



Time to build a more effective youth justice system

With law and order policies being released thick and fast by political parties, youth advocates are calling for a shift from the ‘tough on crime’ approach to a smarter, more effective approach to justice.

‘We call on all political parties to change their approach to youth justice to be smarter, reduce recidivism and be more cost effective,’ said Craig Comrie, CEO of the Youth Affairs Council today.

‘We challenge the government to work more closely with the community sector to develop more effective strategies to prevent crime and reoffending in the community, that also fulfil our international obligations,’ he said.

The report ‘**Building a more effective youth justice system**’ is a result of a series of Youth Justice Think Tanks hosted by the Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), the Youth Legal Service (YLS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA). The Think Tanks brought together over 100 policy makers, representatives from non-government organisations, legal experts and youth workers to explore how Western Australia could evolve our youth justice approach to better meets the needs of young people and the community.

The report contains 26 recommendations targeting government and non-government services that can deliver effective community action.

‘We urgently need a high-level mechanism to foster and encourage collaboration between government departments and between the government and non-government sectors to deliver a more effective and collaborative approach to youth justice,’ said Irina Cattalini, CEO of WACOSS.

“Western Australia consistently has the second worst rate of detention of young people in Australia, and leads the nation in detention of young indigenous people.”

“These appalling statistics, coupled with the recent riot at the Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention facility, are clear indications that we need to change our thinking.”

“Young people who offend are more likely to change their behaviour when they have a greater stake in our society – such as decent living conditions, improved family relationships and meaningful daily activities,” said Cheryl Cassidy-Vernon, Director Youth Legal Service.

“Research has consistently shown that community based re-integrative programs (appropriate to the risk factors of each young person) actually work to rehabilitate young offenders,” she said.

“It costs us \$645 per day to lock up a young person, but only \$116 a day to supervise a young person in the community in one of these programs – why aren’t we investing more in delivering outcomes?”

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