

# Townsville's voice: local solutions to address youth crime

An independent report on the Townsville community's view on youth crime, including an assessment of the effectiveness of current prevention strategies and recommendations for improvements

**By Major General (Retd) Stuart Smith AO, DSC,  
Townsville Community Champion  
to the Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP,  
Premier and Minister for Trade**



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5 December 2018



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Honourable Anastacia Palaszczuk MP  
Premier of Queensland  
Minister for Trade  
1 William Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Premier,

In accordance with the terms of my appointment as the Townsville Community Champion, I have the honour of presenting the final report detailing the community's solutions to address youth crime, *Townsville's voice: local solutions to address youth crime*.

This report represents the first time in Townsville's history that consensus-focused, place-based solutions to address youth crime have been developed through independent consultation with the local community.

With the support of your department, between February and October 2018, I facilitated seven community forums and met with more than 800 residents to understand their views on youth crime and the Queensland Government initiatives currently in place to address the issue.

I can report that the local community is committed to working together to develop the youth of Townsville to promote socially responsible behaviour and reduce incidents of youth crime. The 20 recommendations in this report reflect the community's consensus view that a just and sustainable solution must focus on prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

The recommendations pertain to the Townsville Local Government Area, however they could also be considered for statewide application. They take into consideration the Queensland Government's Keeping Communities Safe initiative, recommendations in the *Report on Youth Justice* by Bob Atkinson AO, APM, and the terms of reference of the Queensland Productivity Commission's inquiry into imprisonment and recidivism.

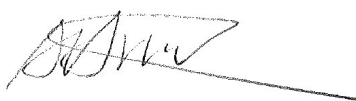
I would like to acknowledge the support I received from your staff, including your Director-General David Stewart, Chief of Staff David Barbagallo, Donna O'Donoghue, David Thannhauser, Kyla Hayden, Sean Kricker and Emma Timms.

I was also directly assisted by Sara Lando, Zac Murphy and Alison Blackbourne in the Townsville office of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and thank them for their advice and professionalism.

Thank you for my appointment as the Townsville Community Champion. The independent nature of my appointment meant all sections of the community were willing to share their opinions and suggest solutions on an important social issue. This innovative, consensus-focused and place-based approach may be useful when responding to community-level challenges in the future.

It has been a privilege to work with the Townsville community to develop the recommendations contained in this report, and I trust that you and your government will find them useful as you work to keep Queenslanders safe.

Yours sincerely



Stuart Smith AO, DSC  
Major General (Retd)

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## Acknowledgements

This report represents the broad views of the people of Townsville. I therefore begin my list of acknowledgements by respectfully thanking victims of crime, parents, teachers, business owners, Queensland Police Service officers, social and youth workers, members of the judiciary, Elders and young people who generously allowed me to listen to their views on youth crime.

I thank the Premier for appointing me as a Townsville Community Champion. It has been an honour to work to repay the Townsville community for its support during my several postings to north Queensland as an officer in the Australian Defence Force.

I acknowledge the support from principal Department of Premier and Cabinet staff, including the Director-General David Stewart, Chief of Staff David Barbagallo, Donna O'Donoghue, David Thannhauser, Kyla Hayden, Emma Timms and Sean Kricker. The department also coordinated vital professional and specialist support from Helen Sharpley and the Community Insights team at the Public Service Commission to conduct community forums.

I especially recognise the support I received from Sara Lando, Zac Murphy and Alison Blackbourne in the Townsville office of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and would like to acknowledge their outstanding professionalism in researching and coordinating community consultations. They have consistently demonstrated the core Queensland public service values of 'customers first' and 'ideas into action'.

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## Executive summary

In response to community concerns about youth crime, on 29 January 2018 the Premier appointed Major General (Retd) Stuart Smith AO, DSC as the independent Townsville Community Champion.

The Townsville Community Champion's task was to consult with the community, from the grassroots through to its leadership, to understand their experiences of youth crime and to listen to their views on how the Queensland Government can address the issue. The Premier requested the Townsville Community Champion to make recommendations that reflect the community's solutions for youth crime.

Community consultations took place between February and October 2018, during which the Townsville Community Champion met with more than 800 residents, in addition to facilitating seven community forums.

Extensive consultations revealed the majority of the community does not support harsher penalties for offenders or changes to the *Youth Justice Act 1992* to make breach of bail conditions an offence. A minority of residents raised bootcamps, youth curfews or relocation sentencing as proposals.

Rather, the consensus view is that a fair and sustainable approach to youth crime must address five key themes:

- Share more information on action being taken to address youth crime
- Hold youths accountable for their actions
- Support youth and their families to participate in education
- Promote role models and mentors
- Improve the diversionary justice process and timeliness within the youth justice system.

Throughout the consultation process, it became clear that the Townsville community is seeking an holistic youth development strategy

that addresses these five themes, while supporting local youth through prevention, intervention and rehabilitation stages. For this reason, the 20 recommendations contained in this report fall into these three categories and a youth development strategy model is outlined on page 20.

### Prevention

Locals are of the view that comprehensive prevention measures that keep the community safe and foster positive behaviour in children are vital to addressing youth crime. The community's proposed prevention measures are outlined in recommendations 1 to 10. Providing support to victims of crime and encouraging participation in early childhood education were recognised as the key priorities for consideration.

### Intervention

The Townsville community believes more emphasis needs to be placed on keeping youth engaged in responsible social activities outside of school hours. Recommendations 11 to 14 detail the community's proposed solutions to address this issue. In particular, improvements to after-hours youth services and strengthening mentoring programs were mentioned as key measures.

### Rehabilitation

The community has called for process improvements within the youth justice system. These are outlined in recommendations 15 to 19 and include greater use of diversionary justice options and measures to improve the transition between rehabilitation services. Such measures are consistent with recommendations contained in the *Report on Youth Justice* by Mr Bob Atkinson, AO, APM.

The implementation of recommendations contained in this report will require ongoing collaboration between Queensland Government agencies. Implementation should be driven locally by an expanded and autonomous Townsville Stronger Communities Executive Committee, as outlined in recommendation 20.

## Recommendations

### Prevention

**1. Support victims of crime.** An independent audit of the measures of performance and effectiveness of the Policelink telephone response service in the Townsville Local Government Area (LGA) to improve the service beginning calendar year 2019.

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

**2. Support victims of crime.** Review and develop standing procedures for the trial deployment of Police Liaison Officers in the Townsville LGA to enhance the level of assistance for victims of crime from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

**3. Support parents.** Map the parent education programs in the Townsville LGA and assess the measures of performance, reach and effectiveness of parenting programs to strengthen family networks from 2019.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women in cooperation with the Department of Education and Queensland Health]*

**4. Support parents.** Review the Townsville LGA public transport plan (such as the Sunbus service) to provide more access for Townsville families from 2019.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Transport and Main Roads in cooperation with the Townsville City Council]*

**5. Provide early education screening.** Trial a wellbeing measure for all primary school children in the Townsville LGA (such as the Griffith University Rumbles Quest measurement tool) to identify the best assessment tool for developing flexible education and support services from school

year 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

**6. Support school attendance.** Investigate and trial the establishment of a Queensland Student Identifier Number (similar to the Victorian Student Number) for children enrolled in education in the Townsville LGA to ensure all children are engaged in an education pathway from school year 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

**7. Support school attendance.** Conduct an independent review of processes for responding to suspected truancy in the Townsville LGA and investigate options for, and feasibility of, legislative amendments to strengthen parental responsibilities for children attending school from 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

**8. Support school attendance.** Investigate the establishment of the Stronger Smarter program, Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation academies in selected primary schools in the Townsville LGA from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**9. Develop cultural resilience.** Develop and trial an extra-curricular education program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school children in the Townsville LGA to develop Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resilience from school year 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**10. Develop cultural understanding.** Review the current application of the Australian Curriculum's intercultural understanding learning module for primary school children in the Townsville LGA to develop and trial improvements to the module and strengthen intercultural understanding from 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

## Intervention

**11. Improve youth services after hours.**

Investigate and trial enhancements to after-hours youth services in the Townsville LGA, including but not limited to:

- a youth services call centre
- transport (such as the Murri Watch patrol)
- additional emergency accommodation (such as the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service's *Lighthouse*)
- emergency support

to ensure the safety of at-risk youth from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Townsville City Council]*

**12. Improve youth services after hours.**

Investigate and trial the establishment of community hubs at selected schools to economically centralise the provision of after-hours youth development services from 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Department of Education, the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, and the Townsville City Council]*

**13. Strengthen mentor programs.** Investigate and develop a coordinated mentoring/employment placement pathway between youth service programs including, but not limited to, Project Booyah, cultural mentoring, Queensland Youth Services and

Transition 2 Success to develop at-risk youth from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, and Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**14. Strengthen mentor programs.** Review and develop standing procedures for the deployment of Police Liaison Officers in the Townsville LGA to provide police liaison support to primary schools from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

## Rehabilitation

**15. Strengthen diversionary options in the youth justice system.** Investigate and trial the of involvement of Elders (such as a Murri Youth Court) in the Townsville LGA to support diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Justice and Attorney-General in cooperation with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**16. Strengthen diversionary options in the youth justice system.** Review the resourcing of the Townsville Community Justice Group to support diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Justice and Attorney-General]*

**17. Strengthen diversionary options in the youth justice system.** Review the measures of performance and effectiveness of restorative justice conferencing in the Townsville LGA to improve diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the*

*Queensland Police Service and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General]*

**18. Strengthen transition between youth justice rehabilitation services.** Conduct an independent audit of the measures of performance and effectiveness of transition pathways between rehabilitation services after detention, with particular attention to:

- information management and sharing
- Supervised Community Accommodation
- case management
- re-engagement in training and employment

to improve service delivery and reduce youth reoffending from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training]*

**19. Strengthen transition between youth justice rehabilitation services.** Develop and implement a Youth Justice operations learning model to develop a culture of continuous improvement of service delivery from 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

## Implementation

**20.** Review the terms of reference, membership and approval authorities of the Townsville Stronger Community Executive Committee to support the development and implementation of a community-driven Townsville Youth Development Strategic Plan from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of the Premier and Cabinet to direct the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

## Interim recommendations — May 2018

The Townsville Community Champion submitted three interim recommendations to the Premier in the monthly report of May 2018.

These interim recommendations were based on initial community consultations and research and are repeated here:

1. That the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women establish an offender accountability board.
  - a. The board be managed by Youth Justice.
  - b. The board include a representation of the Townsville community including (but not limited to): business, government (including local government), non-government, academic, citizens and cultural representation.
  - c. The board identify a program of works that places emphasis on giving back to the community through activities that are visible and meaningful.
  - d. Youth Justice report back to the board on the progress of activities.
2. That the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women enable offenders to continue to give back to the community through completing community service activities while residing at a youth detention facility. This could include:
  - a. activities that generate income that can be re-invested back into the community to address crime issues
  - b. activities that may be delivered as a component to training and/or education.

3. That the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women prioritise an audit of community service operations across Townsville. The result of the audit should be provided to the proposed offender accountability board and resourced by Youth Justice. The audit should focus on the following:
  - a. Explore how to better measure the effectiveness of activities that hold offenders to account to ensure the types of activities are effective in achieving their objectives, including:
    - i. prioritising activities that reduce offending rates
    - ii. establishing and monitoring targets of effectiveness
    - iii. being seen by the community to hold offenders accountable.
  - b. Assess the effectiveness of program activities delivered through the offender accountability board compared with the effectiveness of program activities prior to the establishment of the board.
  - c. Incorporating statewide standards and departmental performance processes.



## Background

### Growing Townsville community concerns about youth crime

In December 2015, the Queensland Government introduced a Bill to amend the *Youth Justice Act 1992* and the *Childrens Court Act 1992*. Specifically, these amendments reinstated the principle of detention as a last resort, and removed provisions that allow young offenders to be identified and childhood offences to be admitted in adult sentencing proceedings.

Further amendments were introduced into Queensland Parliament in early 2016 to end the automatic transfer of 17-year-olds (with more than six months remaining in detention) to an adult prison and reinstate the restorative justice conferencing program. Concurrently, in an effort to improve coordination of crime prevention services, the Townsville District Queensland Police Service (QPS) established a Community Policing Board in May 2016.

As these legislative and organisational improvements were being progressed, the QPS Annual Statistical Review 2015–16 noted a five per cent increase in reported offences against property and a 10 per cent increase in unlawful use of a motor vehicle (UUMV) across Queensland.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the review indicated that UUMV in the Townsville District had risen from 585 reports in 2014–15 to 891 reports in 2015–16.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the issue of crime began to draw increasing public and media interest in Townsville. One example of this interest was the formation of the Townsville Crime Alerts and Discussions Facebook page and its public petition for measures to reduce youth crime.

### Initial Queensland Government efforts to address youth crime in Townsville

On 6 June 2016, the Queensland Attorney-General hosted a Townsville community forum to address concerns about youth crime. The key outcome was the 14 September 2016 announcement of the *Five-point Plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*. The plan was overseen by a Directors-General roundtable and listed five priority areas:

- Targeted policing
- Local community driven responses
- Addressing the causes of offending including targeted youth justice responses
- Boosting jobs and providing education and training to get young people job ready
- Improving collaboration and service integration.

To enable targeted policing, QPS established a new Chief Superintendent position in Townsville, reinforced its Rapid Action and Patrol teams with extra police officers to enhance their 24/7 response and deployed additional general patrol officers to the city under Operation Oscar Merchant between September 2016 and March 2017.

