

Youth justice in Queensland

Doing things differently to get different results

Our challenge

Rates of youth detention in Queensland have been increasing for several years, against the national trends (which are plateauing or declining). This includes increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and girls.^{1 2}

Making change happen

The proposal

The Queensland Government, in partnership with the community sector, hosts an intensive two-day workshop that brings together people with unique knowledge from across the youth justice system.

About the workshop

The workshop will use innovative complexity strategies, specifically designed to gain insights into issues where traditional methods of analysis and design have not delivered the desired results.

Diverse stakeholders share their unique perspectives, knowledge and experience of the current state.

Participants use this shared understanding as a basis for designing small scale initiatives and strategies for improvement that can be adjusted/refined, or easily and quickly halted if not obtaining the desired results.

What outcomes should we expect from the workshop?

In the two days participants will co-create:

- a collective understanding of youth justice issues that reflects the reality, experience, opportunities and constraints of the varied stakeholders in the room
- agreed priorities for action
- a positive and energising environment in which ideas and initiatives can be put forward and 'sounded out' with diverse stakeholders with minimal risk
- small scale low risk initiatives and strategies for improvement, designed for innovation and quick outcomes
- a list of people willing to work collaboratively to progress these strategies
- a summary of issues requiring further research and analysis to inform action.

Participants could include:

- Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander leaders, Elders and Justice group members
- policy makers from education, youth justice and communities
- health (including mental health), social and support workers
- legal, court, corrections and police officers
- teachers and school personnel
- young people with involvement in the youth justice system
- stakeholders from community, welfare and faith based groups working in the area
- academics working on related issues
- philanthropic youth-focused trusts or peak bodies with an interest in innovative policy development.

The youth justice sector has a history of cross sectoral collaboration, and is keen to engage with and contribute to policy development in this area.

Duration and location

2 working days, Brisbane region

Cost

Approximately \$16,000 (for workshop design, facilitation and documentation)³

Context and rationale

Youth justice urgently needs a renewed vision and strategy for reform.

The Palaszczuk Government inherited a legacy of youth justice legislation that lacks a clearly articulated policy approach and a credible evidence base.⁴ The Government has committed to a number of major changes in philosophy and approach to begin this process of renewal, including repealing the most punitive and ineffective aspects of the youth justice legislation;⁵ termination of the boot camp trial;⁶ and directing refreshed attention to early intervention and prevention programs.⁷

The Government is seeking to continue this pathway to continuous improvement across a range of justice-related areas by working in a meaningful partnership with the community:

*We are all working towards the same goals and only by encouraging true participation from people at every step of the process can we ensure those goals are reached.*⁸

Youth justice is *complex* (not complicated)

Working in partnership is critical in addressing complex social issues. It supports both innovation and deep understanding. It can also provide challenges — for example, when all the stakeholders concerned about a particular issue are convinced that their version of the problem (and solution) is correct.⁹

This means that complex problems like youth justice cannot be solved by traditional methods of policy analysis and design. Traditional methods excel at solving complicated problems. Aspects of building regulation, for example, are governed by precise, known and unchanging cause-and-effect rules that can be implemented by experts with a high degree of certainty about the outcomes.

With complex issues, ‘solving’ one aspect often reveals or creates other, even more complex, dilemmas. In a complex system, it is not uncommon for small changes to have big effects; big changes to have surprisingly small effects; and for effects to come from unanticipated causes.¹⁰

Complex problems need a different approach: new tools for identifying ‘unanticipated consequences and unrealised opportunities’¹¹

Achieving different outcomes requires different input.

There are tools and methods that are *specifically designed* for working with complex issues, multiple stakeholders and differing perspectives, which:

- support an in-depth, shared understanding of the current state
- identify possible directions for immediate action, and build in the ability to adjust and refine those pathways in real time
- provide signposts for how we decide if we’re tracking (together) toward our desired future.

This proposal offers a way for the Queensland Government to trial complexity tools and methods on a social policy problem that is relatively small in scale, but of cross-portfolio and cross sectoral concern.

References

¹ AIHW (2014), *Youth Detention Population in Australia*, released 28 Nov, p. 39. At: www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=60129549676

² Queensland Government (2014). “Youth Justice Pocket Stats 2013-14”. Department of Justice and Attorney General; Children’s Court of Queensland Annual Report 2014 – 15.

³ Proposal costs, methodologies and deliverables are premised on using Cognitive Edge methodologies: <http://cognitive-edge.com/about-us/>

⁴ *Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2014*. The Bill was overwhelmingly criticised by those agencies and professionals working in this area who provided submissions during the public consultation into the Bill. Submissions are available at www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-committees/committees/LACSC/inquiries/past-inquiries/YouthJustice2014

⁵ The Hon. Yvette D’Ath MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (2015). Address to Queensland Community Legal Centres Conference, 27 May.

⁶ The Hon. Yvette D’Ath MP, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice (2015), Media release, ‘Boot camp bill hits \$16.7m, independent evaluation finds’, August 20, statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2015/8/20/boot-camp-bill-hits-167m-independent-evaluation-finds

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ Conklin, Jeff. (2005) *Dialogue Mapping: Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems*. Wiley.

¹⁰ OECD (2009) *Applications of Complexity Science for Public Policy: new tools for finding unanticipated consequences and unrealized opportunities*, www.oecd.org/science/sci-tech/43891980.pdf

¹¹ *ibid*