

IN SOLIDARITY FOR A BETTER FUTURE FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

7th December 2022

Dear Premier,

We write to you today regarding the state of youth justice in Western Australia.

The signatories to this letter are experts in justice, child wellbeing, youth affairs, lived experience, and community development. We comprise lawyers, community service providers, academics, Elders, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and more.

We have closely followed the emerging crisis in our youth justice system as details have emerged these past few months. In July, we saw the decision to send children to a maximum-security facility at an adult prison. In August, we heard the decision from the Supreme Court of WA declaring the confinement of children to cells for more than 20 hours to be illegal. In November, we watched with horror the footage from Four Corners showing dangerous and violent restraints used against children.

We stand in solidarity and unequivocal support of the [recent statement from Aboriginal leaders](#) from Western Australia. We echo their calls for a better approach for children and the closure of Unit 18 at Casuarina Prison. We believe Aboriginal people must be heard, and that the McGowan Government must engage meaningfully with the Aboriginal community and people with lived experience on youth justice issues.

We can both improve community safety and end the harm inflicted upon children in prisons. The evidence shows that to do this we must address the underlying causes of offending, and stop entrenching disadvantage. Interventions that help, not harm.

Currently, 50 per cent of young people entering detention in Western Australian will return within two years, increasing to 85 per cent after five years.^[1] It is clear our approach is not working. Experts from all areas agree – our youth justice system has failed and must be reformed. Providing appropriate responses affords us the opportunity to reduce recidivism, increase community safety, and improve conditions for young people and staff in detention.

We must both urgently intervene to safeguard children in detention and commit to a long-term strategy for our youth justice system that prioritises wellbeing, not punishment.

In August 2022, Social Reinvestment WA (SRWA) published its [Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in WA](#). This evidence-based document outlines a comprehensive series of reforms to our youth justice system. We call on you to consider this *Blueprint* in reform of the youth justice system – we **have the solutions, and the evidence is clear.**

The way forward lies in trauma-informed and developmentally and culturally-appropriate care at every stage, investing in community and family-based responses, and providing the right support, at the right time, for every child.

We echo the calls from Social Reinvestment WA and stand with the statement released by Aboriginal leaders on Monday 28 November 2022 (which contains 6 asks of shared intent).

If we had been in attendance at the summit organised by the Premier, we would have asked the WA Government to:

1. **Investigate failures through an independent inquiry** that enables truth-telling and accountability for the behaviour uncovered by Four Corners across the entire system.
2. **Immediately ban use of dangerous restraints, solitary confinement,** and adhere to the WA Supreme Court ruling of maximum hours locked in cells.
3. **Commit to a specific date publicly to Close Unit 18** and transition children back to Banksia.
4. **Convene a taskforce of Aboriginal leaders, independent experts and Government** to develop and implement immediate changes within youth detention to improve the care provided to children.
5. **Commit to developing a whole-of-government Youth Justice Strategy** with direct Cabinet oversight, informed by the taskforce and the Blueprint developed by SRWA.
6. **Stop charging, prosecuting and locking up children under the age of 14,** who are not old enough by law to drive, vote, or get a job. Help them with tailored support instead of harming them.

We acknowledge the **recent decision to ban the use of ‘folding up’ in youth detention, and commend this first step.** However more must be done to immediately end harm of children in youth detention, and bring Western Australia in line with our human rights obligations.

We believe as a community we can do better, and seek your leadership on this issue.

Signed by,

106 Organisation Heads and Notable Western Australians.

Listed overleaf, alphabetically by last name.

