

31 October 2016

The Commissioners  
Royal Commission into the Protection  
and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory  
PO Box 4215  
KINGSTON ACT 2604

Dear Commissioners

**SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO THE PROTECTION AND DETENTION OF CHILDREN IN THE  
NORTHERN TERRITORY**

Save the Children Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment in relation to the Royal Commission's consideration of matters relating to the protection and detention of children in the Northern Territory.

Save the Children is Australia's leading independent emergency relief and development organisation for children. Across the world, Save the Children is working in more than 120 countries to save and protect children and their rights. First established in Victoria in 1919, Save the Children Australia works in over 200 locations around Australia and has country offices located in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. The attached map (Attachment A) highlights the places in which we work in Australia and demonstrates the extent of our engagement across Northern Australia in locations including Kununnura, Wadeye, Darwin, Mornington Island and Doomadgee.

We would also like to draw to your attention Save the Children's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy which has seen us prioritise the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and now to be in a position where 25% of our workforce is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

We recognise that the terms of reference for the Commission focus largely on the treatment of children who have been in, or are currently in, detention in the Northern Territory. Save the Children has not worked directly in youth justice in the Northern Territory and we do not seek to comment on these aspects of the terms of reference. However, we have a particular interest in matters relating to paragraph (h) of the Letters Patent, namely:

*(h) what improvements could be made to the child protection system of the Northern Territory, including the identification of early intervention options and pathways for children at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour*

In this regard, we would like to draw to the attention of the Commission pilot programs that Save the Children is running successfully in Western Australia and Tasmania. These programs are designed to:

- keep young people engaged and out of criminal activity,
- to divert those who are already offending away from the justice system, and
- support the transition of young people into the community after a period of detention.

Our expectation is that these programs could be adapted for specific application in the Northern Territory and that their implementation along with other necessary system reform would make a significant contribution to diverting young people from engaging in anti-social behavior.

The two national award-winning programs that we run in Tasmania – one to support young people on bail and one to work with those in transition back into the community after serving custodial sentences – have shown remarkably positive results. Indeed, during the period of delivery, the number of young people in detention in Tasmania has fallen from about 36 to less than 10. Furthermore, a recent study conducted by Ernst and Young as indicated a \$3.50 return for every \$1.00 invested.

We have also recently introduced a new mobile outreach education program to reconnect disengaged students involved in the youth justice system. The *Educating Young People for a Better Future* program prioritises relationship-building through learning experiences and uses trauma-informed approaches to address the educational underachievement that many of our cohort have experienced to date. We have been able to deliver our program in a variety of outdoor and informal settings by utilising a mobile classroom. This has helped to boost enjoyment in learning, which has improved self-belief and success for the young people involved in the program.

Save the Children has been in discussion recently with the Northern Territory Government about the success of programming in Tasmania and its possible adaptation for the Northern Territory environment. Further information about the **Transition from Detention Program** is at Attachment B and about the program **Supporting Young People on Bail** is at Attachment C. A summary of the Ernst and Young study is at Attachment D and a summary of **Educating Young People for a Better Future** at Attachment E.

We also have two very promising pilot programs running in Western Australia which, while modelled on the successful Tasmanian programs, have been customised to assist young people in Perth and in the almost entirely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Kununurra.

- **Yes!** is an alternative learning centre located in Kununurra and targeted at young people aged 9-15 years who have less than 20% school attendance. While still in a pilot phase, at the end of Term 1 2016, 11 of the 25 participants with previous school attendance of 10% or less now have attendance rates of over 60%. This type of program could be targeted in similar communities to Kununurra where school attendance is very poor.

Some more detailed information about this alternative learning program is at Attachment F.

- **Strong Tomorrow** is a youth justice program, run in collaboration with WA Police, that targets small numbers of young (10-17 years) 'prolific offenders' who commit between 4-8 offences per month. From January – June 2015 75% of clients did not reoffend while engaged. From January – March 2015, 38% of clients were actively engaged in life skills, cultural or diversionary activities and this increased to 86% in the period April – June. WA Police estimate the costs saved in crime processing alone is 3-4 times the cost of the program. This model is being trialled in both Perth and Kununurra and has been developed from the very successful diversionary work in Tasmania (see above) with non-indigenous children. Further information about this program is at Attachment F.

A common theme across all our youth justice work is supporting young people to re-engage with education. Participation in education is the strongest protective factor against engagement in the criminal justice system and yet many of the young people that we work with have been excluded from school through suspension or expulsion. While it is perhaps beyond the scope of this Commission to examine the link between the education and youth justice system, the provision of education within the youth detention environment can and should be examined. A period of detention provides an unparalleled opportunity to reengage at risk young people with education in a safe and supported environment, and therefore we encourage the Commissioners to seek

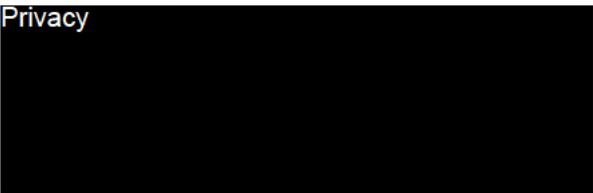
advice on a model of detention that includes a strong and genuine focus on education. The Parkville College model in Victoria is a strong approach that we would encourage the Commission to consider.

Once again, Save the Children welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to the Royal Commission. Our work in Tasmania and in Western Australia is demonstrating that young people can be successfully diverted from the justice system and that there are positive alternatives for them. We trust that our work in prevention and early intervention is of interest to the Commission and would be pleased to provide further information to the Commission, or to appear before it, at any time.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at [mat.tinkler@savethechildren.org.au](mailto:mat.tinkler@savethechildren.org.au) or on **Privacy** if we can be of further assistance.

With best wishes

**Privacy**



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