

# Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system

Summary of yourtown's advocacy submission 2025



## What is it about?

**yourtown** contributed to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's youth justice and incarceration system, advocating for reform that is inclusive, culturally responsive, and centred on prevention, rehabilitation, and positive long-term outcomes for young people. Informed by extensive frontline experience and insights from the Your Voice 2025 project, the submission calls for a nationally consistent approach that addresses the root causes of youth offending, including educational disengagement, family instability, homelessness, and systemic disadvantage, through early intervention and community-based responses.

## Why is it important?

The Senate inquiry is important because it examines a youth justice system that relies too heavily on incarceration, despite strong evidence that it harms young people, increases reoffending, and fails to address the drivers of crime. **yourtown's** submission is important because it brings credible, frontline evidence and young people's perspectives into the process, demonstrating that early intervention, education, family support, culturally led solutions, and community-based alternatives are more effective, humane, and cost-effective. Together, the inquiry and submission create a critical opportunity to drive consistent, evidence-based national reform that improves outcomes for children and community safety.

## Some of **yourtown's** key messages:

### 1. Embed co-design and human-centred approaches as the national standard in youth justice

Governments should adopt coordinated approaches that place young people with lived experience at the centre of policy and program development through advisory panels, funded co-design, and clear participation standards. Evidence shows these approaches build trust, increase engagement, and improve outcomes, making them essential to a rights-based, inclusive, and effective youth justice system.

### 2. Keep young people engaged in education and training to prevent justice involvement

Governments should prioritise coordinated, culturally responsive strategies that keep young people connected to education, vocational training, and employment through early intervention, flexible learning pathways, and strong collaboration across education, justice, and social services. Sustained engagement in education reduces the risk of youth offending, promotes social inclusion, and should be embedded as a core alternative to incarceration within youth justice reform.

### 3. Build clear skill-building and employment pathways to reduce reoffending

Governments should commit to sustained funding and national coordination of vocational training, apprenticeships, and employment pathways for young people at risk of or involved in the justice system, with culturally responsive and youth specific programs. Evidence shows that structured skill-building and employment pathways reduce reoffending, support social inclusion, and should be embedded as essential alternatives to incarceration in national youth justice strategies.

### 4. Embed family centred interventions as a core pillar of youth justice reform

Governments should invest in family-centred programs that: address trauma; strengthen relationships; provide wraparound support across housing, health, education, and employment; and implement culturally responsive approaches. Evidence shows these interventions prevent youth offending, improve long-term wellbeing, and should be embedded within national youth justice strategies to deliver lasting community outcomes.

### 5. Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead justice solutions

Governments should commit to long-term investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations to lead culturally grounded early intervention, diversion, and rehabilitation through stable funding and integrated supports. Evidence shows these community led justice models reduce detention and reoffending, build trust, improve wellbeing, and should be embedded in national reform as self determined alternatives to incarceration.

### 6. Prioritise safe and stable housing as a core protective factor for young people

Governments should invest in safe, supportive, and culturally appropriate housing for young people at risk of justice involvement, alongside integrated education, employment, and therapeutic supports. Evidence shows stable housing reduces reoffending, improves wellbeing, and must be recognised as a foundational element of national youth justice reform.



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