Another key aspect of the plan was the formation of the multi-agency Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group in October 2016, comprising senior representatives from six key government departments reporting to a Police Inspector. The action group was tasked with working intensively with at-risk youth and young offenders and their families to better coordinate government and non-government support services.

The action group was also tasked with developing strategies to enhance collaborative service delivery across Townsville and identifying opportunities for a newly formed

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Police Service 2015 *Annual Statistical Review*: 18–19.

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Police Service 2015 *Annual Statistical Review*: 137.

Townsville Stronger Communities Executive Committee to consider.

The Executive Committee comprises regional directors of the agencies that make up the action group including: the Queensland Police Service; Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women; Department of Education; Department of Housing and Public Works; Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships; and Queensland Health.

The committee is regularly updated on the work of the action group and given recommendations for improved coordination between government departments. These recommendations have led to the introduction of an after-hours emergency accommodation service known as *The Lighthouse* for children aged 10–16; a partnership with a non-government organisation to provide family support that targets anti-social behaviours; and a reduction in minimum age limits for youth support services to eight years of age.

Additional measures under the title of 'Community Youth Response' were announced in December 2016 to complement the Five-point Plan. The Community Youth Response was developed by the Department of the Attorney-General and Justice and focuses on a core group of high-risk youth offenders assessed as being responsible for half of all youth crime in Townsville.

Measures included the establishment of a specialist High Risk Youth Court, intensive case management of young offenders, an after-hours diversion service, and cultural mentoring for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders.

To resource the Five-point Plan, the Queensland Government allocated \$1.8 million for 2016–17, and a further \$6.7 million to be divided across 2017–18 and 2018–19.

## Subsequent Queensland Government efforts to address youth crime in Townsville

In October 2017, the Queensland Government completed a progress report on the Five-point Plan. This report concluded that the plan had achieved 'positive early results' and suggested the government should continue efforts to implement the plan in conjunction with the Community Youth Response.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the two initiatives were continued under respective departmental activities as part of the Queensland Government's strategy to address youth crime in Townsville. The components of this strategy continued to focus on intervention and rehabilitation measures. Responsibility for overseeing this strategy was transitioned to the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women. Implementation continued through the Stronger Communities Executive Committee.

Towards the end of 2017, community concerns about youth crime continued to be voiced through media and social media outlets. These concerns were heightened by two incidents involving unlawful use of motor vehicles by youths in Townsville in December 2017. The most serious of these incidents occurred on 22 December and involved youths driving stolen cars on the Bruce Highway and crashing into another car, causing serious injury to an elderly couple. Consequently, on 29 January 2018 the Premier announced the appointment of an independent Townsville Community Champion to gather and report on community-driven solutions for youth crime.

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<sup>3</sup> Queensland Government 2017 *Twelve-month progress report on the Queensland Government's Five-point Plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*: 7.

## Role of the Townsville Community Champion

The Community Champion was provided with the following tasks:

- Seek the views of the Townsville community on matters relating to youth development and youth crime.
- Engage with the public, representatives from business, local, state and federal government, and non-government organisations.
- Assess the effectiveness of current prevention strategies, noting potential improvements and alternative or complementary services that could be implemented by the Queensland Government.
- Engage the community through several rounds of community forum, to be complemented by direct consultation with individuals or groups as required.
- Present a written report of findings, recommendation and actions to be taken to the Honourable Anastasia Palaszczuk MP, Premier
- Provide regular (monthly at minimum) progress updates to the Premier.

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## Aim

The aim of this report is to inform the Premier of the Townsville community's view on youth crime, including an assessment of the effectiveness of current strategies, in order to provide recommendations for improvements that could be implemented by the Queensland Government from 2019 onwards.

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## Defining the problem

To develop a consultation plan, it was first necessary to define the nature of the youth crime problem in Townsville. This included developing a statistical, structural and anecdotal understanding of the size of the youth population, the extent of youth crime and the youth justice system. The Townsville Community Champion approached the Public Service Commission's Community Insights team to collate statistics in these three areas. This information, attached at Annex A and discussed below, was shared with the Townsville community as part of the consultation process.

## The youth population of Townsville

The *Youth Justice Act 1992* defines a child as a person under 18 years of age — this definition was used to understand the composition of the youth population of Townsville. In 2016, the youth segment of Townsville consisted of 25,000 persons within the total population of 186,000. Approximately 12,000 persons in this youth segment were aged between 10 and 14.

The environment for the youth segment of Townsville is influenced by a variety of social conditions that may contribute to negative behaviour. These conditions include mental health needs, unemployment, substance abuse and domestic violence. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, the unemployment rate in Townsville in 2016 was 8.7 per cent compared to the Queensland rate of 7.6 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Annual QPS statistical data shows the number of domestic violence and drug offences in the Townsville District are equivalent to or higher than similar sized population centres such as Logan City. For example, there were 2544 reported breaches of Domestic Violence Orders (DVO) and 5247 reported drug offences in the Townsville District in 2016, compared to

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Townsville Statistics available at [http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services](http://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services)

</getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/318?opendocument> accessed on 15 Nov 18.



2173 reported breaches of DVO and 5586 reported drug offences in Logan City over the same period.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of these social conditions can be seen in the demographics of children in the youth justice system in Townsville. A 2017 census showed that of the 117 children in the youth justice system on 27 March 2017 in Townsville:

- 82 were known to have a substance abuse problem
- 41 were diagnosed with a behavioural disorder, 29 were totally disengaged from education, training and/or employment
- 19 were subject to a child protection order.<sup>6</sup>

These demographics were acknowledged by all of the residents who were consulted by the Townsville Community Champion and discussed in the range of community forums.

The broad view of the Townsville community was that any strategy for dealing with youth crime should consider social environmental conditions that influence youth development. However, it was also acknowledged that the youth justice system was not the preferred avenue for addressing these wider social environmental challenges.

## The extent of youth crime

According to QPS annual statistical data, youth crime in the Northern Region increased marginally between 2015 and 2017. As an example, the number of reports of unlawful entry by males aged 10 to 14 increased from 1000 in 2015–16 to 1078 in 2016–17.<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, the number of reports of unlawful use of a motor vehicle (UUMV) in Townsville by males aged 10 to 14 decreased from 359 in

2015–16 to 251 in 2016–17.<sup>8</sup> Overall, the reported number of property offences by this gender/age group increased from 2820 to 2934.<sup>9</sup> Annual statistical data for 2017–2018 was unavailable at the time of writing this report.

The number of youth offenders and the location of youth crime assist in understanding the extent of the problem. Youth offences occur across the Townsville Local Government Area (LGA), with some repetition in those suburbs containing major shopping precincts. The Queensland Government's progress report on the Five-point Plan referenced data from July 2016 to August 2017, indicating that 50 youth offenders were responsible for 40 per cent of all property offences committed by 10 to 24-year-olds and 24 per cent of all property offences.<sup>10</sup>

The 2017 census of young people in the youth justice system provided the Townsville Community Champion with a useful snapshot regarding the extent of youth crime in Townsville.<sup>11</sup> On that day, 117 young people from Townsville were engaged in the system. Of these, 81 were male and 36 were female. Only 19 of this group were located at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre.

However, while statistical and structural evidence was useful in understanding the extent of youth crime in Townsville, the Community Champion sought to understand the public perception of the level of youth offending. Individual consultations and forums hosted by the Townsville Community Champion reported a general discontent and frustration with the number of property-related offences and UUMV offences committed by youth.

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Police Service 2017 *Annual Statistical Review*: 152.

<sup>6</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 4.

<sup>7</sup> Queensland Police Service 2017 *Annual Statistical Review*: 114.

<sup>8</sup> Queensland Police Service 2017 *Annual Statistical Review*: 114.

<sup>9</sup> Queensland Police Service 2017 *Annual Statistical Review*: 114.

<sup>10</sup> Queensland Government 2017 *Twelve-month progress report on the Queensland Government's Five-point Plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*: 7.

<sup>11</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 4.

## Youth justice system

An understanding of the youth justice system in the Townsville LGA begins with the Youth Justice Act. Within this system, a young person aged 10 to 17 who commits an offence may be held accountable through QPS, court and sentencing processes.

Under the QPS process, a youth may have no action taken, be issued a caution, undergo a restorative justice process or face prosecution. A restorative justice process may involve the alleged offender volunteering to meet with the victim of crime to express their remorse and allow the victim of crime to explain how they have been harmed by the offender. Such a meeting will include an agreement from the offender as to what reparative actions they will undertake. Between March and August 2018, QPS issued 272 cautions to youth offenders in the Townsville LGA (with some individuals receiving a multiple number of these cautions).<sup>12</sup>

Young people facing prosecution may stay in the community or be held in custody until the outcome of their court process has been finalised. Most youth who are alleged to have perpetrated an offence in the Townsville LGA will have their case heard by a Childrens Court magistrate, however Townsville has also established a specialist High Risk Youth Court to ensure all high risk and repeat offenders appear before the same magistrate.

This court process is assisted by the Community Justice Group program. This program provides funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations dedicated to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have come into contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup> The program allows community representatives to attend the Magistrates Court to identify and promote

treatment and support programs for defendants, and make cultural submissions to the courts.

The court process may result in an acquittal, community-based unsupervised or supervised order, or detention at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. Community-based supervision orders usually incorporate a requirement for a young person to engage with a variety of youth justice rehabilitation services such as counselling, education and training.

These orders may also result in a young person being placed in Supervised Community Accommodation. This accommodation provides them with a safe place to stay, and 24/7 supervision by a social worker to help them attend education and complete rehabilitation programs.<sup>14</sup>

Young people detained at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre undergo a structured rehabilitation program, which also includes counselling, education and training. Between 50–70 per cent of detention is served in custody, before the remaining period is used to transition young people to the community on a supervised release order.

## Problem definition statement

Based on the statistical, structural and anecdotal evidence regarding the population, extent of crime and the justice system, the problem to be consulted with the Townsville community was broadly defined as:

*'How do we develop the youth of Townsville in order to promote socially responsible behaviour, reduce incidents of youth crime, strengthen community spirit, and promote Townsville as the preferred destination for business and lifestyle?'*

<sup>12</sup> Queensland Police Service 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Queensland Court 2017, Community Justice Group Program available at <https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/services/court-programs/community-justice-group-program> accessed on 21 November 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women 2018 'Inclusion of 17-year-olds in the youth justice system' Queensland Government available at <https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/inclusion-17-year-olds-youth-justice-system> accessed on 21 November 2018.

## Outline of consultation process

Consultation involved a four-step process to ensure there was comprehensive engagement and evidence collection across all sections of the community. Particular attention was given to understanding the general Townsville community's view on youth crime and which community-driven youth development solutions attracted consensus support. The engagement strategy is outlined at Annex B.

**Step one** commenced on 29 January 2018 and comprised grassroots consultation with victims of crime, community leaders, business owners, youth offenders and the public. This period also involved a full inspection of the youth justice system, including engagement with QPS Rapid Action and Patrols teams, the Stronger Communities Action Group, youth justice programs, and visits to the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. Consultation during this period also involved hosting small group forums with interested members of the public to discuss specific topics such as the QPS pursuit policy and the functions of the High Risk Youth Court. Concurrently, the Townsville Community Champion met with government, media, cultural and youth service leaders.

**Step two** commenced on 3 June 2018 and involved a public forum to develop community-driven solutions for youth development and the deterrence of youth crime. Attendees were provided extensive background information, including the youth population size, extent of crime and the youth justice system. This set the scene for attendees to focus on the problem definition statement and to consider two specific questions:

- *How do we enhance current efforts to improve safety in our local neighbourhoods?*
- *How do we ensure young people who are at risk of offending are supported to stay positively engaged with school, learning and the community?*

The forum was conducted in a roundtable format to ensure all viewpoints were recorded.

**Step three** commenced on 4 June 2018 and involved re-engaging victims of crime and youth offenders to discuss key themes and solutions developed at the public forum. This stage culminated on 28 June 2018 with the hosting of a youth service providers forum to understand and discuss the practical opportunities and gaps within community-driven solutions for youth development and the deterrence of youth crime. Again, this forum was conducted in a roundtable style format to enable all views to be discussed and recorded.

**Step four** commenced on 9 August 2018 and involved a community leaders forum. This enabled the Townsville Community Champion to outline community-driven solutions and invite comment on how local leaders might enact these solutions.

## Consultation principles

The underlying principles adopted by the Townsville Community Champion throughout the consultative process are set out below:

- This report would present the broad consensus view on key themes from the community, acknowledging that opinions across the community are diverse and legitimate.
- Key themes would be researched to understand the current situation and scope for potential improvement. This requires an understanding of the current measures of performance and effectiveness of current services.
- This report should only outline recommendations that are assessed as being sustainable in the long term. Where possible, the focus of this report gravitates towards solutions that come from the community, are made feasible by support from the Townsville community and are therefore resilient to the impact of political cycles. This encourages stability across the system

and ownership within the community of potential solutions and recommendations.

- Recommendations would be offered to the Premier as they became apparent.

A list of groups involved in the consultation process is provided at Annex C. During each phase, the Townsville Community Champion provided monthly progress reports to the Premier.

## Outline of community views

In light of public discussions about youth crime and in keeping with the consultation principle of understanding the consensus view, the Community Champion initially requested a response to the question:

*'How do we enhance current efforts to improve safety in our local neighbourhoods?'*

While some residents responded to this question by demanding additional QPS resources, harsher penalties for youth offenders, and changes to the Youth Justice Act to make breach of bail conditions an offence, this was not the consensus view. A minority of residents proposed bootcamps, youth curfews or relocation sentencing.<sup>15</sup>

Five key themes emerged early in the community consultation process. These were consistent in the summaries recorded at the conclusion of the forums with the public, service providers and community leaders. The themes are outlined below.

