



Mount Isa Family Support Service
&
Neighbourhood Centre Inc.

“Providing support for everyone in our Community”

9 April 2019

**SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
IN RESPONSE TO THE IMPRISONMENT INQUIRY DRAFT REPORT**

Dear Sir/Madam

We are a locally-run charity that has operated for more than 30 years in the Mount Isa community. As a Neighbourhood Centre, we are a non-stigmatising, non-targeted, first point of contact for anyone in the community who needs help. Approximately 75% of our clients are women, and about the same number identify as Indigenous.

Below are is our submission in response to the Draft Report, in which we only intend to comment on items we feel are relevant to our community.

1. Adopt more effective ways to deal with offending

- 1.1 We believe that the system will be more effective if non-custodial sentences are used whenever that would not compromise community safety. Examples we believe would work include:
- Community service
 - Home detention
 - Drug/alcohol rehabilitation
- 1.2 We support a more victim-focused system, which concentrates on restorative justice, where appropriate, for example meetings with and apology to victims, making restitution to victims.
- 1.3 We believe that the scope of criminal offences should be reduced, especially where there is no obvious victim, for example in the case of unpaid fines or low-level drug offences.

2. Break the cycle of reoffending

- 2.1 We support better coordination and accountability to effect more successful rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners. We believe that case management needs to be done by a dedicated group of properly-trained professionals, not prison officers who may be moved around to address overcrowded conditions.

- 2.2 We support removing unnecessary restrictions on work release orders, where that is likely to lead to improved rehabilitation and reintegration.
- 2.2 We believe that the primary goal of prison facilities must be to support rehabilitation in order to achieve community safety. Our understanding is that:
- People on short-term sentences must not be allowed to mix with high-security/long-term hardened criminals.
 - Prisoners on short sentences are often released before they complete rehabilitation programs, therefore work must be done on shortening programs and concentrating on creating habits of work and constructive routines.
 - The young people of our community would maintain a much better connection to family and to possible pathways to rehabilitation if they were held in a facility in this region. We commend to you such locally-grown solutions as the Indigenous Horsemanship Program, which has the wide support of the community and human rights campaigners, but which has remained unfunded. Such proposals should at least be given a trial and proper evaluation.

3. Reduce interactions with the criminal justice system

- 3.1 As a community service that has long experience of teaching life skills to at-risk families, we are most concerned at the chronic underfunding that we have experienced over recent years. We know that many of the young offenders in this town are simply not having their basic needs met at home. We suggest that funding be lifted to a level (ie approximately double what it currently is) to enable us to once again do work with our mostly Indigenous clients on basic prevention and intervention, eg:
- Household routines mealtimes, bedtime, cleaning, getting up and getting ready to go to school/work/job-hunting
 - Cooking and preparing nutritious meals, planning and budgeting for meals, preparing your own food to take to school or work
 - Personal hygiene and presentation, preparing for job interviews, looking after your clothes
- 3.2 We are most concerned with long-term issues in our community that have not been addressed, such as:
- Early diagnosis for FASD and other disabilities
 - The need for culturally-appropriate assessments of ability, such as intelligence quotient
 - Proper diagnosis for brain damage that may be caused by lead poisoning
 - The apparent reluctance in the past of the Living with Lead Alliance to properly educate the community about the long-term harm that can be caused to young children, thus motivating our most at-risk families to change their behaviours.
- 3.3 We understand that many young people who are not safe in their own homes (eg because of overcrowding, drinking, fighting, domestic violence) come into the contact with police and, when it is not safe to return them home, these young people are being housed overnight in the police watch-house. We believe this is a most inappropriate situation, bringing those young people into unnecessary contact with the criminal justice system, normalising incarceration and bringing them in contact with criminals. It is our firm belief that this community needs:
- A fully-funded night patrol, preferably run by the local Indigenous community
 - A fully-funded safe house, preferably not run by faith-based services with a history of child abuse
 - Whether as part of a safe house or otherwise, a fully-funded rest and recovery centre for children who have used substances.
- 3.4 We believe more needs to be done for the universal systems of health and education to work:
- There needs to be a public transport system in Mount Isa. The failure of successive governments to provide transport in such a large community, and which experiences such extremes of weather,

has contributed to disengagement. People are being cut off by Centrelink for failing to walk kilometres in 43 degree heat for an appointment. Most of our clients do not have their own transport, many are aged or infirm, and they cannot afford the cost of running a vehicle with our high fuel prices.

- For cultural reasons, many Indigenous children and young people would prefer to go to a particular school (eg one they find safe or culturally safe, or to be with their own family members) rather than to the school which is closest to them. The voices of Indigenous leaders in our community must be listened to, and transport provided for children to attend the school of their family's choice.
- There is a lack of access to child care, which prevents many families from engaging in training and employment, or even programs that we would wish to run if we had sufficient funding.

3.5 We believe there needs to be more cultural awareness training of police. We note that there are too many reports from our clients about negative interactions between the police and the Indigenous community including:

- Racial profiling of Indigenous youth, engaging with them when they apparently have done nothing wrong, photographing them, pushing them face-down on the ground, stripping/searching them, taunting them and only turning on body-cams when they react, taking their phones if/when they try to film the interactions
- The Indigenous community documenting these negative interactions but being too afraid of reprisals to make any formal complaint.

4. Build a better decision-making architecture

4.1 We support the creation of an independent body to run Queensland prisons with a brief to:

- Ensure greater support for and focus on victims, rather than perpetrators, of crime
- Focus more on rehabilitation, ensuring that it happens more quickly, and earlier in the career of any potential criminal
- De-politicise the governance of our prisons and focus on evidence-based approaches to improving community safety.

Thank you for this opportunity to have our community's opinions considered.

Yours sincerely

Chris Connors
Manager