



## 29 July 2025

### **Safety, Not Soundbites: Community-Led Solutions Key to Youth Justice Reform**

A coalition of community services are calling for youth justice reform that strengthens community safety by investing in what works—restorative, community-led responses that support young people to take responsibility, repair harm, and build stronger futures.

Safety is built through connection, not control. Stable housing, support into education, access to meaningful paid work—these are the foundations that keep young people on track. Across the Territory, Aboriginal organisations and local services are already delivering programs that work. Reform must back them—not bypass them.

Restorative justice reduces reoffending far more effectively than detention. It creates space for victims to be heard, for harm to be acknowledged, and for real accountability to take place. It works because it responds to harm with purpose—not punishment—and succeeds when communities are trusted to lead.

Young people also need access to practical, ongoing support—particularly those experiencing mental health challenges, alcohol and other drug use, or cognitive impairment. Addressing these issues early, within community and in culturally appropriate ways, reduces the likelihood of future contact with the justice system.

Political strategies that rely on punishment often sound strong, but take us further from what actually keeps people safe. They trade on fear, not solutions.

Community Organisations are calling for:

- Investment in Aboriginal-led and community-controlled early intervention and diversion;
- Continued access to restorative justice responses that support victims and reduce reoffending;
- Strategies that link young people with housing, education, employment, and therapeutic support;
- Genuine partnership with communities to deliver practical solutions that work

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*"If we are serious about creating a just and safe society, we need to rethink how we treat children who break the law. That means ending the overuse of detention, expanding youth diversion programs, investing in early intervention and prevention, and ensuring that every child – regardless of background – has the support they need to thrive."*

**Craig Kelly, CEO, Anglicare NT**

*"The children we work with have already experienced violence and disconnection. Responses that punish instead of support only deepen the trauma. Community-led, restorative approaches create the safety and stability needed to break the cycle—for them, and for the whole community."*

**Ana Aitcheson, CEO, Dawn House**

*"Many young people that come into contact with the justice system are dealing with complex trauma, grief and mental health challenges. Real justice must centre on support for healing and recovery, not just consequences. Early intervention and restorative pathways offer that chance and are proven to work."*

**Geoff Radford, CEO, NT Mental Health Coalition**

*"Too many of our young people end up in the justice system when what they really need is care, support and connection to culture. The solutions already exist in community—they're built on trust, on relationships, and on tackling the root causes of harm. Investment in these strengths will deliver better outcomes for everyone."*

**Rob McPhee, CEO, Danila Dilba Health Service**

*"Prisons don't prevent crime—they exacerbate it. The more we rely on incarceration, the more we guarantee future harm. If we're serious about safer communities, the answer lies in proven, community-led alternatives that actually reduce reoffending. The Northern Territory has a choice: invest in solutions that work, or deepen the failures that make our communities unsafe."*

**Kirsten Wilson, NT Coordinator, Justice Reform Initiative**



*“Every young person deserves the chance to make things right and build a better future. Punitive approaches ignore the complexity of children’s lives and cut off those chances. Restorative, community-based responses hold young people accountable in ways that heal, not harm—and they’re far more effective at keeping communities safe.”*

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

*“Children who come into contact with the justice system have often experienced significant trauma, loss and disconnection. Responding with punishment only compounds that harm. What these children need is safety, stability and the chance to heal. When we invest in relationships and restorative approaches, we not only support their recovery—we create safer communities for everyone.”*

**Janise Mitchell, CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation**

*“When young people are given the opportunity to make things right and see the real impact of their actions, they are far less likely to reoffend—and far more likely to stay connected to school, culture and community. Restorative justice gives victims a voice, supports real healing, and builds long-term safety. This is what community-led responses offer—and it’s where our efforts and investment must go.”*

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