### Theme one — share more information on action taken to address youth crime

Several agencies were tasked under the Five-point Plan to engage the community in developing solutions to address local crime,

establish a Stronger Communities website and conduct a strategic media campaign. The Stronger Communities Executive maintained the lead for this engagement, supported by QPS and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.<sup>16</sup> Information on youth justice programs was provided through general and social media. However, most residents and forum attendees stated they wanted more detailed information about what was being done to reduce youth crime in Townsville.

This was particularly apparent amongst administrators of social media groups, namely the Townsville Crime Committee and the Townsville Crime Alerts and Discussions Facebook page. As a result of this early feedback, the consultation process incorporated a public information plan. Accordingly, mini-forums were convened to enable participants to be informed of specific youth crime policies and programs, and to discuss potential solutions.

Media outlets in Townsville were offered briefings on the consultation process and articles on youth development programs. The Stronger Communities' Facebook and Twitter accounts were used to post similar information and links to relevant media articles.

This deliberate public information plan ensured residents and forum attendees were in a better position to provide informed views during community consultations. Forum attendees reflected to the Townsville Community Champion that they felt better informed on youth development and youth crime issues.

### Theme two — hold youth accountable for their actions

The Five-point Plan included targeted policing and targeted youth justice responses as priority areas. Residents commented positively on targeted policing such as Operation Quebec Ironside in March 2018, which focused on

<sup>15</sup> Annex D.

<sup>16</sup> Queensland Government 2017 *Twelve-month progress report on the Queensland Government's Five-point Plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*: 3.2.



crime hot spots and on conducting community liaison.<sup>17</sup>

The Townsville Community Champion chaired a mini-forum on 5 March 2018 to update an interested group of residents on the operations of the specialist High Risk Youth Court. The information provided by the dedicated magistrate for this court was received favourably.

While the general community view was that youth offenders should be held accountable, there were divergent assessments on what the best methods were to achieve such accountability. A minority of residents were vocal in their view that changes needed to be made to the Youth Justice Act to enable the courts to take more punitive measures against youth offenders. For example, some residents suggested stronger penalties for property offences and reintroducing breach of bail conditions as an offence. Other residents highlighted a requirement for additional QPS patrol officers.

However, this was not the common view when discussed in forums and individual consultations with residents, service providers, QPS and community leaders. When residents were invited to provide further details on their view — and information on the current application of the judicial system was shared with them — that view became less vocal. One victim of crime highlighted to the Townsville Community Champion that their opinion on punitive measures had changed when they saw the benefits of restorative engagement and community service orders on the youth that had conducted an offence against them.

The Townsville Community Champion also sought research material from James Cook

University criminologists about the effectiveness of punitive measures in deterring youth crime. They provided research papers from the Australian Institute of Criminology and other international study centres that concluded 'interventions based on surveillance, control, deterrence, or discipline are ineffective' and 'interventions based on restorative methods and skills training are effective'.<sup>18</sup>

The common view was that youths should be held accountable through community service orders and restorative engagement activities. Research revealed the use of community service orders declined by over 20 per cent in 2016–17.<sup>19</sup> In one example, it was revealed a young person had only completed 15 hours out of 100 hours of a community service order over six-months because community service could not be conducted while they were in detention or on a supervised release order. This meant the deterrence effect of this sentence and the benefit to the community was not being achieved.

Accordingly, specific recommendations on improving procedures for the issuing of community service orders were submitted to the Premier as part of a Townsville Community Champion monthly report. These are listed on page 8.

### Theme three — support families and youth to remain engaged with education

Supporting families and young people to stay in school was the strongest theme to emerge from consultations. Residents and forum attendees commented on the effectiveness of

<sup>17</sup> Queensland Police Service 2018 'Operation Quebec Ironside – closure of major operation' *Queensland Police News* available at <https://mypolice.qld.gov.au/blog/2018/03/05/operation-quebec-ironside-closure-major-operation-townsville-police-district/> accessed on 19 Nov 18.

<sup>18</sup> MacKenzie D 2015 'Preventing future offending of delinquents and offenders: what have we learned from

experiments and meta-analyses?' *Journal of Experimental Criminology* Cambridge University 11(4): 564–595.

<sup>19</sup> Childrens Court of Queensland, 'Annual Report 2016–2017', Queensland Government available at [http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf) accessed on 1 May 2018.

measures outlined in the Five-point Plan to provide education and training, such as the Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre and early identification of students with poor school attendance. They concluded that supporting families and youth to remain engaged with education was the cornerstone of a community-driven strategy for developing the youth of Townsville, promoting socially responsible behaviour and reducing incidents of youth crime.

This conclusion was triggered by the fact that a large percentage of children in the youth justice system were identified as being disengaged from the education system. In March 2017, youth justice agencies were supervising 117 youth in the Townsville LGA. Of these, 55 were of compulsory school age. Of those that should be at school, 14 were completely disengaged from education.<sup>20</sup> This is also supported by Townsville LGA school attendance data that indicates one in 10 children are not attending school on any given school day.<sup>21</sup>

The broad community recognised that many children in the youth justice system experience a difficult family environment clouded by issues such as mental health needs, unemployment, domestic violence, substance abuse and other forms of dysfunction. While providing education and training to get these young people job ready was a priority area in the Five-point Plan, through activities such as the Flexible Learning Centre, residents were concerned there was an overall lack of focus on early learning and primary school education measures.

Despite the actions of the Department of Education's early leavers team to address poor school attendance by children aged under 15, individuals and groups frequently questioned what strategies were in place in the department to address school truancy. In one example, a resident commented that they had

seen school age children frequenting shopping centres for extended periods on school days on a consistent basis.

The broad community also indicated a concern for children suspended or expelled from school. The view was that some schools resorted to suspension or expulsion too readily, did not promote alternative education pathways or apply strategies to re-engage students. Research to support this community view revealed an 8 per cent increase in the number of suspensions and expulsions in Townsville LGA schools between 2013 and 2016.<sup>22</sup>

## Theme four — promote role models and mentors

Promoting role models and mentors was the second strongest theme captured during the consultation process and was closely linked to the earlier theme of providing support to families. Residents understood and widely supported cultural mentoring, Youth Justice's Transition 2 Success program, QPS's Project Booyah and various youth-focused employment programs as measures contained in the Five-point Plan.

Again, there were divergent opinions on what constituted best practice for youth mentoring programs. However, there was consistent agreement on the principle that youth mentoring was a 24/7 requirement, meaning youth services must be accessible after normal business hours.

The community identified that successful mentoring was characterised by careful selection and training of mentors, and the incorporation of families in the mentoring process.

The Australian Institute of Criminology notes good practice components for mentoring programs include a structure for selecting and training mentors, engaging youth voluntarily

<sup>20</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 4.

<sup>21</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 2.

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Training 2017, 'Student absences by reason and school – Queensland State

Schools 2013–17' available at <https://qed.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/statistics/schooling/students> accessed on 13 November 2018.

and involving all parties in the process including caregivers. When working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is recommended that mentoring programs have: strong links with the community and services; an understanding of historic, cultural and social factors; are sensitive to cultural requirements in matching Indigenous mentors and young people; and that they consult with, and promote within, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.<sup>23</sup>

### Theme five — improve the diversionary justice process and timeliness of the youth justice system

While acknowledging that targeted youth justice responses were outlined in the Five-point Plan, the consultation process revealed significant community dissatisfaction with two aspects of the youth justice process.

The first was that diversionary justice processes such as police cautions and restorative justice conferencing were not being used often enough as an alternative to court. In 2016–17, 102 community service orders and 35 restorative justice orders with supervision were issued by the Childrens Court to youth offenders in Townsville.<sup>24</sup> Youth Justice confirmed that between 1 January and 30 September 2018, the court referred 85 cases to restorative justice conferences, while QPS referred 29 young people. However, only 58 conferences were completed.<sup>25</sup>

A second concern was timeliness of the process where it takes an average 51 days to finalise a Childrens Court matter, resulting in too many youth being held on remand in the Cleveland

Youth Detention Centre.<sup>26</sup> In 2016–17, 41 per cent of young people in the Queensland youth justice system who had a detention order as a court outcome were immediately released, as they had no time left to serve in custody due to remand-in-custody credit.<sup>27</sup>

Consultations with Youth Justice staff and participants in the legal system indicated that delays can be attributed to pre-sentence report requirements, case submissions and forensic testing. One resident provided the Townsville Community Champion with evidence showing court proceedings for his grandson had been deferred on three occasions due to the unavailability of pre-sentence reports and prosecution briefs. He expressed concerns about the impact this was having on the mental health of his grandson.

<sup>23</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology 2006, 'Mentoring and crime prevention: what is good practice?', AICrime reduction matters No. 43, Canberra, Australian Government available at <https://aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm043> accessed on 21 November 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Annex A – Information sheet 5.

<sup>25</sup> Youth Justice Services summary 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Childrens Court Annual Report 2016–17 available at [https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf](https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf) accessed on 19 November 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Childrens Court Annual Report 2016–17 available at [https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf](https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf) accessed on 19 November 2018.

## Townsville youth development strategy model

During the consultation process, the community proposed broad themes that focused on a wider range of measures than the intervention and rehabilitation measures being implemented under the Five-point Plan and Community Youth Response.

These were distilled into a wider Youth Development Strategy model (Figure 1 on page 21). This model considers the development of a young person from birth to age 18 and accepts there are periods of risk during that development pathway that, if not managed, may result in a youth displaying anti-social behaviour, such as criminal offending.

The model emphasises three broad methods to support youth development: prevention, intervention and rehabilitation. It highlights the variables associated with youth development programs, namely the cost, effectiveness and impact.

### Prevention

Prevention occurs prior to the display of anti-social behaviours. Preventative programs target families and young people at risk of developing anti-social attitudes and/or values. This usually occurs in the prenatal period, extending into early primary school. However, preventative programs can extend further into the developmental lifespan. The model captures the main age bracket that these programs are being implemented within.

### Intervention

Intervention occurs once anti-social behaviour presents itself, but before the criminal justice system becomes involved. A range of service providers including non-government, private

and government services, particularly those in the health and education sectors, provide intervention programs. This usually occurs at some point in primary school and extends into adolescence. The age span at which these can be implemented varies, however the model focuses on the most likely age brackets.

### Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation occurs when there is formal involvement by a young person with the justice system. This can include involvement with the police and youth justice programs, including youth detention facilities. This can begin as young as 10 and extend through to the age of 18 when the young person enters the adult system. Rehabilitation programs are usually provided through legislative means and often in unison with intervention programs.

### Cost

The cost of programs is the lowest when implemented in the prevention period, however the most expensive programs are implemented in the rehabilitation phase. No programs are more expensive than the rehabilitation method of detention, which exceeds approximately \$1422 a day per young person.<sup>28</sup>

### Effectiveness

The most effective programs are those focusing on prevention of anti-social behaviours in the early years of a person's life. In contrast, programs delivered when behaviours are entrenched — to the degree they have attracted the attention of the police and youth justice system — are much less effective at reducing offending.

<sup>28</sup> Australian Productivity Commission 2017, 'Report on Government Services 2017', Chapter 17 Youth Justice Services, Australian Government available at

<https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2018/community-services/youth-justice> accessed on 1 May 2018.



## Impact

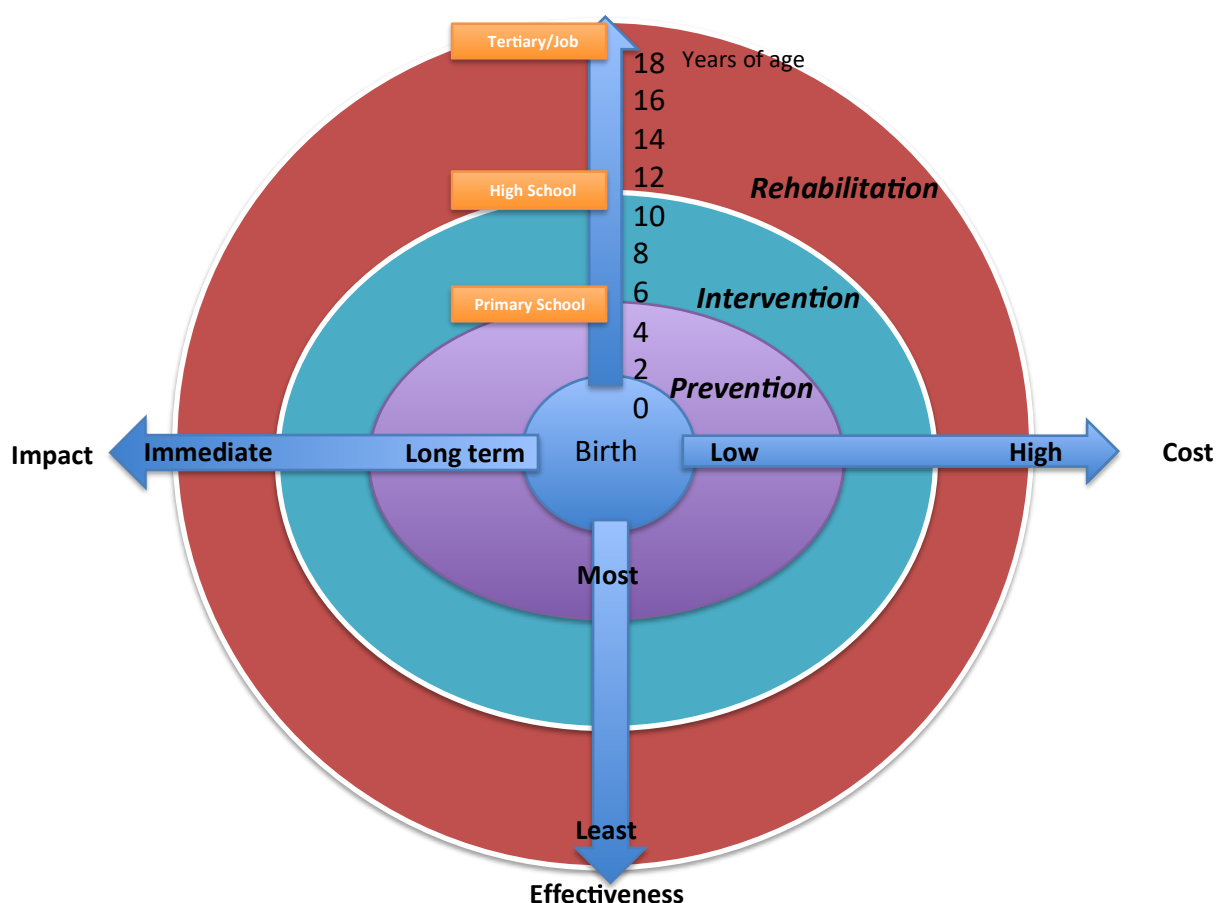
Prevention programs are an investment in the future of young people and the broader Townsville community where the impact will not be felt immediately. However, these effects are hard to measure when they provide a lifelong impact on the young person. Impacts of rehabilitation programs are more immediate, however the likelihood of long-term change is much less compared to preventative programs.

