the law are replaced with new norms.

Culturally appropriate mentors play a key role in building safe, trusting, relationships with young people, their families and community. They can also work with schools and training organisations to resolve potential barriers to engagement in learning, and work with employers to create supportive workplace environments, e.g. providing cross cultural training, negotiating workplace flexibilities.

Community-based program models

Positive community networks, including respected community leaders, are a key component of successful intervention programs. Reconnection to learning or work also takes place in supportive environments (alternative education settings; social enterprises).

Our most successful programs for young offenders have involved the provision of intensive individual case management by culturally appropriate case managers working closely with the young person, their family and community, to address behaviour, lifestyle, attitudes and future prospects. These workers understand issues confronting young people and help them to draw on individual, familial and community supports to strengthen cultural identity and connection to community.

An example of this type of program is Participate in Prosperity which was delivered by **yourtown** from 2007 to 2012, funded through Skilling Queenslanders for Work. The aim of the program was to assist ex-prisoners resettling in Logan City to make a successful transition back into the community and to re-engage in employment. Participants (a large proportion of whom were Indigenous) received support in securing stable accommodation, re-connecting with family, addressing drug and alcohol issues and improving their personal, life, employability and vocational skills while undertaking paid work in yourtown's social enterprises. They were subsequently placed in employment through **yourtown's** youth specialist employment services. Around 45 young offenders per year were assisted through this project before the program funding ceased.

Issue 7 – Programs and services for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in detention.

Incarceration is a major issue for many **yourtown** clients, but particularly for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A recent survey showed that around 35% of Indigenous clients participating in our programs have been in juvenile detention or the adult correctional system before coming to **yourtown**.

Based on yourtown's research and experience, it is recommended that any program provided for young Indigenous people in detention needs to incorporate the provision of culturally appropriate mentoring and focus on addressing both risk and protective factors in relation to offending behaviour.

Key program elements should include:

- provision of a comprehensive individual assessment for each client prior to release, including a psychological evaluation, identification of dependency issues and other barriers to re-engagement
- recognition of the need to address multiple barriers, including: personal/emotional difficulties; family relationships; community connections; employability skills; substance abuse and the risk of continuing links with previous criminal associates
- the use of an intensive one-on-one case management model to ensure all issues and barriers are addressed and core life skills are developed and enhanced
- the appointment of Indigenous case managers who can understand issues confronting young Indigenous clients and that helps them to draw on existing individual, familial and community strengths to strengthen cultural identity, kinship and relationships
- the development of individual case management (pathways) plans, matched to each young person's learning style and cultural background. The case manager should act as a single point of contact for advocacy, referral or financial brokerage for their clients
- the provision of a complete 'throughcare' model of assistance that commences within the correctional facility and is continued on release over an extended period of time. This should include addressing priority needs on release from detention, e.g. securing accommodation, connecting with family, accessing financial support, addressing psychological distress and dealing with alcohol and drug dependence
- a place-based approach to service delivery involving the use of collaborative working arrangements with Probation and Parole and community service providers to ensure a holistic, wrap-around service can be provided as a 'safety net' for clients with complex issues
- clinical practice support for front line staff and
- the use of existing pro-social community networks, including local Elders, in program delivery

yourtown also recommends that the development and operation of programs for young Indigenous officers be guided by regionally-based specialist Advisory Panels which include Indigenous Elders and relevant members of local communities who need to play a key role in helping young people to rebuild their cultural identity and connections.

yourtown Youthful Offenders Program (YOP)

Overview

yourtown currently delivers the Youthful Offenders Program (YOP) in two correctional centres in South East Queensland – Boys Yard at the Brisbane Correctional Centre and Woodford Correctional Centre. The aim of the program is to reduce the number and severity of behavioural incidents while in detention and reduce each participant's risk of re-offending on release.²

Program description/content

The Youthful Offenders Program incorporates group induction, individual assessment and planning, intensive individual support (therapeutic case management) and participation in personal development and life skills workshops. **yourtown** Case Managers work collaboratively with Correctional Centre staff to plan, deliver, monitor and review the effectiveness of interventions tailored to each young person's needs.

Intensive individual case management support is delivered by the Therapeutic Case Managers using a person-centred and strengths-based approach, consistent with evidence-based best practice.³ Staff use cognitive-behavioural strategies to help address re-offending behaviour, a technique consistently found to be more effective in reducing recidivism than other approaches.⁴

Common issues addressed through this process include:

- goal setting to establish the foundation for personal change and enable measurement of progress
- improving understanding of risk and consequences for self and others from negative behaviours
- building motivation to change and develop a more positive future outlook and
- addressing mental health issues, including stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidality

Since July 2016, the program delivered to young offenders at Woodford Correctional Centre has been strongly focused on assisting participants to deal with alcohol and other drug (AOD) dependence in response to issues identified by Queensland Correctional Services.

Participants also receive:

- coaching to improve capacity for managing their own behaviour, e.g. understanding consequential thinking, managing response to triggers, anger management and impulse control
- counselling to assist in dealing with grief and loss resulting from experience of separation from family, past trauma and abandonment issues and encourage self-acceptance and forgiveness
- assistance in building cultural identity and community connections
- assistance in addressing drug and alcohol dependence and
- advocacy support within the Centre.

Life skills and topic-based workshops are conducted with two facilitators and focus on addressing issues which are common across the group of participants. The YOP team is supported by **yourtown's** Practice Supervision team of highly skilled clinical psychologists who provide Case Managers with core skills training, monthly clinical practice supervision, debriefing and support (both face-to-face and online) and ongoing professional development.

