

MEDIA RELEASE:

CHILDREN MOVED TO CASUARINA. THIS MUST NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.

SRWA calls for WA Government to reform youth justice and address the system failings that have sent children to maximum-security adult prison.

20th July 2022

- Today 17 children have been moved to maximum-security adult Casuarina Prison, following an announcement from the WA Government on 5th July 2022.
- Social Reinvestment WA has called on the WA Government to immediately publish a clear timeframe for the closure of the Casuarina Prison-based facility and to improve transparency around conditions within the prison.
- Justice experts and child advocates who visited Casuarina Prison say the facility is not appropriate for children or young people, and is not suitably separated from adult prisoners.
- More than 75 community organisations published an open letter last week calling on urgent youth justice reform from the WA Government, saying the conditions that have created this issue must be addressed.
- Social Reinvestment WA will release a comprehensive blueprint for youth justice reform in August 2022, with solutions to address Western Australia's high rates of incarceration of young people and ensure this situation never reoccurs.

Comments attributable to Glenda Kickett, Co-Chairperson Social Reinvestment WA

"Sending children to maximum-security prison is a shocking move – it is not a child-focused environment, it is not appropriate to provide the therapeutic care children need to rehabilitate, and it is not the right solution for Aboriginal children. The unit being used for children is designed for adults, extremely close to adult prisoners and shade cloths will only block views, but not noise. This decision needs to be thought through and it needs experts in children's wellbeing guiding the approach."

"Given the government has committed to this move, at the absolute minimum we need a clear timeframe for the closure of this facility and for the care of these children to help them return to the community. The government has made this decision with no public plan for how it will care for these children, no end date for its use, and no plan on how they will address the conditions that have put us in a situation where maximum-security prison is the only option for children in need."

Comments attributable to Daniel Morrison, Co-Chairperson Social Reinvestment WA

"WA's justice system needs reform. Aboriginal people are incarcerated at incredibly high rates, and we have not invested in alternatives to detention that can rehabilitate and support young people. Things like residential alcohol and other drug counselling facilities work. We need to change our approach from imprisoning children and instead work to support communities to care for young people before behaviour escalates and involves police or courts."

"These announcements paint these young people as bad adults– but the reality is they're just children with unmet needs, who have been repeatedly failed by every system meant to support them. The missing context is that successive failures at Banksia Hill, including 22 hour a day lockdowns have led to this moment."

Comments attributable to Sophie Stewart, Campaign and Coalition Manager SRWA

"Youth justice is in constant crisis – this is just the latest symptom of our broken system. The WA Government

needs to work with the community on a plan to divert and rehabilitate children and redirect funding to the programs that work to reduce the root causes of crime. Imprisoning children as young as 10 years old is not effective, it is actively harmful, and it is also expensive. We're seeing community-based programs achieve amazing outcomes in reducing crime for fractions of what we spend on prisons."

"We need a plan to ensure this never happens again. We need the WA government to commit to holistic reform of the systems which respond to young people in crisis. Social Reinvestment WA has developed a blueprint outlining how we can fix our broken system, which will be launched next month. Sending children to maximum security prison is not our only choice - we can work to fix our broken justice system and keep both kids and communities safe."

ENDS.

About Social Reinvestment WA:

Social Reinvestment WA is a coalition of 30 non-profit organisations campaigning since 2014 to end the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in WA. They lead development of justice reinvestment solutions in partnership with communities, and run the Raise the Age campaign in WA.

www.socialreinvestmentwa.org.au/raise-the-age

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