Most immediate impacts are derived through detention. Detention can effectively stop offending behaviour, however when an offender is placed in a detention centre the

long-term impact is likely to be an increased risk to the community through future and lifelong anti-social behaviours.

In all these variables, it is accepted that in the case of serious offenders, the community's need for immediate safety and protection takes precedence. The challenge is in getting the balance right between individual and community needs.

Community-driven solutions, and their variables within the strategy model, were further analysed to understand the gaps and opportunities associated with implementing such a strategy in Townsville.



**Figure 1.** The Townsville Youth Development Strategy Model depicts the age of young people and the three methods: prevention, intervention and rehabilitation. The diagram also highlights how factors such as cost, effectiveness and the impact of implementing programs affect these three stages.

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## Assessment of current strategies gaps and opportunities

### Prevention

The Townsville Community Champion identified two preventative measures outlined in the *Five-point plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*. These measures were described as high-visibility policing operations to deter offending, and early identification of students with poor attendance. Comment on the effectiveness of these measures was sought during individual and group consultations.

Based on community feedback, the first method used in the Townsville Youth Development Strategy model would contain additional comprehensive prevention measures. These measures are aimed at keeping the community safe and fostering positive social behaviour in children. Of all the prevention measures outlined by the community, support to victims of crime and early childhood education were mentioned as the key measures in this stage of the strategy. These measures are discussed further below.

### Support victims of crime

Considerable effort was made to understand the youth crime problem from the perspective of the victim. A large proportion of victims interviewed by the Townsville Community Champion commented on systems relating to crime reporting and victim support.

Many victims spoke about incidents where the Policelink telephone response system appeared unable to understand or react to reports of crime. For example, one victim of crime expressed frustration that a Policelink telephone operator lacked local knowledge of Townsville streets and suburbs and that this

unnecessarily delayed responses to an alleged crime. Other victims were concerned that, having reported a suspected crime, there was no QPS patrol response.

Many victims also commented on the lack of information provided to them following their report of an offence. Specifically, several victims of crime advised they had not received any information on whether offenders had been brought to justice and whether they, as victims, were entitled to any further information or support.

The Townsville Community Champion researched both the Policelink system and the QPS Victims Assist program. Policelink was established for people to report non-urgent matters and currently receives more than one million telephone calls annually. The Policelink website was established to receive online enquiries as a priority and receives about 250,000 digital contacts annually.<sup>29</sup> Discussions with QPS Community Contact Command revealed an internal Business Operations Review was being conducted to solve a number of challenges associated with Police Communications Centres. However, this review was not designed to incorporate community feedback on the performance of Policelink.

The Townsville Community Champion also attended a briefing on the QPS Victims Assist program during a Townsville Community Policing Board meeting and received information on procedures for supporting victims of crime. This service is currently provided by general duty police officers, in addition to their job of responding to other criminal matters.

In addition, a meeting was held with the QPS Townsville District's Cross-Cultural Liaison Office to understand the current roles and tasks of the Police Liaison Officer (PLO) network. A 2017 study into the operation of the

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<sup>29</sup> Queensland Police Service, 'Policelink' available at <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/policelink/> accessed on 19 November 2019.

Police Liaison Officer network was completed by the University of Queensland and suggested this service could have wider utility to provide additional support to victims of crime.<sup>30</sup> This solution would reduce the workload of general duty police officers.

**Recommendation 1.** *An independent audit of the measures of performance and effectiveness of the Policelink telephone response service in the Townsville Local Government Area (LGA) to improve the service beginning calendar year 2019.*

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

**Recommendation 2.** *Review and develop standing procedures for the trial deployment of Police Liaison Officers in the Townsville LGA to enhance the level of assistance for victims of crime from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

### Support parents

Understandably, many residents indicated that the centre of gravity of development for any young person is the family. Early education and support for parents and family structures were seen as essential first steps towards ensuring a child does not enter a pipeline of anti-social behaviour that culminates in youth crime. While no government or non-government agency was able to provide a full map of family programs in Townsville, there was no apparent shortage of these types of services.

For example, the Townsville Community Champion was briefed on The Smith Family's Communities for Children Facilitating Partners program, which is a place-based initiative designed to facilitate a whole of community approach to support and enhance early

childhood development.<sup>31</sup> Under this program, The Smith Family partners with agencies such as Police–Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC), Centacare and Australian Red Cross on activities that encourage positive education for children between birth and 12 years of age.

The Townsville Community Champion was also briefed on the internationally recognised First 1000 days Australia program, which focuses on the health and wellbeing of parents and children in the first 1000 days of a child's life.<sup>32</sup> The Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service (TAIHS) has operated this program since November 2017. All parents involved in this initiative who were interviewed by the Townsville Community Champion regarded this program as effective in connecting them to early education programs and networks.

While the First 1000 days Australia program has only recently been introduced, there is significant evidence that highlights the importance of support to mothers, fathers and their children during this critical stage of life. Most notably is evidence that links adverse experiences in a foetus' and infant's development with an individual's behavioural and social wellbeing. For example, prenatal exposure to drugs and exposure to trauma in the first three years of life can change a brain's development, impacting on a child's behaviour.<sup>33</sup>

Another issue raised frequently by residents was public transport. Numerous parents, families and youths criticised the lack of public transport in the Townsville LGA and its detrimental impact on connecting children with education and other services, particularly flexible learning services. Specific mention was

<sup>30</sup> Watson K et al 2017 'Effective Community Policing in Queensland? An Examination of the Police Liaison Officer Program' *Australia and New Zealand Society of Evidence Based Policing* University of Queensland: 25–31.

<sup>31</sup> The Smith Family 2018 *Communities for Children FP Townsville West QLD Program Overview 2017–2019* available at <http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au> accessed on 10 May 18.

<sup>32</sup> First 1000 Days Australia 2018 *First 1000 Days Australia Movement* available at <http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au/1000-days-movement> accessed on 10 May 18.

<sup>33</sup> Moore, T.G., Arefadib, N., Deery, A., Keyes, M. & West, S. (2017), 'The First Thousand Days: An Evidence Paper – Summary', Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

made about insufficient transport services to suburban growth areas such as the Upper Ross and Northern Beaches. Discussions with the bus service provider in Townsville, Sunbus, revealed public transport routes had not been reviewed for five years and were only done so at the direction of the Queensland Government.

**Recommendation 3.** *Map the parent education programs in the Townsville LGA and assess the measures of performance, reach and effectiveness of parenting programs to strengthen family networks from 2019.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women in cooperation with the Department of Education and Queensland Health]*

**Recommendation 4.** *Review the Townsville LGA public transport plan (such as the Sunbus service) to provide more access for Townsville families from 2019.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Transport and Main Roads in cooperation with the Townsville City Council]*

### **Provide early education screening**

A review of the background of young people in the youth justice system revealed a large number are disengaged from the education system.<sup>34</sup> Often this disengagement was triggered by suspension or expulsion from school, with many students not re-engaging with education thereafter. Education Queensland lists behavioural problems as one of the primary reasons behind suspension and expulsions. Individual and group consultations suggested early wellbeing screening was necessary to ensure children and families could receive appropriate support services to

participate in education and prevent behaviour-related suspension or expulsion. It was proposed that screening could test for potential learning challenges such as hearing problems, language skills, neurological issues and social and emotional wellbeing.

The benefit of this proposal is underscored by a recent study in Western Australia that indicated youth in detention facilities were significantly over-represented in being diagnosed with neuro-developmental impairment (89 per cent) and/or foetal alcohol syndrome (36 per cent). These rates are noted as being some of the highest in youth populations in detention globally. Importantly, the research stated that most children found to have medically diagnosable conditions had previously never been assessed, despite being involved in the education, child safety and youth justice systems. The lead researcher, Professor Carol Bower, noted:

*“These are missed opportunities for earlier diagnosis and intervention, which may have prevented or mitigated their involvement with justice services — and more importantly may have permitted alternative community care with targeted health and educational interventions and rehabilitation.”<sup>35</sup>*

In addition, Australian studies into the link between speech language difficulties and youth offending found up to 50 per cent “...of young offenders have a clinically significant, but previously undetected, oral language disorder.”<sup>36</sup> The research identifies the need for additional support for teachers in the early years, as individuals with these undiagnosed oral language difficulties are often identified and managed within schools as having ‘behavioural problems’. The authors have

<sup>34</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 4.

<sup>35</sup> Telethon Kids Institute 2018, ‘Nine out of ten young people in detention found to have severe neuro-disability’ available at <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/news--events/news-and-events-nav/2018/february/young-people-in-detention-neuro-disability/> accessed on 13 November 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Snow, P., & Powell, M., 2012, ‘Youth (in)justice: Oral language competence in early life and risk for engagement in antisocial behaviour in adolescence’ Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice, no. 435, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, Pg. 1.

called for progress in implementing policy and practice in this area, noting:

*‘It is the responsibility, therefore of adults, not vulnerable young people themselves, to ensure that a risky start in life does not result in social marginalisation and offending.’<sup>37</sup>*

Griffith University has developed a pre-school wellbeing measure that has the potential to identify children that may require behavioural and learning support or more flexible learning pathways.<sup>38</sup>

**Recommendation 5.** *Trial a wellbeing measure for all primary school children in the Townsville LGA (such as the Griffith University Rumbles Quest measurement tool) to identify the best assessment tool for developing flexible education and support services from school year 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

### Support school attendance

Many residents observed that an inordinate number of young people in the Townsville LGA did not appear to be attending school. The attendance rate across Townsville state schools in 2017 was 90.06 per cent, slightly lower than the Queensland average of 91.5 per cent.<sup>39</sup> School suspensions are part of the reason for non-attendance. Approximately five percent of non-attendance in Townsville state schools in 2017 was due to suspension. Approximately 25 per cent of non-attendance in 2017 was unexplained.

Community concerns about school attendance, suspensions and exclusions are well founded, given risk factors that accurately predict the likelihood of youth offending. A report by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research identified school attendance, suspensions and exclusions, the age of the offender and the number of prior contacts with the justice system as key factors in predicting offending. The report noted:

*‘Not being at school, having been suspended or expelled from school and having had several prior contacts with the criminal justice system all independently increase the likelihood of another conviction.’<sup>40</sup>*

The Townsville Community Champion investigated Education Queensland policies and procedures that relate to the tracking of school attendance and to addressing truancy. Individual schools are responsible for implementing strategies to re-engage suspended students, while the Townsville office of Education Queensland is responsible for implementing strategies to re-engage children who have been excluded from school. According to current Education Queensland procedures, the notification and warning pathway takes a minimum of one month to complete before any punitive action can be taken to enforce parental obligations for a student to attend school.<sup>41</sup>

One of the limitations of the legislation is that the maximum penalty for a first offence is six penalty units (around \$700) for a first offence or 12 penalty units (around \$1400) for second and subsequent offences. The Queensland

<sup>37</sup> Snow, P., & Powell, M., 2012, ‘Youth (in)justice: Oral language competence in early life and risk for engagement in antisocial behaviour in adolescence’ Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice, no. 435, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, Pg. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Griffith University 2018 *Rumbles Quest well-being measure* available at <https://www.realwell.org.au/> accessed on 18 September 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Department of Education and Training 2017, *Student absences by reason and school*, Queensland Government, available at

<https://ged.qld.gov.au/publications/reports/statistics/schooling/students> accessed on 17 November 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Weatherburn, D., Cush, R., & Saunders, P., 2007, ‘Screening juvenile offenders for further assessment and intervention’, Crime and Justice Bulletin – Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice, No. 109, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Education 2018 ‘Managing Student Absences and Enforcing Enrolment and Attendance at State Schools’ available at <http://ppr.det.qld.gov.au> accessed on 21 November 2018.



Police Service stated that in the Townsville District in 2016 there were two persons charged with fines ranging from \$150–\$400. In 2018, three persons were charged.

Victoria has introduced a Victorian Student Number.<sup>42</sup> The student number is issued to a student at enrolment at all schools (state, Catholic and independent). The system manages engagement of children in school and identifies school area needs, training pathways and trends. While Education Queensland has a similar system for state school students, it does not extend to independent or Catholic school students, nor does it appear to be easily used to track students who disengage from school.