Outcomes

² The pilot YOP commenced in April 2013 at the Woodford Correctional Centre with 26 participants aged 18-20 and was subsequently extended to June 2014. From July 2014, the scope of the program was expanded to include the Boys Yard Unit in the Brisbane Correctional Centre which houses young offenders aged 17. Currently, three Therapeutic Case Managers attend Woodford Correctional Centre for a total of 15 hours per week and Boys Yard for a total of 7 hours a week to deliver assessment, goal planning, individual support, referral responses and co-facilitated workshops.

³ Becker, D. & Drake, R. (1994). 'Individual placement and support: A community mental health center approach to vocational rehabilitation', *Community Mental Health Journal*, v30(2), pp.193-206.

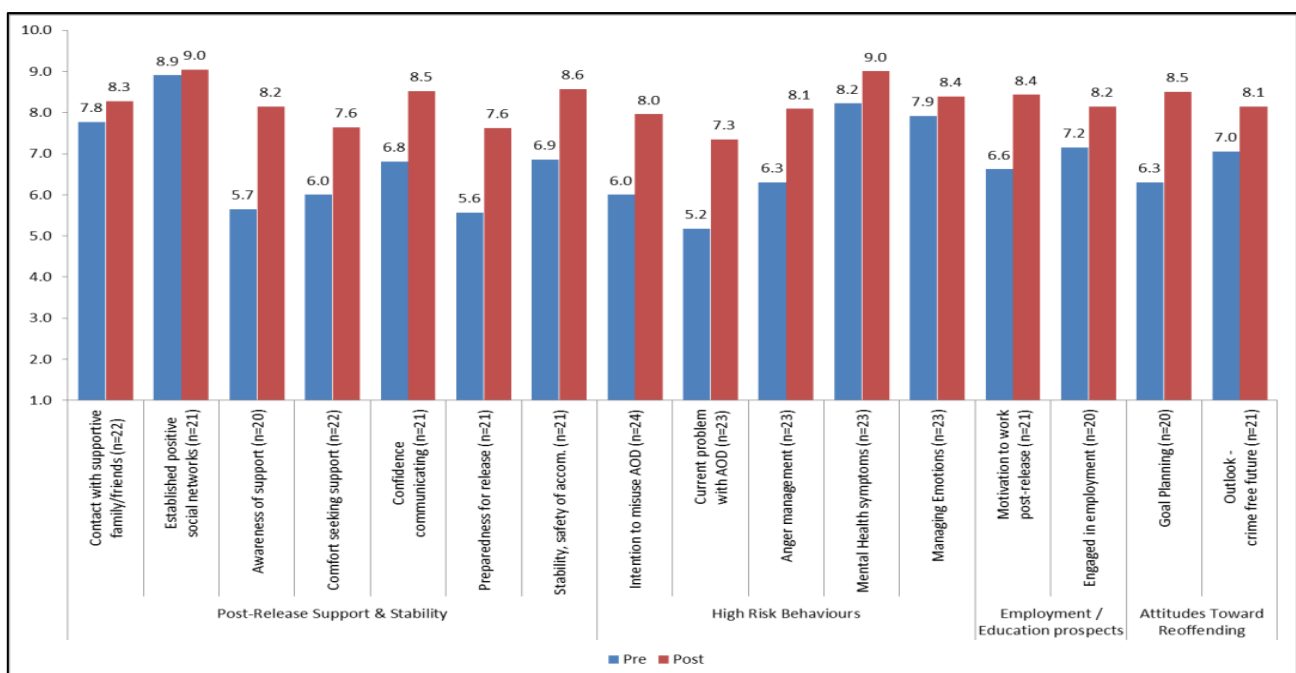
⁴ Birgden, A. (2008). Offender rehabilitation: a normative framework for forensic psychologists, *Psychiatry, psychology and law*, vol.15, no.3, pp.450-468.

From the inception of YOP, yourtown has worked in collaboration with Correctional Centre staff in the design and ongoing review of the delivery model. A formal evaluation of the program in 2014, identified that to date, the program had been delivered to 159 Woodford participants and 26 Boys Yard participants. Positive outcomes were achieved in a range of key performance areas which focused on minimising risk factors for recidivism and improving protective factors.

Positive outcomes included: improved attitudes towards the use of alcohol and other drugs; increased motivation to gain employment on release; improved links to services in readiness for release; increased capacity to manage anger and other emotional or mental health issues; changed mindset regarding negative behaviour; and a more positive future outlook. YOP had also had a positive impact on young people's sense of accountability and their acknowledgement of the consequences of their offending behaviour.

All participants involved in the evaluation indicated high levels of satisfaction with the program and most believed it had been effective in achieving its intended outcomes.⁵ Preliminary outcomes from a subsequent evaluation confirm that the program is effective in helping participants to achieve positive outcomes.⁶

The following diagram illustrates preliminary outcomes achieved with 27 program participants at Woodford.



Graph 1: Preliminary outcomes measured through pre and post YOP assessments with 27 program participants at Woodford (Groups 6 & 7 - 2014/2015)

⁵ yourtown 2014. Evaluating a Corrective Services Program for youthful offenders in South East Queensland.

⁶ yourtown 2015. Woodford Youthful Offenders Program, Group 6 & 7 Outcomes.