



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Mr Jeremy Hanson MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson (Deputy Chair), Ms Jo Clay MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Community Corrections

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The ACT Legislative Assemblies inquiry into Community Corrections

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WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Ted Noffs Foundation has been supporting disadvantaged and disconnected youth in the ACT for over 20 years. We have a strong focus on working with young people whose lives are impacted by the effects of alcohol and other drug use. We also support any at-risk young person in the ACT.

Noffs has a range of programs in the ACT that provide specialist services to young people.

1. At our site in Watson, we operate a detoxification and rehabilitation program for young people aged 12 to 18 who have alcohol and other drug related issues. Clients are supported in a therapeutic community and treatment is for up to three months duration. We also provide a dedicated after-care program for these young people, up until the age of 25, that offers ongoing support and case management.
2. We have an Outreach Drug and Alcohol Service that operates from the city offering counselling and assistance for young people aged 12 to 25. Aligned with this service is a mentoring program for young people at risk of homelessness. This service matches clients with volunteer mentors and also provides case management and support.
3. The Noffs ACT Street University operates in Civic and is an early intervention and treatment service for young people whose actions may have negative impacts on the community or their own wellbeing and often result in adverse physical and mental health outcomes, involvement in criminal activity, disconnection from family and community and homelessness.
4. We also operate a 6 bed accommodation service that we self-fund for young people who struggle to find accommodation in the homelessness sector.

ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Ted Noffs Foundation wishes to highlight some key areas for the Standing Committee that are relevant to the Terms of Reference.

1. There is a very strong need to look at how we work with young people in the adult justice system. 18-22 year olds should not be treated in the same way as other adult offenders. These young people are not the same in terms of their development, mental cognition, emotional intelligence and resilience. They are not the same. They are young people.

Many of these young people have experienced high rates of trauma, isolation and inequality that they have had very little time to address since entering 'adulthood.'

Young people don't just fall into committing crime. There are a variety of different reasons that they become involved in crime: through substance use, domestic violence, trauma, homelessness, poverty and mental health issues, to name a few.

There needs to be a very different approach to working with this cohort if we want to support them to change and grow. If the aim is to just punish them, locking them up works, but it doesn't change people's behaviour. If it did, no one would ever end up back in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. (AMC)

There needs to be treatment options available for these young people that they can opt into as an alternative to incarceration. They need to be given the chance to address these contributing factors rather than just sitting in a jail.

A treatment option should be available to this cohort and be based on a Therapeutic Community Model. It works. Young people could be supported to address the issues that lead to the criminal behaviour. They also need to be able to do this with their peers. It's not appropriate to have 18 or 19 years olds in the same treatment setting as 40 or 50 year olds.

We currently offer this form of supported treatment. Our Program for Adolescent Life Management (PALM) is for young people aged 12-18, with a focus on alcohol and other drug use. We know from the young people (18-22) that we work with through outreach, who end up in the AMC, or are involved in the adult justice system, that they would love to access a treatment option like PALM. They want a treatment option that's geared towards them, as young people, that is all about supporting them to address their issues.

The information below highlights the drop in criminal reoffending after only 30 days of treatment in PALM, when followed up with young people 3 months after leaving treatment (Information from our 2020/2021 health report)

% of Young people involved in crime for young people participating in PALM for 30 days:

- Offences relating to theft pre-treatment was at 38%, which reduced to 19% three months post treatment
- Offences relating to assault pre-treatment was at 33%, which reduced to 14% three months post treatment
- Offences relating to supply pre-treatment was at 17%, which reduced to 6% three months post treatment
- Offences relating to driving pre-treatment was at 19%, which reduced to 10% three months post treatment
- Offences relating to vandalism pre-treatment was at 18%, which reduced to 6% three months post treatment

As you can see there is a very significant drop in reoffending, by nearly 50% across all fields. AND this is just a by-product from an alcohol and drug treatment service. With

a focus on crime, a program like this could significantly change the direction for so many young people. It works. It also costs less. Putting young people in the AMC for 30 days will not give you a similar bang for buck. Treatment is the answer here. It's simple. These are young people that need support. Offer treatment to them, as young people, and you will have a better result.

2. The strongest indicator that people will end up in the adult justice system is through their involvement in the juvenile justice system. More needs to be done to provide early intervention for at-risk young people. This is where the ACT government needs to focus its support and resources as a means of crime prevention. Again, young people don't just fall into a criminal lifestyle because it's fun or an easy way of life. These young people become involved in crime because they are experiencing poverty, isolation, mental health concerns, substance use issues, trauma and neglect, abuse, domestic violence etc.

These young people come up through the school system. Teachers see the inequality and problematic behaviours that suggest underlying issues at a very early age. The young people who are known to be impacted by the above factors, are identified by family, friends, case workers and youth services as being at high risk. They are not hidden. We know who these young people are.

We could provide support for them to address these contributing factors but the resources that should be there to support them are not. Instead, funding is geared towards policing crime, rather than prevention. Invest money in at-risk youth at a very early age, and young people won't turn to crime later in life.

The Ted Noffs Foundation thanks the Standing Committee for the opportunity to present these matters for its consideration.

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