

From: Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, 5 April 2017 1:03 PM
To: Youth Justice System in Victoria Inquiry
Subject: New Submission to Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria

Inquiry Name: Inquiry into Youth Justice Centres in Victoria

Dr. Ruth Schmidt Neven

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President
Association of Child and Family Development Inc.



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Our submission focuses on the following four areas:

1. Concern about the sensationalising of youth offending and the demonising of adolescents and young people in the media.
2. Concern about the proposed building of a youth detention centre in Werribee that is contrary to longstanding research evidence that incarceration is not an effective response to youth offending
3. The need for a trauma-informed approach to youth offending
4. The need for high-level training for staff in trauma-informed practice

1. We call upon all politicians in the Victorian Government to monitor and contain the sensationalising discourse and exaggerated publicity concerning youth offending, that inflames community anxiety, hardens attitudes and demonises adolescents and young people
2. We call upon the Victorian Government to reconsider its proposal to establish a secure unit for youth offenders in Werribee. The building of such an institution in the 21st century contradicts longstanding national and international research that clearly indicates that building a law and order fortress combined with increasingly harsh sentencing for young offenders, leads to poor outcomes and a high risk of recidivism into the adult prison service. We urge that the proposed sum of 32 million dollars for the Werribee Centre be directed instead to community-based initiatives which have a proven effective track record in Victoria over many years.
3. As professionals concerned with child, adolescent, parent and family mental health, we urge the Victorian Government to promote a trauma-informed approach to youth offending. The findings of extensive national and international research is conclusive regarding the over-representation of highly traumatised and often abused adolescents and young people in the youth justice system. Many of them have been or are currently in state care. They face significant problems with damaged attachments and resultant poor self-regulation which is a potent mix when combined with their less neurologically mature brain development. For these reasons, the emphasis must be on rehabilitation rather than punishment. Given that adolescents have a strong need for a connection to a supportive environment their incarceration and removal from these community supports places them further at risk.

4. A trauma-informed approach to youth offending must be embedded into the staff support system that surrounds young offenders. This not only assists the young people but also contributes to the safety and security of staff. Consideration should be given to broadening the staff base from those whose background may be in security or the prison service, to including psychologists, counsellors, occupational therapists and other appropriate professionals. High-level training in a trauma-informed and trauma-management approach that focuses on different ways of containing challenging problems should be a funding priority and would be most effective linked to existing community-based initiatives.

Finally we would like to draw the attention of the Parliamentary Inquiry to a number of recent outstanding locally produced position papers and recommendations concerning Victoria's Youth Justice System of which the Victorian Government's own 'Roadmap for Reform' is one. These papers all emphasise a rights-based inclusive approach that goes beyond restraint and punishment and seeks to promote early intervention, prevention and the sharing of responsibility.

References:

Is our youth justice system really broken? Castan Centre for Human Rights Law Conference July 2016.
Criminal Law Services: Victoria Legal Aid.

Good practice in reducing the over-representation of care-leavers in the Youth Justice System. Monash University, September 2014.

Victoria's youth justice system: Where to next? Insights from the Australian and New Zealand School of Government Towards Strategic Leadership. July 2016

Victorian Government: Roadmap for reform: Strong families, safe children.

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File1:

File2:

File3: