

Supplementary questions

ACYP

Question: The Committee heard that service providers in some communities are well-funded but operate independently, creating gaps in wraparound service provision for young people. Are you aware of this issue, and how do you think it could be addressed?

Response: Children and young people will often talk about wanting one place to go to share their story, and that they want to access the necessary services through one place. We have heard from children and young people that the disconnected services leaves significant gaps in wraparound services. For children and young people who face multiple vulnerabilities, such as those in OOHC, disengagement from education, interactions with police or experiencing homelessness, creating an integrated and coordinated service system is essential.

Services and agencies need to be designed with clients in mind, and the funding attached needs to enable services to focus on the needs of the client, not the needs of the contract. By establishing strong networks between government agencies, services providers and community you are more likely to create and have a holistic service response. This kind of connected community also allows for better data sharing that results in a better experience for the client.

As I discussed at the hearing, community led responses are effective in solving anti-social behaviour. Many of these responses may rely on one member of the community in providing a service, such as transport.

Short term funding cycles are a significant issues that services face in providing long term, holistic support to children and young people. It can also create an unnecessarily competitive environment for service providers, and often sees short term solutions invested in pilot programs over long term solutions that require time to be effective.

Question: Your submission acknowledges the Joint Protocol to reduce the contact of young people in residential out-of-home care with the criminal justice system. (p10) Do you think the Protocol has had an impact on the criminalisation of young people in care?

Response: ACYP sits on the Joint Protocol Steering Committee and has assisted in drafting and providing comments on the terms of reference. The purpose of this work is to reduce the number of children and young people in the out of home care system coming into contact with the police. The intention is to work with service providers to ensure that a police response is not sought in situations where there is no need for police intervention.

This Protocol brings agencies and services together for the benefit of children and young people. To my knowledge there has not been a formal review, but the intention is good, and it needs greater support across government and community to ensure it is respected and implemented.

Question: Do you think strategies and directives such as the Protocol are effectively embedded in agency practice?

Response: Protocols that benefit children and young people, especially our most vulnerable, are well intentioned and need wide support to be properly implemented. This includes ensuring there is training for service providers to understand their role in implementing

protocols, ensuring children and young people understand and know their rights around any protocol, and the regular monitoring and review of such protocols. As Advocate, I see the benefit of designing and implementing protocols that ensure our first response to situations are not always police responses. We also need to ensure that appropriate supports are available for children and young people who may be demonstrating complex behaviours, so that they can receive therapeutic responses.

Question: Your submission comments on the 'current media rhetoric'. In your opinion, what role does media reporting play in shaping public perception of youth crime trends?

Response: The media has a critical role in shaping public perception and discourse around youth crime. The tendency to sensationalise the issue risks creating a moral panic around young offending that is reactionary and does not consider the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour. This vilifies young people as a cohort and increases the stigma around young people's behaviour. For those who have conflict with the criminal justice system this stigma can create challenges in positive reintegration into community and further diversion from the youth justice system.

There needs to be responsibility in journalism to give a balanced view of the situation, and also ensure that the information is factual and considers the impact it may have on the community, and the children and young people concerned.

Question: How have current government responses to the issue of youth crime affected young people, especially those who have had contact with the justice system? Have they told you about their perspective on these responses?

Response: The current government's response to youth crime did not (to my knowledge) include the voices of children and young people, those who will be most impacted by these laws. It does not address some of the underlying issues that these children and young people face, including poverty, nor does it address belonging and exclusion from school. In recent conversations with young people in custody they do not understand the law changes, but they are feeling the impact by repeat returns to custody without fully understanding why. They have also talked about their bail conditions being ones that would be difficult to achieve, for example one young person suggested their bail conditions included returning to school (from which they have been excluded).

Diversion, intervention and rehabilitation is the best way to address the concerns and issues being faced by children and young people who are interacting with the justice system. Together with whole of family responses. Services and supports that seek to address the underlying issues of trauma, mental health and anti-social behaviour through creative outlets and educational opportunities have a greater chance of creating behavioural change. It is imperative that children and young people have a voice in shaping these services.

Question: The Committee has heard that government should focus on public education and awareness to address concerns about community safety. What are your thoughts on this?

Response: Public education and raising community awareness are useful in addressing community safety. This narrative must balance a focus on reducing youth crime, educating the public around the factors that lead to youth crime and the manner they can support vulnerable communities prior to coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

Educational strategies should be focused on early intervention, holistic support for family and communities and creating pathways for young people to build positive networks. These

strategies must challenge the harmful stereotypes and stress the importance of rehabilitation and positive contribution to society.

Question: We heard that younger children (9–12-year-olds) are involved in offending behaviour, and there needs to be early intervention and diversion programs in place for children under the age of 12. What are your thoughts on this and are you aware of any existing programs that would meet this need?

Response: To address complex behaviour in children and young people at these ages, programs need to include a continuum of care and involve a holistic response. The research is clear that the first 5 years of a child's life is important in terms of understanding needs and development. Funding programs that engage in schools and community to ensure children and young people have access to the things they need to thrive, is important.

Diversionary options that support children to understand and manage their emotions, resolve conflict and be empowered to make their own decisions are critical.

As discussed earlier, place-based community led diversionary programs are often the most effective models of early interventions. It is important that the NSW Government provide greater investment and expansion for these types of programs to increase their profile and accessibility.

Some examples of good practice services include Berry Street, which provide trauma informed services to children, young people, families and communities around OOHC, through care, domestic and family violence, education, parenting and community engagement. Safe Steps Victoria is another good example of a service that is child and youth focused from intake to service closure. Both of these examples offer opportunities for children to learn and develop positive relationships with family and community as a foundation for mitigating the underlying causes of anti-social behaviour.