Providing flexible learning programs to support school attendance is a priority in the Five-point Plan. The Townsville Community Champion visited the Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre and the Queensland Pathways State College, both of which provide alternative education avenues for high school children. These schools specialise in supporting young people who are disengaged from mainstream schools and who face complex obstacles in their lives. The Queensland Pathways State College had 80 enrolments during 2018, while the Flexible Learning Centre, operated by the Townsville Catholic Diocese, had 130 enrolments in 2017 according to the My School website.

Mentoring programs that encourage parents and children to remain engaged in school are applied in different ways across Townsville. The Community Champion visited the Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation academies, which seek to improve the education, life skills and job prospects of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Clontarf Foundation academies have been operating in four state high schools in Townsville since

October 2017 and have 20 staff in total.

It is evident through consultations across the Townsville LGA that these programs are widely supported by principals, teachers, parents and students. These programs have achieved strong results in encouraging students to improve their school attendance rate and complete Year 12. The Clontarf Foundation's 2017 annual report noted a national average school attendance rate of 79 per cent.<sup>43</sup> The Clontarf Foundation's regional manager stated that, after 12 months of operation in Townsville, its academies are already lifting school attendance rates to this level. The Townsville academies have actively engaged with families and conducted 6500 pickups to take students from home to school.

The Townsville Community Champion participated in several Clontarf Foundation academy events, including sports training, pre-school breakfast, cross-country running, table tennis and a school graduation. This enabled individual discussions with youth and mentors involved in the program. All the young people demonstrated a higher level of self-confidence and respect for others than youth who were interviewed by the Community Champion at the detention centre or while on QPS patrols. Young people involved in the Clontarf Foundations academies were unanimous in their view that the program had given them 'the best incentive ever' to attend school. Academy mentors were clearly a positive influence on the youth and demonstrated to the Community Champion the importance of involving families in the program, particularly at the school graduation ceremony.

While flexible learning and mentoring programs are available in high schools (in accordance with the Five-point Plan), individual and group consultations revealed a community preference for these programs to be introduced much

<sup>42</sup> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 'Student Numbers' Victorian Government available at <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/schooladmin/vsn/studentnumbers.aspx> accessed on 18 November 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Clontarf Foundation 2017, *Annual Report 2017*, in author's possession.

earlier in the youth development pathway. Introducing these programs into primary schools was viewed as a more effective way to prevent anti-social behaviour and disengagement from education.

The Townsville Community Champion investigated the approach of the Stronger Smarter program at the Aitkenvale State School. By applying a philosophy of excellence and seeking an education partnership between parents, teachers and students, the Stronger Smarter approach promotes flexible learning and mentorship.<sup>44</sup> An example of flexible learning within the school has been the establishment of an Intensive Language Centre that helps children from diverse backgrounds to adapt to mainstream education pathways.

Aitkenvale State School has achieved positive results with students from very diverse backgrounds. The school has seen a 40 per cent drop in behavioural incidents per student per day from 2014 to 2016.<sup>45</sup> Principals, teachers, parents and students consulted by the Townsville Community Champion support the Stronger Smarter approach.

**Recommendation 6.** *Investigate and trial the establishment of a Queensland Student Identifier Number (similar to the Victorian Student Number) for children enrolled in education in the Townsville LGA to ensure all children are engaged in an education pathway from school year 2020 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

**Recommendation 7.** *Conduct an independent review of processes for responding to suspected truancy in the Townsville LGA and investigate options for, and feasibility of, legislative amendments to strengthen parental responsibilities for children attending school from 2020 onwards.*

<sup>44</sup> Stronger Smarter Institute, 'Stronger Smarter Approach – Position Paper' available at <http://strongersmarter.com.au/resources/high-expectations-relationships/stronger-smarter-approach-position-paper/> accessed on 18 November 2018.

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

**Recommendation 8.** *Investigate the establishment of the Stronger Smarter program, Clontarf Foundation and Stars Foundation academies in selected primary schools in the Townsville LGA from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

## Develop cultural resilience

Cultural resilience was a significant theme in all community consultations. The need for youth to develop respect for themselves and other cultures was seen as essential in preventing anti-social behaviours. This was a consistent comment during consultations with Traditional Owners, Elders and school principals. Recruiting appropriate teachers and counsellors was regarded as a critical requirement for implementing cultural education programs.

Currently, the Australian National Curriculum requires cultural tolerance to be implemented as a learning module in all schools. No assessment of the success of these learning modules appears to have occurred in the Townsville LGA. Again, the Stronger Smarter program being applied in some Townsville schools is demonstrating evidence of cultural resilience in students. This program encourages the use of 'yarning circles' to allow students to learn and discuss aspects of their culture, thereby encouraging improvements in their behaviour.

**Recommendation 9.** *Develop and trial an extra-curricular education program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary school children in the Townsville LGA to develop Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural resilience from school year 2020 onwards.*

<sup>45</sup> Burgess J 2017 *A Transformational Narrative of Aitkenvale State School* Aitkenvale State School, in author's possession.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Education in cooperation with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**Recommendation 10.** *Review the current application of the Australian Curriculum's intercultural understanding learning module for primary school children in the Townsville LGA to develop and trial improvements to the module and strengthen intercultural understanding from 2020 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Department of Education]*

## Intervention

The Townsville Community Champion identified cultural mentoring, after-hours safe haven programs, Project Booyah, Transition 2 Success, mental health services for young people, and youth-focused employment programs as intervention measures contained in the *Five-point Plan to reduce youth crime in Townsville*. Townsville residents observed that a wide range of intervention programs and services were operating for youth exhibiting anti-social behaviour or at risk of offending. The community were widely supportive of these measures.

The second layer of the community-driven Townsville Youth Development strategy identifies additional intervention measures. A dominant view in the community was that more emphasis needed to be placed on keeping youth engaged in responsible social activities outside of school hours. Of all the intervention measures outlined by the community, improvements to youth services after hours and the strengthening of mentoring programs were mentioned as the key measures in this stage of the strategy. These measures are discussed further below.

### Improve youth services after hours

The Townsville Community Champion was able to witness programs aimed at providing after-hours service to youth. QPS Rapid Action and Patrols officers and the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service's *Lighthouse*

emergency accommodation staff were of a view that there was a shortage of emergency transport, temporary accommodation and counselling services available to respond to at-risk youth. Youth service providers suggested the need for a central after-hours call centre for young people.

The Townsville Community Champion also visited the Murri Watch after-hours transport provider. This service connects homeless adults with emergency accommodation and support services in a culturally sensitive manner, and has directly contributed to reducing vagrancy in the Townsville LGA. Youth service providers have suggested that, with appropriate child safety protocols, the Murri Watch service could be extended to provide after-hours emergency transport and connections for at-risk youth.

Several government, non-government and community groups across the Townsville LGA have taken the initiative to alleviate gaps in after-hours support for families and youth. The Townsville Community Champion made several visits to these 'community hubs' including the Community Gro initiative at Rasmussen and the Garbutt Bombers Club at Garbutt.

These hubs have benefited from the support of community volunteers and goodwill from PCYCs and have demonstrated a capacity to bring local communities together. One example of this was a community gathering hosted by the Garbutt Bombers for family and friends after the sudden death of a young person. Several state school principals commented positively on community hubs and suggested further hubs could also be established using state school facilities after hours.



**Recommendation 11.** Investigate and trial enhancements to after-hours youth services in the Townsville LGA, including but not limited to:

- a youth services call centre
- transport (such as the Murri Watch patrol)
- additional emergency accommodation (such as the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service's Lighthouse)
- emergency support

to ensure the safety of at-risk youth from 2019 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Townsville City Council]*

**Recommendation 12.** Investigate and trial the establishment of community hubs at selected schools to economically centralise the provision of after-hours youth development services from 2020 onwards.

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Department of Education, the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, and the Townsville City Council]*

### Strengthen mentor programs

This report has already discussed the importance of mentoring programs in school. However, community feedback also highlighted the critical need to identify and refer youth to mentoring programs outside of school. Accordingly, the Community Champion met with QPS officers, school principals, the Stronger Communities Action Group, Youth Justice staff and residents to discuss current procedures for identifying and referring at-risk youth, and the performance of mentoring programs external to school.

In terms of identifying at-risk youth, there was strong support for the cross-agency procedures being applied by the Stronger Communities Action Group to refer youth to mentoring programs external to schools. Discussions also highlighted the importance of the QPS Adopt-a-Cop program used at various schools in the

Townsville LGA. This program was viewed as helping young people understand the role of police, while assisting them (in cooperation with schools, the action group and Youth Justice staff) to identify at-risk youth so they could be referred to external mentoring programs. It was noted, however, that this procedure drew resources away from general duty policing and that Police Liaison Officers could provide a more consistent presence in schools.

The Community Champion visited a range of sporting, cultural, leadership and employment mentoring activities for at-risk youth and young people in the youth justice system. During consultations, individuals and groups offered the view that effective intervention measures included Queensland Youth Services' Recycle Your Dreams and other work skills projects, QPS's Project Booyah and Youth Justice's Transition 2 Success program.

The Townsville Community Champion consulted social workers and parents engaged with these programs and held lengthy discussions with the young people themselves. One youth participating in the Queensland Youth Services' Recycle Your Dreams program confided the initiative had changed his life because the skills he had learnt had increased his chances of gaining a job.

Another young person at a Project Booyah gym session advised that the program had taught her much about the importance of self-discipline and accepting personal responsibility. Of the 41 participants who attended Project Booyah Townsville in 2017, 30 remain engaged in school education.

On a statewide basis, the Transition 2 Success program notes these key achievements:

- 70 per cent of participants have had no further offending, or their offending is considered significantly less serious than previous offending (for example, shop stealing, fare evasion).

- Of the 24 per cent of young people who committed more serious offences, 95 per cent committed these offences within the first four weeks of starting the course. After the four-week mark, only five per cent of participants continued to offend.<sup>46</sup>

The Community Champion is advised the performance of the Transition 2 Success program in Townsville is on par with state results.

The Townsville Community Champion also visited cultural mentoring programs. This included several visits to the Men's Shed operated by Bindal Elder, Uncle Alfred Smallwood, and two visits to 'on-country activities' by the Yinda Indigenous Development Enterprise.

While the Yinda Indigenous Development Enterprise accepted 46 referrals during 2017–18, detailed data on the effectiveness of this mentoring program was not available due to the program having only operated since October 2017. The program has maintained close cooperation with the specialist High Risk Youth Court Stakeholders Committee in order to explore rehabilitation solutions for youth offenders.

These cultural programs were highly valued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths and Elders in the Townsville LGA, as well as other members of the community. One youth informed the Townsville Community Champion that this cultural mentoring had improved their self-respect, relationship with parents and job prospects.

Individuals and groups advised that mentor programs could be strengthened through:

- coordination between programs to determine which one is the best 'fit' for an at-risk youth

- partnerships between programs to share mentors, facilities, organisational knowledge
- cooperation between programs to identify employment opportunities.

**Recommendation 13.** *Investigate and develop a coordinated mentoring/employment partnerships placement pathway between youth service programs including, but not limited to, Project Booyah, cultural mentoring, Queensland Youth Services and Transition 2 Success to develop at-risk youth from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Queensland Police Service, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training, and Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**Recommendation 14.** *Review and develop standing procedures for the deployment of Police Liaison Officers in the Townsville LGA to provide police liaison support to primary schools from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Queensland Police Service]*

## Rehabilitation

The Five-point Plan prioritises targeted youth justice responses as part of a strategy to reduce youth crime. Key activities within this priority include the operation of the specialist High Risk Youth Court, case management of young people on youth justice orders and bail support programs. The community provided considerable comment on the current youth justice responses. An outline of specific feedback is provided at Figure 5 at Annex D.

A broad section of the community, including residents and service providers, believed the current responses were too slow. In addition, the community was dissatisfied with the

<sup>46</sup> Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, 'Transition 2 Success program', Queensland Government, available at [https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/youth-](https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/transition-2-success-program)

[justice/transition-2-success-program](https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/youth-justice/transition-2-success-program) accessed on 18 November 2018.

process used to transition youths from detention to rehabilitation services.

The third layer of the community-driven Townsville Youth Development strategy identifies improvements for youth justice responses. These include measures such as a greater use of diversionary options in the youth justice system and measures to improve the transition between youth justice rehabilitation services. These measures match many of the recommendations contained in the *Report on Youth Justice* by Mr Bob Atkinson. These measures are discussed further below.

### **Strengthen diversionary options in the youth justice system**

The Townsville Community Champion consulted key stakeholders about the judicial process and observed the court process first hand. This included attending Childrens Court and High Risk Youth Court proceedings. It also included attending several High Risk Youth Court monthly stakeholder meetings.

Information gathered about the judicial system indicated that while cultural considerations could be considered in court processes, particularly in the adult Murri Court, there was no equivalent structure established in the Townsville Childrens Court.<sup>47</sup> Youth Murri Courts are, however, operating in other locations in Queensland.<sup>48</sup> While a range of diversionary justice options are available to police and the courts, the uptake of these diversionary options and supportive programs could be enhanced.

Traditional Owners and Elders reflected a strong desire to be involved in the Childrens Court process. Cultural leaders raised similar concerns to the broader community, particularly when discussing youth development in Townsville. These leaders are interested in being involved in the judicial system in a manner that can enhance the process. The current mechanism for cultural involvement in the court system is through the Community Justice Group. The group is made up of cultural leaders who volunteer to help reduce crime and social problems in their community.<sup>49</sup> This involves members attending the Magistrates Court and Murri Court, identifying and promoting treatment and support programs for defendants and making cultural submissions to the courts.

