



Media release

Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and
Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland
The Honourable Coralee O'Rourke

Back to country for juvenile Indigenous offenders

Townsville Elders will take Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders and their parents out on country, as part of a new youth justice cultural mentoring program set to begin in October.

Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland Coralee O'Rourke today announced Queensland Youth Services in partnership with the Yinda program had provided the winning tender to mentor Indigenous 10 to 17 year olds.

"I'm delighted to see the cultural mentoring will be up and running so soon, and I'm confident the children will receive strong guidance from the Traditional Owners involved, including Alfred Smallwood, Russell Butler and Wayne Parker," Mrs O'Rourke said.

"These leaders have long been positive role models, and Elders such as Uncle Alfred have years of experience in mentoring young individuals and their mothers and fathers through challenging periods."

Mrs O'Rourke said the initiative would connect young Indigenous offenders to community, culture and country and seek to restore family bonds.

"Taking children out on country will be a key part of this process, however Elders will also take a much wider approach in using cultural practices to build resilience and teach young people respect for themselves and others," she said.

"An important aspect of this work is strengthening family relationships between fathers and sons and mothers and daughters.

"To do this, Elders and leaders will be available around the clock to provide support."

Mrs O'Rourke said the initiative would receive \$500,000 in funding from the Queensland Government over 12 months and was a great example of the community providing a local solution in response to local needs.

"No single group or agency, including the police, can fix an issue like youth crime," she said.

Member for Thuringowa Aaron Harper welcomed Queensland Youth Services and Elders working together to design this program so they can motivate young people to turn their lives around.

"Like many places around Australia, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in the criminal justice system in Townsville," he said.

"Dedicated and respected Indigenous Elders came to us as local MPs saying they wanted to help after we held our community forum on crime. "The irony of this program is that Elders took it to the LNP in 2013 which favoured its failed bootcamps with high recidivism rates over working with local Indigenous Elders." Member for Townsville Scott Stewart said that if we want to see young people contribute positively to the community, then we need to address the underlying factors that lead some of them to offend.

"Going out on country and other cultural activities will allow Elders to deal with young people's loss of connection to kinship and culture, which often exacerbates some of the drivers of crime."

Indigenous young offenders and children at high risk of offending will be referred to the service by Youth Justice case workers, the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group, Elders, Queensland Police, Child Safety officers, schools, and youth and family support services.

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