



**17 July 2025**

**JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT: "Diversion Delivers: Justice & Healing for Victims, Young People, and Communities"**

A coalition of Northern Territory community organisations and leaders are calling on the Northern Territory Government to abandon its proposal to remove diversion as an option for over a dozen further offences.

They are also raising serious concerns about the Government's announcement of forthcoming changes to the *Youth Justice Act*, the details of which have not been made public. These undisclosed reforms, combined with the reclassification of offences, risk further undermining access to diversion and entrenching punitive responses to children and young people.

Community leaders are urging greater investment in community-based youth diversion programs, which are proven to reduce offending among children and young people and prevent future crime.

Programs like *Brother To Another* - an outcome focused, social and emotional wellbeing service for young men - are helping young people turn their lives around, supporting them back into education and employment.

Data shows that 90% of the young people engaged intensively by the program experience major improvements: reduced offending and incarceration, improved social connection, and increased attendance in education.

On Groote Eylandt, youth crime dropped from 346 to just 17 over three years after local community-led initiatives employed residents to proactively support at-risk young people.

On Monday, the NT Coroner handed down 32 recommendations in response to the 2019 fatal shooting of Kumanjayi Walker—including a call for the NT Government to provide community-led diversion services for young people.

Youth diversion and restorative justice programs are vital to a functioning justice system. When done well, the needs and interests of victims are equally considered, while also diverting young people away from courts. Community led restorative approaches not only help victims recover and heal, but also provide young people with consequences, accountability and the support they need to change their behaviour.

The NT already incarcerates children at four times the rate of any other jurisdiction in Australia, with approximately 98% of those in detention being Aboriginal. Dismantling diversion—and failing to be transparent about further changes to the Youth Justice Act—is a missed opportunity to address the root causes of offending among young people.

We need more diversion pathways and opportunities—not fewer—because once someone is imprisoned, the likelihood of them returning is high.



Pushing children into an overstretched court system means months of incarceration, delayed consequences, and an increased risk of reoffending—often with more serious outcomes. These delays also fail to recognise that it is often in the best interest of victims to have matters dealt with efficiently and constructively.

Community-based alternatives hold young people accountable in ways that are meaningful to victims, young people and their communities. They are more effective than incarceration, usually cost much less and are far more effective at repairing relationships.

We call on the Government to be courageous in leading the Territory and to increase their investment in community led, restorative justice and diversion. Only by addressing the needs of children, young people and their families will we create safer communities.

*“We work with young people across the Territory every day. We’ve seen what’s possible when services are well-funded, culturally responsive and built on trust. What we need now is investment—not policy that pushes kids further into crisis.”*

**Craig Kelly, CEO, Anglicare NT**

*“Holding victims as active participants in the justice process via restorative and diversion programs, not only improves their ability to recover and heal, but also instils a greater sense of trust in law enforcement and the judiciary.”*

**Gerard McGeough, CEO, Victims of Crime NT**

*“We cannot afford to keep repeating history—history that continues to disproportionately punish Aboriginal children while denying them opportunity.”*

**Kirsten Wilson, Advocacy & Campaign Coordinator, Justice Reform Initiative**

*“Diversion is a critical part of any effective justice system. By reducing opportunities to access these important programs and services, the NT Government is condemning more children to detention, leading to not only further harm but also increasing their likelihood of reoffending. Diversion programs delivered by experienced and trusted community service organisations help children to remain connected with family, education and the community and be supported towards positive pathways - it is vital that these are retained and adequately resourced.”*

**Clare Horsfall, Senior Manager NT, Jesuit Social Services**

*“Every day, we see the impact that the right support can have. When young people are connected to culture, community, and meaningful programs, they thrive. Diversion works—because it’s about healing, not harm. What we need now is long-term investment in the services that keep our young people strong and our communities safer.”*

**Leon Tripp, Interim CEO, The GAP Youth & Community Centre**



*“Punishment alone doesn’t change lives, but diversion does. Young people need support, not punishment that traps them in cycles of harm. Diversion provides kids a chance to take responsibility, make amends, and get the right help, the right way at the right time. It’s a proven approach that puts health, healing, culture and hope at the centre, and every young person deserves that chance to build a stronger secure future.”*

**Stephanie Holmes, Executive Officer, Association of Alcohol and Other Drug Agencies NT (AADANT)**

*“The Territory cannot arrest its way out of youth disadvantage. Every time we close the door on diversion, we push a young person closer to prison and further from a future. Reducing access to diversion ignores what Aboriginal communities have been saying for decades. The solutions are local, place-based and grounded in culture. They just need to be backed. Every dollar spent on keeping a child in detention could be spent on supporting them to finish school, reconnect with family, and heal from trauma. That’s the kind of Territory we want to build.”*

**Sally Sievers, CEO, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS)**