Community feedback would indicate that the Townsville Community Justice Group is underfunded and undervalued. The Community Champion noted two Elders regularly attended the High Risk Youth Court and stakeholder meetings, but did not have the time to also attend the Childrens Court. The voluntary nature of cultural leaders' involvement (in return for a small allowance) was viewed as reflecting poorly on the actual value that the system places on the cultural expertise offered by these leaders. These resource challenges have been identified in previous reviews of the Murri Court system<sup>50</sup> and are likely to be further identified in the current review of the Murri Court structure in Queensland<sup>51</sup> due to be released in February 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, A., & Louis, E., 2010, 'Evaluation of the Queensland Murri Court: Final report', Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government, Technical and Background Paper 39.

<sup>48</sup> Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Service(Qld) Ltd 2016, 'Murri Court Mackay' available at <http://www.atsils.org.au/murri-court-mackay/> accessed on 19 November 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Queensland Court 2017, 'Community Justice Group program', Queensland Government available at <https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/services/court->

[programs/community-justice-group-program](#) accessed on 19 November 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Morgan, A., & Louis, E., 2010, 'Evaluation of the Queensland Murri Court: Final report', Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government, Technical and Background Paper 39.

<sup>51</sup> Queensland Courts (no date), 'Murri Court', Queensland Government available at [https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/573972/m-fs-murri-court-evaluation.pdf](https://www.courts.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/573972/m-fs-murri-court-evaluation.pdf) accessed on 19 November 2018.

In assessing the importance of cultural considerations within judicial systems, the 2016–17 Childrens Court annual report found Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represent 48 per cent of court outcomes in Queensland.<sup>52</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are also over 10 times more likely to have a matter processed by a court than other children. This state pattern is also reflected in figures which show 88 of 117 young people in the youth justice system in Townsville on 27 March 2017 were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>53</sup>

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders may be partly addressed by enhancing cultural leadership in combination with a system that formalises the delivery of cultural expertise into judicial processes. This would also increase the likelihood of identifying effective diversionary pathways.

Community feedback also indicated a preference for greater use of diversionary options, particularly for children who would benefit from engaging positively with their community. This was seen as a far better option than having early associations with highly criminalised young people in the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. The broader view of the community was that, where possible, children should be given an opportunity to be diverted from the criminal justice system. This would include processes or systems that hold children to account, while maximising the potential of the child to change their behaviour.

Current diversionary strategies include those managed by QPS and those managed through the youth justice system.

**Recommendation 15.** *Investigate and trial the of involvement of Elders (such as a Murri Youth Court) in the Townsville LGA to support*

*diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Justice and Attorney-General in cooperation with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships]*

**Recommendation 16.** *Review the resourcing of the Townsville Community Justice Group to support diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Department of Justice and Attorney-General]*

**Recommendation 17.** *Review the measures of performance and effectiveness of restorative justice conferencing in the Townsville LGA to improve diversionary justice procedures for the High Risk Youth Court from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Queensland Police Service and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General]*

### **Strengthen transition between youth justice rehabilitation services**

The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre client services team has several pathways for young people transitioning from detention into the community. These include the Department of Education planning a transition to an education or training provider in the community; Queensland Health providing recommended health follow-ups to occur in the community; and Youth Justice planning the transition of an offender's case management to youth justice services in the community, including cultural transition and Supervised Community Accommodation when relevant.

The Townsville Community Champion visited rehabilitation programs in each of the transition pathways. These included the Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre, the

<sup>52</sup>Childrens Court of Queensland, 'Annual Report 2016–2017', Queensland Government available at [http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/00](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/00)

[08/548135/cc-ar-2016-2017.pdf](http://www.courts.qld.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/00) accessed on 1 May 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Annex A — Information sheet 4.



Transition 2 Success program and Supervised Community Accommodation. While each of these programs appear to be progressing in accordance with contractual arrangements, there is evidence of a lack of coordination between these pathways. There have been incidents where young people have failed to comply with conditional release order conditions, such as attending education or health pathways while living in Supervised Community Accommodation. The most prominent example of this was an incident involving a 13-year-old girl on a conditional release order who absconded from a Supervised Community Accommodation facility and who was then alleged to have committed a series of property offences.

Successfully coordinated transitions have occurred where case workers have been specially selected to intensively guide youths through programs in partnership with families. Intensive case management is usually established for young repeat offenders who are subject to specialist High Risk Youth Court procedures.

One youth recounted to the Townsville Community Champion that their transition was successful because their case manager 'never gave up' and 'delivered support when I needed support'. These observations were echoed by the parent of a youth who was involved in intensive case management.

If intensive case management is proven to be the most effective process for transitioning young repeat offenders from custody to the community, then this should be applied to all youth that require rehabilitation.

Where incidents of poor transition have taken place, there was no evidence of processes and procedures being adapted to improve transition procedures. This is the most significant gap in the current rehabilitation strategy in Townsville.

**Recommendation 18.** *Conduct an independent audit of the measures of performance and*

*effectiveness of transition pathways between rehabilitation services after detention, with particular attention to:*

- *information management and sharing*
- *Supervised Community Accommodation*
- *case management*
- *re-engagement in training and employment*

*with the aim of improving service delivery and reducing youth reoffending from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, in cooperation with the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training]*

**Recommendation 19.** *Develop and implement a Youth Justice operations learning model to develop a culture of continuous improvement of service delivery from 2020 onwards.*

*[Relevant agency: Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

## Implementation

To facilitate the implementation of the Townsville Youth Development Strategy, two critical aspects would warrant consideration. The first is the empowerment of the Townsville Stronger Communities Executive Committee. This committee would be required to adopt a strategic youth development outlook, rather than a youth crime outlook. Such an outlook can only be facilitated by allowing influential representatives from the business community, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and youth to join the committee. But the committee would also need greater autonomy in relation to cross-levelling finances, personnel and other resources.

The second critical aspect is public engagement. Implementation of place-based youth development measures would need to be communicated to the community in a transparent and synchronised manner, preferably through the Stronger Communities Executive Committee.

**Recommendation 20.** *Review the terms of reference, membership and approval authorities of the Townsville Stronger Community Executive Committee to support the development and implementation of a community-driven Townsville Youth Development Strategic Plan from 2019 onwards.*

*[Relevant agencies: Department of the Premier and Cabinet to direct the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women]*

## Conclusion

Townsville residents have continued to voice their concerns about recent incidents of youth crime and its impact on residents, as well as Townsville's reputation.

Extensive consultation has revealed the community is committed to developing local youth to ensure the incidence of youth crime is reduced and Townsville can continue to build a reputation as a preferred lifestyle and business destination.

The Townsville community believes a fair and sustainable approach to youth crime must address five key themes:

- Share more information on action being taken to address youth crime
- Hold youths accountable for their actions
- Support youth and their families to participate in education
- Promote role models and mentors
- Improve the diversionary justice process and timeliness within the youth justice system.

Furthermore, the community seeks an holistic youth development strategy that addresses these five themes, while supporting local youth through prevention, intervention and rehabilitation stages. This would place a focus on:

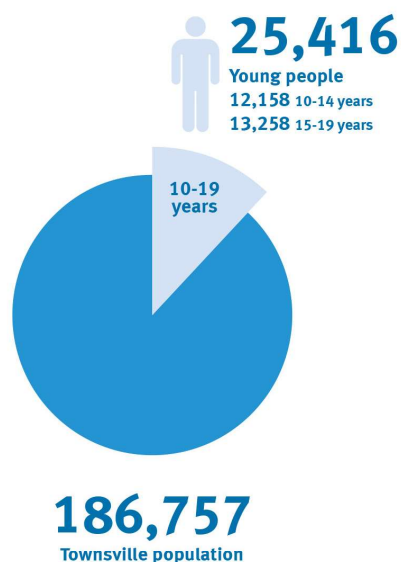
- supporting children and families to participate in education
- providing after-hours youth services for at-risk children
- establishing diversionary justice options for youth offenders
- intensive case management of offenders.

A representative Stronger Communities Executive Committee empowered with implementing the 20 recommendations outlined in this report will reduce the incidence of youth crime and make Townsville safer.

## Annex A — Information sheets

### Information sheet 1

# Who are the young people of Townsville?



**597** year 1 children demonstrate lower than average ability in one or more areas: physical health, social skills, emotions, language and communication (1,386 children were assessed)



Since 2011, there has been a significant decline in children's average ability in vital developmental areas. Development of their social skills now lags behind that of the rest of Queensland.



A person's life success, health and emotional wellbeing have their roots in early childhood. If we get it right in the early years, we can expect to see children thrive throughout school and into their adult lives.



**30 = 50%**

young people 10-16 years of all offending by youth in the justice system (2016-2017)



Most children who commit a crime do so once and then stop offending of their own volition while in their youth.

more than

**60%**



who receive a police caution do not come in contact with the justice system again.

This data is sourced from 2016 census of population and housing general community profile, Townsville (C) (LGA 37010) cat no. 2001.0, from the 2015 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) Townsville (C) LGA, and Youth Justice Performance and Reporting, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women, and Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group website (young people 10-16 years).

## Information sheet 2

# School attendance information sheet

1 Staying engaged in education is one factor known to reduce youth offending

2 19,846 students enrolled in state schools across Townsville in 2017

3 Attendance rates across Townsville state schools (primary and secondary) in 2017 were on par with the rest of Queensland

**90.6%**  
Townsville local government area

**91.5%**  
Queensland

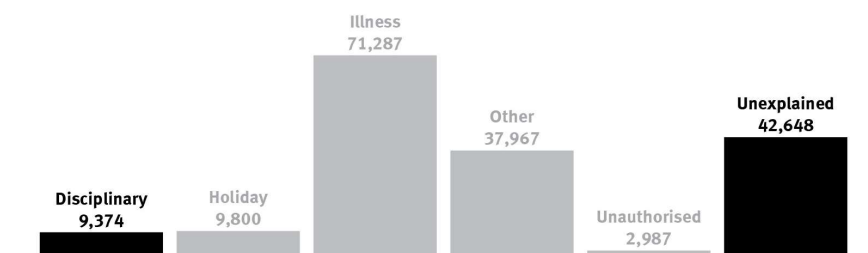
*Percentages show combined primary and high school attendance rates*

4 Parents are responsible for making sure children of compulsory school age are enrolled in a school and attending school every day

5 Students are absent from school for a variety of reasons:

- illness
- school disciplinary absences (e.g. suspension)
- other (e.g. attending medical or legal appointments, attending a funeral, undertaking work experience, sorry business)
- planned family holidays

On occasion students are absent from school without an explanation from parents or the explanation provided is considered to not be reasonable



### Schools have a range of processes to manage and track absences, including:

- Roll marking at least twice a day
- Cross checking rolls with information about student absences to identify an unexplained absence
- Notifying parents/carers when a student is absent from school without an explanation
- Following up with parent/carers if no response or reason is received from them
- Maintaining records of all communication
- Connecting students and/or parents/carers to a range of internal and external supports as appropriate
- Initiating formal action if a student has persistent absences for which a reasonable excuse has not been provided
- As a last resort, referring the matter to the Queensland Police Service for prosecution

*All situations are managed on an individual basis and each school may do this differently.*

This data is sourced from Department of Education, Student attendance rate by school, Queensland state schools 2017, Townsville (C) LGA, and Student absences by reason and school, Queensland state schools 2017, Townsville (C) LGA.

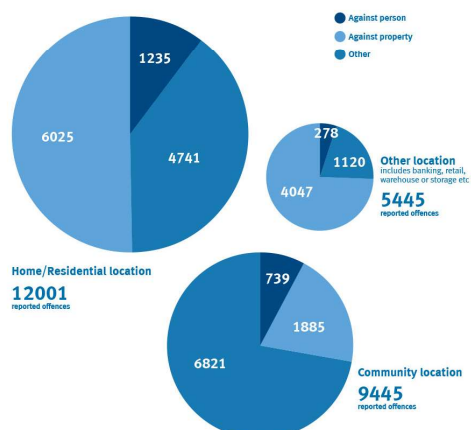


## Information sheet 3

# What crime is happening in the Townsville community?

## Where all crime occurred

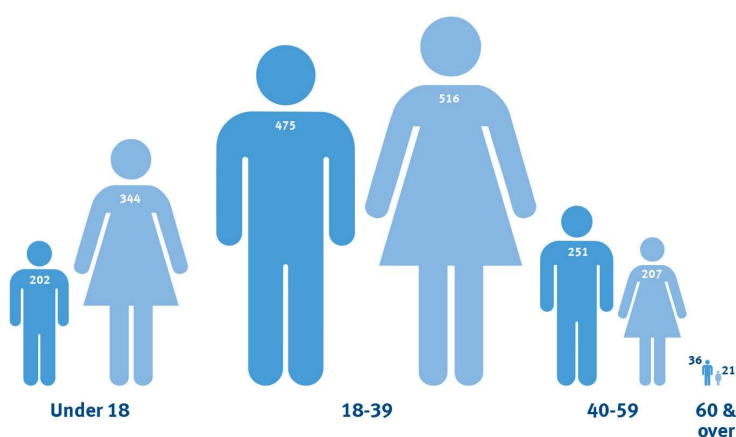
Of the 26,891 reported offences in Townsville\*



\*These figures include both adult and youth crime. The statistics provided do not present a unique person count, as a person may be the victim of more than one offence within the reference period. This data is sourced from QPS statistical services. Number of reported offences by location of incident 01/07/2016 to 30/06/2017 in the Townsville LGA.