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NAME	POSITION	ORGANISATION
Mark Anderson	CEO	Foundation for Indigenous Sustainable Health (FISH)
Karen Armstrong	CEO	Pilbara for Purpose
Alex Arpino	Development Coordinator	Alcohol and Other Drug Consumer & Community Coalition
Fiona Beermier	CEO	Ngala
Stephanie Boyd	JP	N/A
Lee-Anne Brensell	Director	Life Without Barriers
Kim Brooklyn	CEO	Parkerville Children and Youth Care
Jennie Burns Brenda Lee Sonia Blurton	Executive Directors and Aboriginal Practice Leader	Mercycare
Ian Carter AM	Director	Anglican Advocacy Commissions
Fred Chaney	AO	N/A
Paul Cleary	Policy Lead	Oxfam Australia
Peter Collins	Director Legal Services	Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia Ltd
Anna Copeland	Director of Clinical Legal Education	Murdoch University Law School
Vida Corbett, JP	Volunteer	Soroptimist International, South Perth Uniting Church, YouthCARE, FISH
Angela Corry	CEO	Peer Based Harm Reduction WA
Neville D'Silva	CEO	Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation
Alison Dalziel	Director	Localise Pty Limited
Joanne Della Bona	CEO	Coolabaroo
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Alison Evans	A/CEO	Centre for Women's Safety & Wellbeing
Melanie Every	Executive Officer	Financial Counsellors' Association of WA
Jaime Yallup Farrant	Convenor	Climate Justice Union
Matt Gardiner	CEO	54 reasons (part of the Save the Children Australia Group)
Zach Gibson	Vice- Chairperson	Youth Work WA
Louise Giolitto	CEO	WACOSS
Antonio Giometti	CEO	Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation
Kellie Goes	State Director	MacKillop Family Services
Sharon Gough	CEO	Indigo Junction
Gaëlle Gouillou	CEO	Midland Information Debt and Legal Advocacy Service
Jennie Gray	CEO	Women's Legal Service WA
Fran Haintz	EO	Glass Jar Australia LTD
Kerry Hall	Service Manager	Karratha Youth Accommodation Service
Tony Hansen	Co-Chair	Bringing Them Home WA
Kerry Hawkins	President	Western Association for Mental Health
Prof. Colleen Hayward	AM	N/A

Barbara Henry	Executive Officer	Noongar Family Safety and Wellbeing Council
Paul Higginbottom	CEO	Earbus Foundation
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Nicole Jolly Skye Groenveld, Danielle Stipanicev, Cameron Thomson, Jacqui Sheales, DJ Davies, Neoma Ghosh	WA State Manager	Neami National
Nicole Jolly	Chairperson	HepatitisWA
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Denisa Konecny	EO	Broome CIRCLE Inc
Brodie Lewis	Manager	Albany Community Legal Centre
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Catrina Luz Aniere	CEO	Millennium Kids Inc
Michelle Mackenzie	Principal	Mira Consulting
Caroline Marshall	Director	Facilitatrix
Anabelle May	Citizen & Coach	UN Human Rights WA Chapter member
Tim McDonald	CEO	YMCA
Jamie McGleave	General Manager	Propel Youth Arts WA
Greg McIntyre SC	Barrister	Patron of Justice Reform Initiative
Nicki McKenzie	CEO	12 Buckets Inc
Sandy McKiernan	CEO	Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia
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Lyn Millett	Executive Director	Australian Childhood Foundation
Carol Mitchell	Director	JEDO: Justice, Ecology & Development Office, Catholic Archdiocese of Perth
Daniel Morrison	CEO	Wungening Aboriginal Corporation
Jim Morrison	Chair	West Australian Stolen Generations Aboriginal Corporation (WASGAC)
Tim Muirhead	Director	CSD Network
Jody Nunn	CEO	Reconciliation WA
Emma Parkinson	Admin & Marketing	Milligan CLRC

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Tom Penglis	Founding Director	WA Justice Association
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Daniel Pisani	WA State Manager	Whitelion Youth
Melissa Porter	Homelessness Services Manager	Youth Futures
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Denis Reynolds	Judge	Former President of the Children's Court
Suzanna Robertson	Executive Director	Health Consumer's Council WA
Susan Rooney	CEO	St Vincent de Paul Society WA
Wendy Rose	CEO	Kin Disability Advocacy Inc
Mel Rowe	GM	Orana House Inc
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Martin Smith	CEO	Ebenezer Aboriginal Corporation
Fiona Stanley	AC FAA FASSA	Epidemiologist, Former Australian of the Year
Vicki-Tree Stephens	CEO	Youth Involvement Council
Sophie Stewart	Founder & Chairperson	Swim for Refugees Inc, 2021 WA Young Achiever & Leader of the Year
Don Sutherland	CEO	Bloodwood Tree Association
Carolyn Tan	Lawyer	
Susy Thomas	Moderator	Uniting Church WA
Jo Vallentine	Quaker	Former W.A. Greens Senator
Vicky Vass	CEO	ConnectGroups WA
Nicole Wade	Social Worker	Women's Health Care Centre Kalgoorlie
Tania Watson	Executive Minister	Riverview Church
Ben Webb	OPS Manager	Waalitj Foundation
Kerry Weste	President	Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
Dr Tracey Westerman AM	Jilya Institute for Indigenous Mental Health	Founding Director, Psychologist
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Ted Wilkes AO	Adjunct Associate Professor Cultural Advisor	Patron of Justice Reform Initiative
Tina Williams	CEO	Volunteering WA
Scott Winch	A/Head First Nations Programs	World Vision Australia
Brenda Yelland	State Director	Key Assets Australia
Richard Yin	GP	Doctors for the Environment Australia Board member