

## Brisbane Youth Service submission to the Inquiry into imprisonment and recidivism

### About Brisbane Youth Service

With a vision of *New Future for Young People* Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) has been working with homeless and vulnerable young people (aged 12-25 years) in Brisbane and surrounding areas since 1977.

BYS operates from six sites across Brisbane and provides housing, physical and mental health services and specialist programs for young woman and young families. We assist young people to overcome challenges and achieve their life goals.

### Who we assist

In 2017-2018 we provided 32,000 occasions of support to 1,355 young people and accompanying children. A further 1,505 young people were assisted through casual contact such as phone triage or street outreach. Twenty-eight percent of the young people supported at BYS in 2017-18 identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and one in ten identified as CALD

Young people that access BYS are usually experiencing multiple complex issues that impact on their safety and wellbeing and increase the likelihood of offending behaviour as our data indicates:

- 55% of young people are experiencing primary or secondary homelessness
- 47% of young people are in financial crisis
- 80% are living in unsafe and unstable accommodation
- 72% of young people have been exposed to domestic and family violence
- 50% are experiencing serious legal issues
- 40% have a critical lack of family and social support
- 47% have a diagnosed mental health condition

Many of the young people BYS supports have been in prison. As the interim report illustrates people who have experienced homelessness, unemployment, mental health and drug and alcohol issues are overrepresented in the prison population.

This submission has been drafted in response to the questions the Commission has set out in Chapter 7. and is based on our knowledge of the challenges faced by young people who seek support from BYS.

### **Are sufficient support services available to prisoners after their release? Are these services effective? If not, how could they be improved?**

In our experience there is an alarming lack of effective pre-release planning and post-prison support services available for young people. Several post release services we have had contact with lack basic knowledge of available government and community services and have limited experience advocating for young people and navigating within and across systems.

BYS regularly assists young people that have been exited from prison with no accommodation in place and limited or no financial resources to meet basic needs. Exiting into homelessness increases the likelihood that young people will reoffend to meet basic needs.

BYS recommends the following points for consideration by the Commission to reduce recidivism by young people exiting prison.

- BYS agrees that effective throughcare is essential to break the cycle of reoffending. Reoffending and imprisonment are inevitable if young people exit to the same set of complex social circumstances which gave rise to their offending in the first place.
- Planning for exit should commence from the beginning of a young person's imprisonment. A strength based approach which is client led and informed by their hopes for the future must be adopted.
- Young people should never be exited from prison into homelessness. Pre-release planning must engage with government and community housing providers to identify options and plan for release where the young person is without a safe, stable and affordable housing option.
- Options regarding education, employment, training, drug and alcohol and mental health support need to be explored and relevant referrals and appointments in place prior to exit. Ideally the young person has an opportunity to engage with these services prior to release to increase the likelihood of engagement post exit.
- It is important to discuss and plan for young people's reconnection with family and friends and support their engagement in recreational activities to reduce social isolation.
- Quality and consistency of support is vital. Organisations that will be providing post exit support need to connect with the young person in prison and work with them over time to plan for exit. These organisations must have demonstrated experience in working with young people with complex needs and assisting them to navigate multiple systems. Post exit support should not be time limited but available on a duration of need basis.
- It is essential that these organisations are sufficiently resourced to enable employment of suitably qualified staff and given a generous brokerage budget to respond to immediate crisis and enable exit plans to be implemented effectively.
- Placing post prison release support within non-government community-based organisations allows young people to have access to organisations that are part of their local community and have extensive networks with services which can support reintegration and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

#### Case Study

BYS was contacted by a post release service several weeks prior to the release of a young woman from prison and asked to assist in finding housing and obtaining ID for the young woman. The young woman was not known to BYS. The post-prison release service did not have any knowledge of housing options in Brisbane or how to access them. BYS assisted in the completion of application for housing with the Department of Housing and Public Works and a referral to community housing providers. BYS was contacted again upon the young woman's release and advised the young woman had an offer for a boarding house room but it was not available for 3 nights. BYS sourced and paid for three nights' accommodation for the young woman.

On the scheduled move in day BYS was contacted again by the post release service and advised that the community housing provider had delayed the move in date back by a further 3 days. BYS was asked to provide funds for an additional three nights in a motel. BYS was unable to do so and provided details of other emergency relief providers. BYS also provided advice regarding advocating with the housing provider about the move in date.

Consequently, the move in date was brought forward and funds for an additional night of temporary accommodation secured preventing the young woman from becoming homeless.