## People who have had crimes committed against them

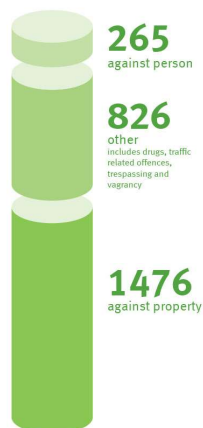
Of the 2054 reported incidents against the person\*



This data is sourced from QPS Statistical Services, number of victims by offences by age groups and sex 01/07/2016 to 30/06/2017 in the Townsville LGA.

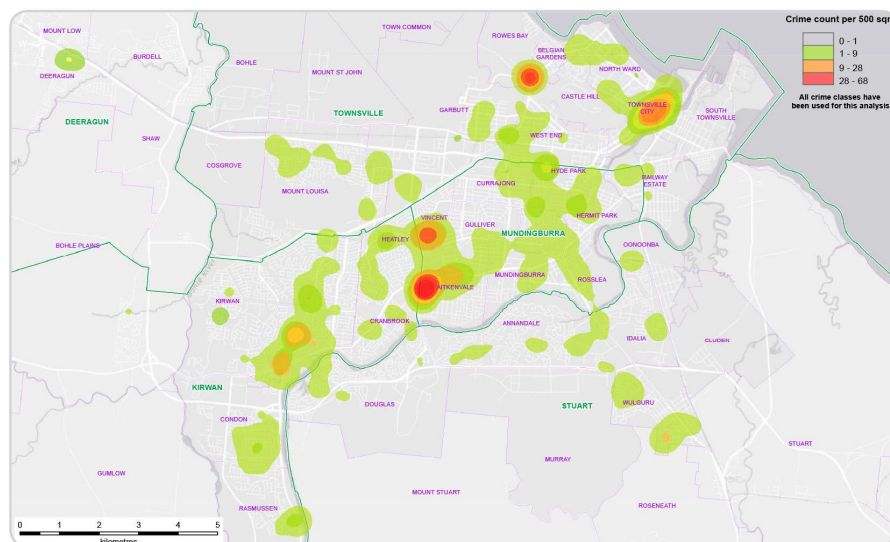
## Youth offending

Of the 2,567 offences in Townsville, youth offenders committed:



Youth offending is a reference to offences committed by young people aged 10-17 years. Data represents offences committed, and is not a count of young people. This data is sourced from QPS Statistical Services, number of offenders by offences by age groups and sex 01/07/2016 to 30/06/2017 in the Townsville LGA.

## Where youth crime occurred



Youth crime is a reference to crime committed by young people aged 10-17 years. The frequency of crime in the depicted areas may be due to close proximity to local infrastructure eg. schools, public transport interchanges, shopping centres and other points of interest. Areas highlighted are based on crime density per square metre. Areas that are not shaded do not mean there is no crime. Map depicts Townsville police district produced by Geospatial Solutions, Queensland Police Service (QPS). Data overlaid on this map is sourced from QPS statistical services for the Townsville LGA.

## What the locals are saying about crime:

"The most disappointing thing I have seen most recently is the way in which we as a community are trying to deal with this crime spree that's happening with these juveniles anywhere from 10 -17 years....It has to start with our education and us identifying the roots of the problem. The family life, the culture and the environment where these offenders are coming from."

Quotes sourced from Townsville media 2018.

"Youth crime is not that difficult to control. It simply takes leadership, decisive action, appropriate engagement of stakeholders and "action."

"Although I only busted teen crims in my car twice, I couldn't sleep properly for weeks after."

"I was very sick, I just stood shaken over the sink – I had to calm myself down."

"The stress on the family knowing that your dad's living by himself and this [crime] is happening."

"It's disappointing that criminal behaviour continues to happen in the community because it disrupts people's rights to live in their homes in safety."

"I'm still disappointed, angry and frustrated that this issue continues to plague our community."

"I don't care whether these kids are 14, they need more than a rap on the knuckles."

## Information sheet 4

# What does the world look like for Townsville children connected with youth justice?



This data is sourced from Youth Justice Performance and Reporting, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women – Youth Justice Census (27 March 2017). Census data may not reflect the current situation.

\* A child protection order is an order made by the Children's Court if it believes a child is in need of protection.  
\* A child is "known" to the child protection system if they have been subject to a child protection advice, child concern report, notification, or substantiation at any time. They may or may not be subject to a child protection order to be known to the child protection system.

### From a sample of 50 young offenders:

**34** had first come into contact with youth justice system between 10 and 14 years of age

**35** have been exposed to domestic and family violence

**49** are involved with or living with other people who have histories of offending

This data was sourced from the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group which includes 2017 Queensland Police Service (QPS) and Youth Justice data, from a sample of 50 young property offenders aged 10-24 years.

## Information sheet 5

# Sentencing process

## information sheet

- 1 Courts must decide on a sentence for each young person based on their actions, and their current situation
- 2 Sentencing must be for one (or more) of the following reasons:
  - Punish an offender for their actions
  - Change (rehabilitate) their actions
  - Discourage them and others from committing same or similar crimes
  - Formally denounce an offender's actions
  - Protect the community from the offender
- 3 In deciding what penalty is appropriate, the court takes into account the level of harm experienced by the victim, reports from Police, and other government agencies such as Youth Justice and Child Safety, or people connected to the young offender. If the young offender is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person a submission from the young offender's community justice group will also be taken into consideration

### Sentencing options available to the court if a young person is found guilty or pleads guilty:

- Reprimand
- Disqualification of drivers licence
- Good behaviour
- Restorative justice process (with or without a supervision order)
- Compensation
- Fine
- Treatment order (drug assessment/ education)
- Graffiti removal
- Probation
- Community service
- Conditional release (suspended detention)
- Detention (in a detention centre)
- Intensive supervision
- A combination of any of the above
- Parents of the young offender can also be ordered to pay compensation to the impacted third party

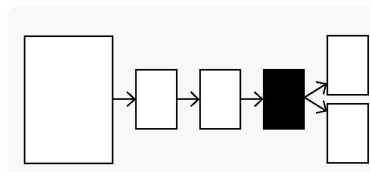
### During 2016–17

**102**  
community service  
orders

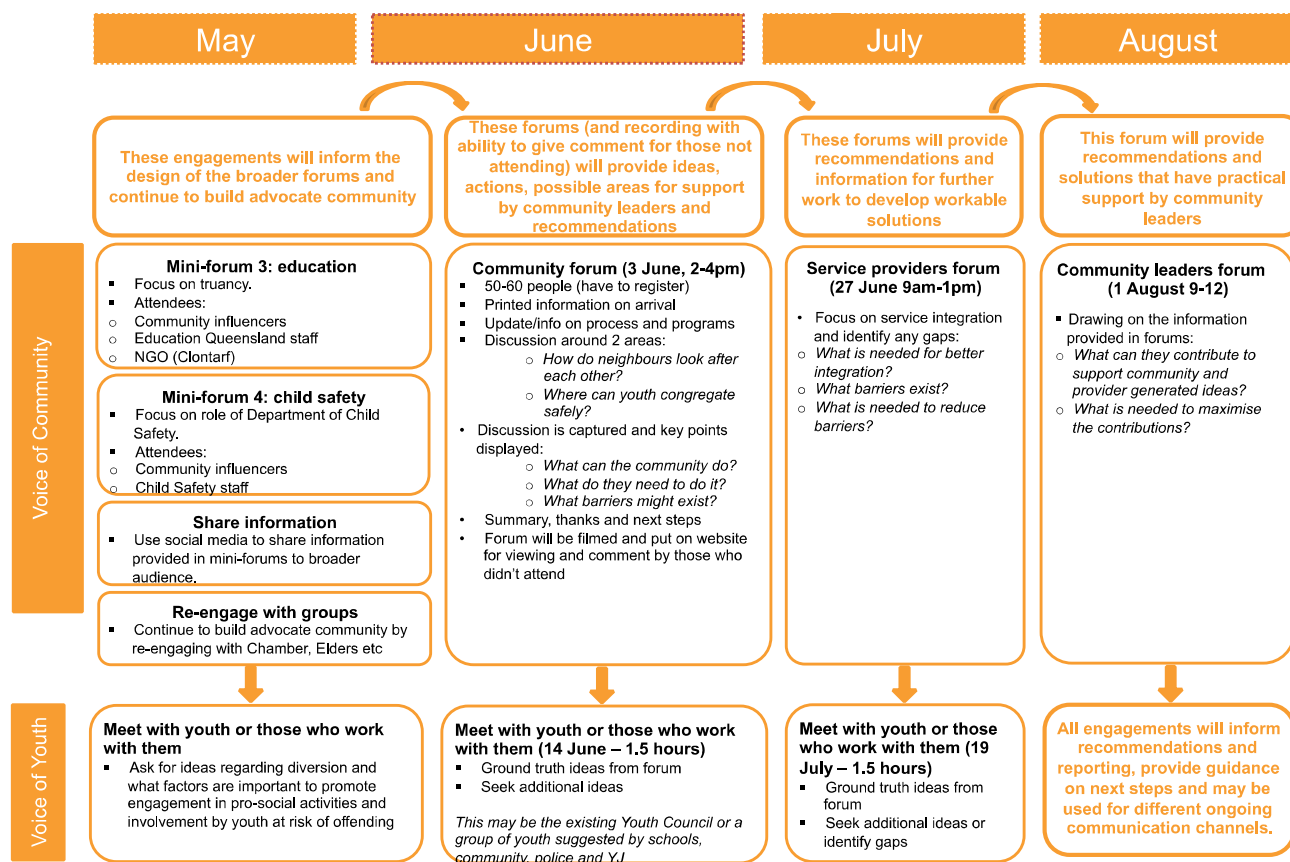
**35**  
restorative justice  
orders with  
supervision

**were issued by the courts for Townsville youth offenders**

This data is sourced from Youth Justice summary statistics: Townsville, 2016-17, Youth Justice Performance and Reporting, Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women.



## Annex B — Community engagement strategic plan



Note: Mini-forums were also conducted in March and April 2018

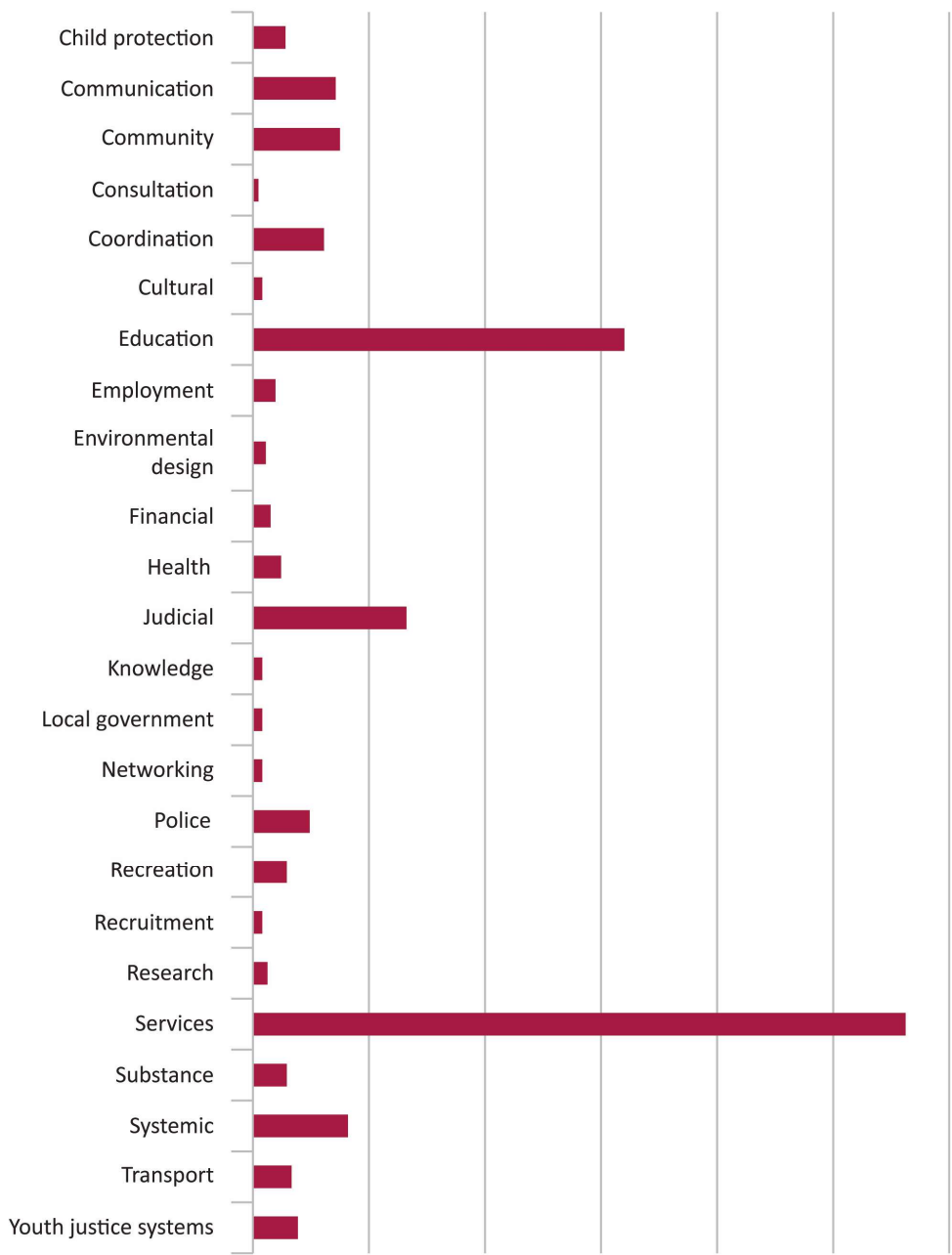


## Annex C — Consultation list

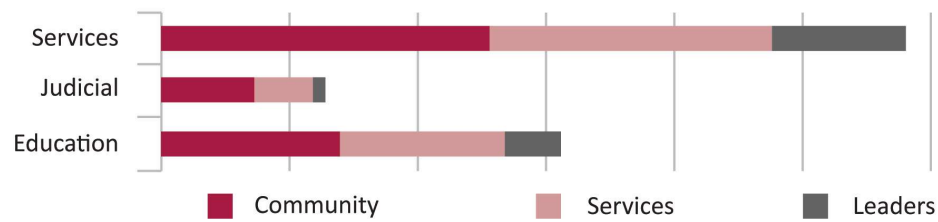
MONTH	PEOPLE	DESCRIPTIONS
January	17	Members of Parliament and local councillors, media, business, government services
February	204	Academics, business, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, judiciary, legal, media, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, non-state schools
March	126	Academics, business, consultants, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, media, mixed groups, judiciary, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, religious leaders
April	114	Academics, business, consultants, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, media, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, religious leaders
May	208	Business, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, media, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, youth, judiciary
June	295	Business, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, media, mixed groups, non-government organisations, residents and/or victims of crime, youth
July	26	Non-government organisations, business, government services
August	268	Cultural leaders and Elders, government services, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, youth, community groups
September	61	Cultural leaders and Elders, government services, media, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, resident and/or victims of crime, youth, judiciary
October	58	Cultural leaders and Elders, government services, mixed groups, non-government organisations, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, youth, judiciary, academics
November	116	Business, cultural leaders and Elders, government services, mixed groups, community groups, Members of Parliament and local councillors, residents and/or victims of crime, youth, judiciary
TOTAL	1493	

