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Kids in trouble need more help, expert warns

KIDS in strife accounted for 3.7 per cent of Mackay region residents fronting the region's magistrates in 2016-17.

The Magistrates Courts of Queensland Annual Report shows 248 local children and young people faced 557 charges in the 12 months – compared to 6310 adult defendants answering to 11,251 offences.

While the number of young people passing through our magistrates courts is low, youth advocate Janet Wright said it could be even lower if the region had a dedicated youth advocacy centre.

Ms Wright said she would like to see all major centres across Queensland have organisations that provide juvenile justice educators, lawyers and youth support plus family support workers who would connect with disfranchised young people and direct them away from criminal activities. The service would be modelled on the Youth Advocacy Centre that operates in Brisbane.

"A lot of young people could be kept out of the justice system if we support them and their families early on," Ms

Wright said. "It needs to be about early intervention and prevention services that support young people to deal with issues that might bring them

into contact with the law."

Child Safety Minister Di Farmer would not commit to rolling out a youth advocacy centre. Instead, she said young people could access a "number of agencies including the Office of the Public Guardian and Youth Legal Aid".

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