

Report on Youth Justice

from Bob Atkinson AO, APM

June 2018



The Four Pillars: A Snapshot

The Four Pillars underpin the report's approach and recommendations. As well as addressing the terms of reference, the Four Pillars form the basis of the Special Advisor's advice to the Minister and department.

The Four Pillars include:

1. Intervene early
2. Keep children out of court
3. Keep children out of custody
4. Reduce reoffending



The Four Pillars: A Snapshot

1 Intervene early

The facts:

- 13% of children in the youth justice system are subject to Care and Protection Orders.
- 83% of children in the youth justice system were known to the child protection system already.
- Only 30% of children in the youth justice system of compulsory school age (aged 15 and under) regularly attended school.
 - From 2013–17 the total number of disciplinary absences in Queensland increased by 24%.
- Every dollar spent on flexible learning options for young people generates \$25 in socioeconomic returns and saves \$32,000 in youth justice and welfare costs.
- The majority of children in the youth justice system resided in the lowest socio-economic areas.
 - 42% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children resided in these areas compared to 34% of non-indigenous children.

Solutions:

“By intervening early when risk factors associated with antisocial or criminal behaviour are evident, there is a much greater chance of preventing a child’s later involvement in the criminal justice system and improving their life outcomes.”

“Collaboration and multi-agency responses are key to both the individual and community level crime prevention and early intervention. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, culturally informed and responsive collaborations will be critical for success.”

2 Keep children out of court

The facts:

- 10% of child offenders are responsible for 43% of all child offences in Queensland.
- The Queensland *Youth Justice Act 1992* provides for the police to divert a child by way of taking no action, issuing a caution or referring the child to a restorative justice process.
- There were 38,338 occasions of police actions against children aged 10–16 years in 2016–17.
- Of these police actions, 10,840 cautions were issued and 1941 children were referred to restorative justice by police.

Solutions:

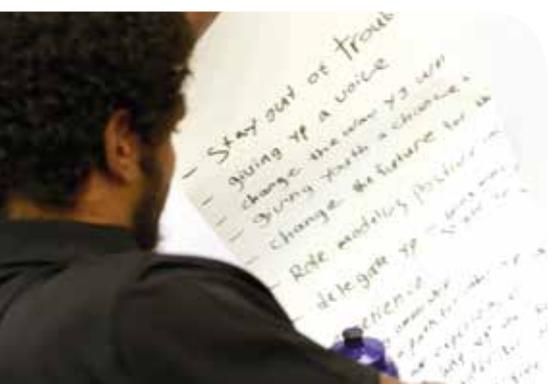
“Where children offend or come to the attention of police, it is critical that a focus is maintained on keeping children out of court, by way of police diversions accompanied by non-court support options.”

“To be effective diversion processes should be supported with new approaches to information sharing, improved assessment processes and enhanced referral pathways and support services for children as well as their families and carers.”

CASE STUDY

‘The Lighthouse’

‘The Lighthouse’ in Townsville is an after-hours diversion service funded by the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women and operated by Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services. It is staffed by trained youth workers who provide an after-hours diversion service for children aged 10–17 years who are at risk of offending.



3 Keep children out of custody

The facts:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children constituted over 69% of the children in detention — despite only representing 7.6% of Queenslanders between the ages of 10–16 years.
- Remand in custody rates in Queensland increased over the last four years from 2.79 per 10,000 to 3.23 per 10,000.
- 18 days is the median number of days children spent in custody and for those serving detention orders it was 43 days.
- Queensland has four supervised bail accommodation services — two in SEQ and two in NQ (Townsville).
- 80% of children in detention centres in Queensland are on remand (higher than the national average of 64%).

Solutions:

“If children can’t be kept out of court, all efforts should be made to keep children out of custody prior to and following an appearance in court.”

“Bail support services serve an important function diverting children from being remanded in custody, particularly where they have a high profile and level of confidence in the courts.”

The children who use the service are often experiencing complex issues within their family including domestic and family violence, drug and alcohol abuse and mental health issues so it provides a safe place they can go to at night.

‘The Lighthouse’ offers a place where young people can be safe and engage in pro-social activities, including table tennis, sport, computer games, weights, television, gardening, trivia, men’s and women’s groups as well as

4 Reduce reoffending

The facts:

- 76% of children subject to supervised orders are suffering from entrenched alcohol or drug misuse issues.
- For 62% of children subject to youth justice supervised orders, substance misuse contributed to their risk of reoffending.
- Therapeutic programs such as skill building and counselling can achieve 10–15% reductions in reoffending.
- It costs \$1500 a day to hold a child in detention.

Solutions:

“The best chance of reducing reoffending behaviour among children is delivering evidence-based interventions that address their individual risks and needs determined by assessment, and that are delivered with the right intensity and frequency.”

“All children in detention should from first arrival, engage in programs that address their offending and personal circumstances, with such programs continuing into and after their transition back into the community.”

supervised excursions, for example, to night markets, fishing and strand walks. These programs are facilitated from 4pm and overnight to 10am on weekdays and 6pm and overnight to 10am on weekends. The provider also offers outreach, crisis care and case management assistance.

Between February 2017 and January 2018 ‘The Lighthouse’ provided a service to 190 young people, who have utilised the service on over 2000 occasions.

Report on Youth Justice

from Bob Atkinson, Special Advisor
to Di Farmer MP, Minister for Child Safety,
Youth and Women and Minister for
Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence

