

The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory  
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Dear Commissioners

*Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia* (A4) is a national grassroots organisation advocating for autistic people (people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder – ASD).

This submission is about more than autism; it is about Australia's general lack of expertise and services for people with challenging behaviour.

We observe that your inquiry was triggered by events in a so-called behaviour management unit (BMU) in a juvenile detention system. We are concerned that:

- we saw no evidence or indication that a qualified behavioural specialist/clinician was present or in anyway involved in the operation of the so-called BMU.
- chronically poor diagnosis rates for ASD in the Northern Territory (see [Variability of autism/ASD prevalence between Australian states](#)) may mean that the NT Government places undiagnosed autistic children/juveniles in detention, where their disability is untreated, unrecognised, and possibly exacerbated.

Please try to understand that Australia's tertiary education system does not train behavioural specialists (see [Behavioural needs of autistic Australians must be met](#)). While there is a (minimum) international standard for behavioural professionals, currently no Australian University trains students to attempt the qualifying exam.

Please do not accept claims that regular training in psychology in Australian Universities is adequate training in behaviour analysis and behaviour modification. Training in these areas in Australia just isn't anywhere near good enough.

Currently in Australia there are around 50 people with behavioural qualifications (registered as Board Certified Behaviour Analysts - see <http://info.bacb.com/o.php?page=100155> ... under "International", choose Australia and click "search"), but they got their qualifications overseas.

Australian Governments do not recognise behavioural qualifications. They do not have jobs for recognised behavioural specialists: instead they employ anyone who claims they can do the job. So it is no surprise that people with difficult or challenging behaviour are being mistreated all over the country. For example, see

- [Paediatrician who hogtied seven-year-old beats assault charge](#)
- [Boy with autism locked in 'cage', NSW school being investigated](#)
- [Autism cage details emerge as United Nations investigates abuse of children](#)
- [Autism is leading disability type for students restrained in Aussie schools](#)
- [Human Rights Watch condemns boy in cage affair in national report](#)

The approach we saw in the Northern Territory juvenile detention system where they painted BMU on the wall is a classic "Yes Minister" approach to the problem.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child require that children receive treatment, services, etc. for their health conditions and disability. Children also have a right to effective education. Clearly, those rights are unrealised ... Australia law denies these rights to autistic children (and other children who are considered at risk of challenging/unwanted

behaviour) in Australian.

We hope you will take the time to consider this perspective on your inquiry. Please contact us if you require any further information or explanation from us.

Sincerely

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Bob Buckley

Convenor, [Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia \(A4\)](http://a4.org.au/)

website: <http://a4.org.au/>

*A4 is the national grassroots organisation advocating for autistic people, their families, carers and associates.  
A4 is internet based so that Australians anywhere can participate.*

*“The first step in solving any problem is recognising there is one.” Jeff Daniels as Will McEvoy in *The Newsroom*.*