*Note: Some people attended more than one meeting, forum or event*

Annex D — Themes identified by participants at community forums

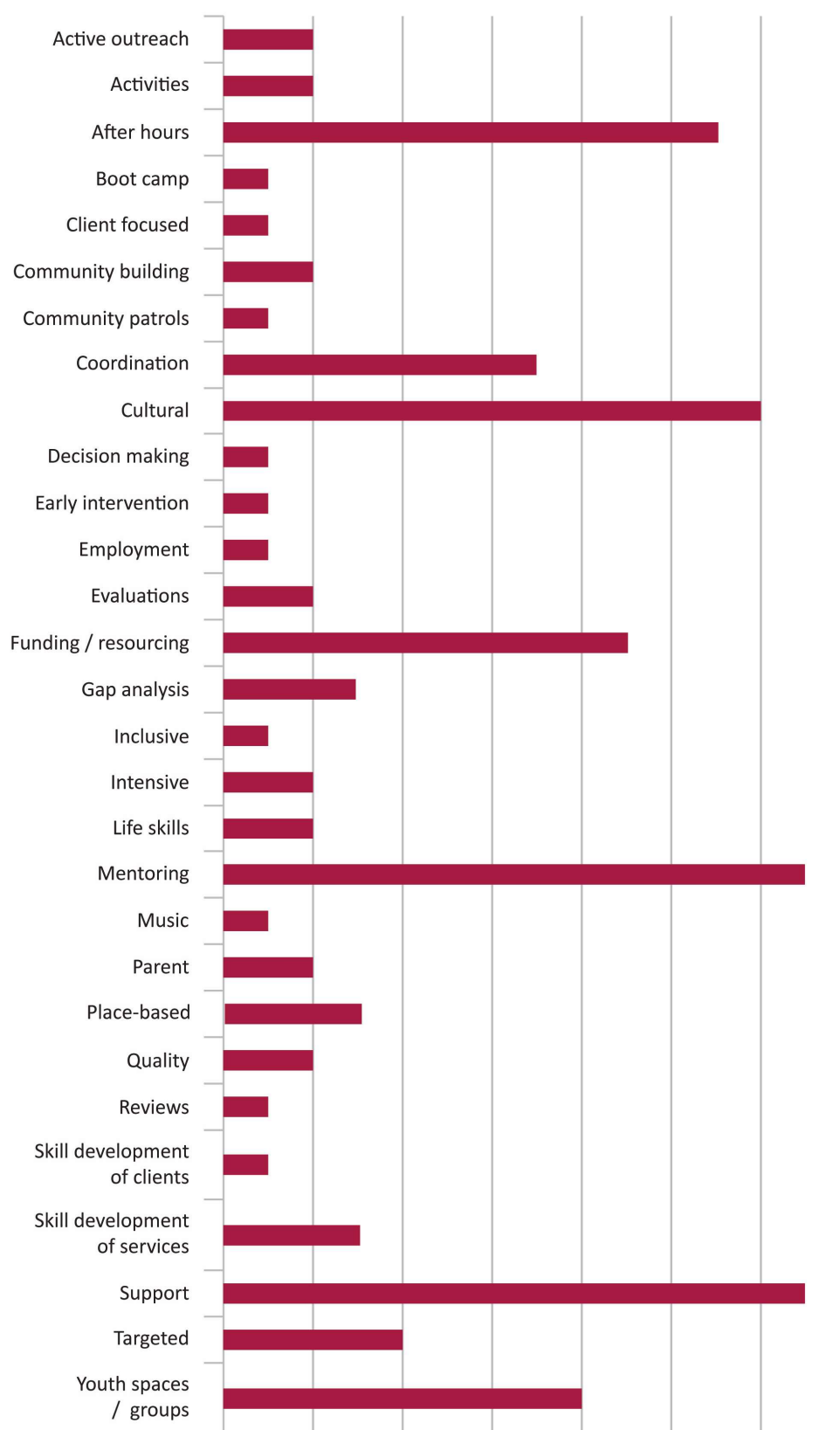


**Figure 2.** Themes identified by participants at forums for the community, service providers and community leaders. This provides a comparison of the number of times solutions on a particular theme were raised.

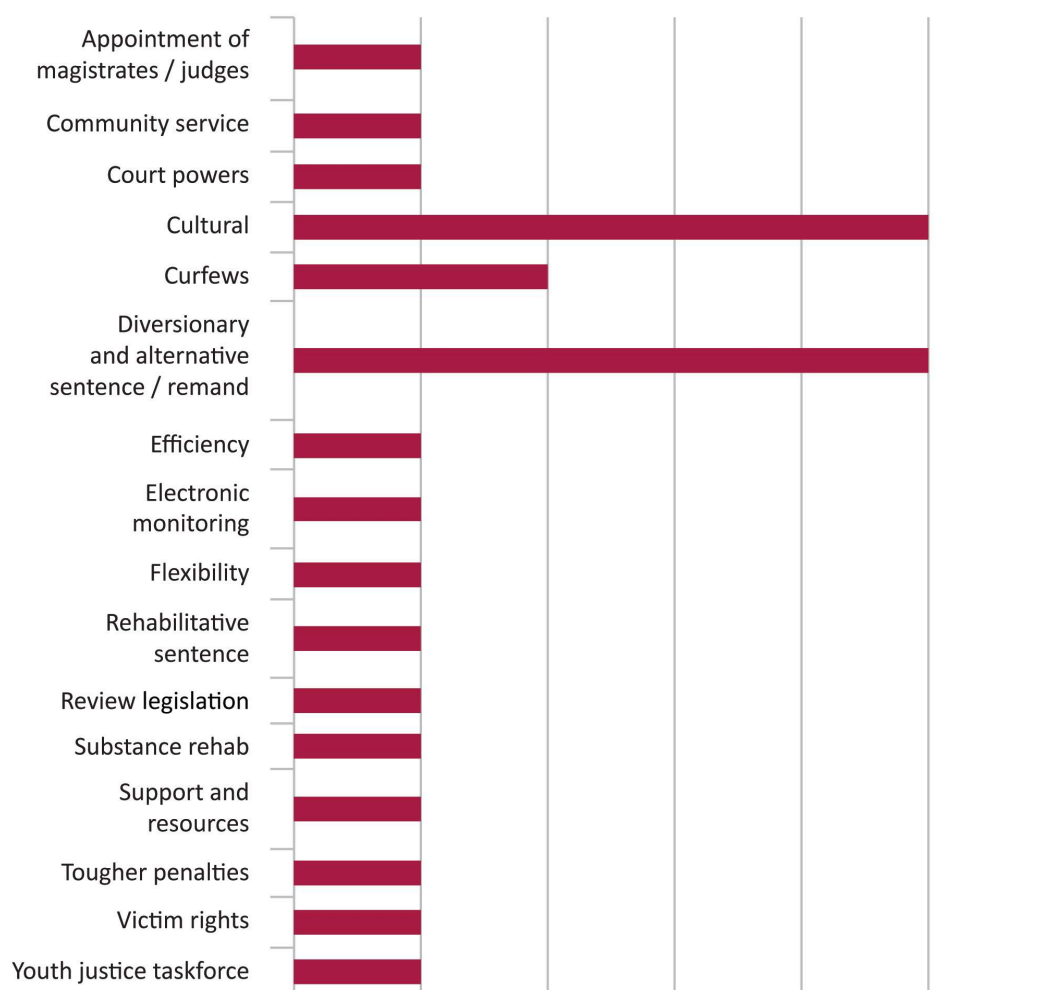


**Figure 3.** Solutions relating to services, the judiciary and education dominated the three main community forums

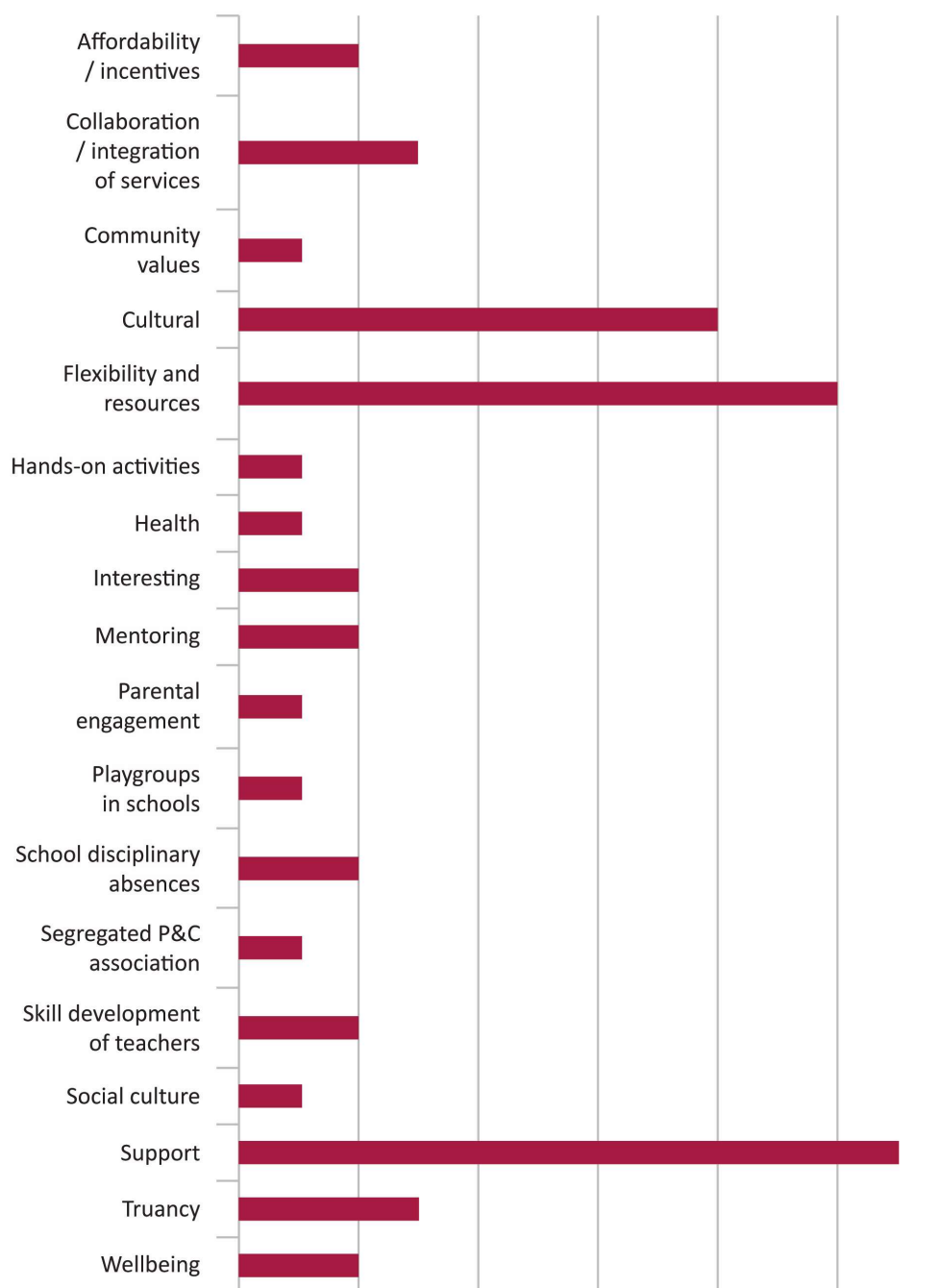




**Figure 4.** Solutions offered at the main community forums in regard to services, with a comparison of the number of times particular subjects were raised



**Figure 5.** Solutions offered at the main community forums in regard to the judicial system, with a comparison of the number of times particular subjects were raised



**Figure 6.** Solutions offered at the main community forums in regard to education, with a comparison of the number of times particular subjects were raised

