

MEDIA RELEASE

Blueprint for a Better Future: Social Reinvestment WA launches landmark report, detailing pathway towards much needed youth justice system reform

26 August 2022

- This morning, Social Reinvestment WA has launched the *Blueprint for a Better Future: Paving the Way for Youth Justice Reform in Western Australia*, at an event at the State Library of Western Australia.
- Speakers included: **Glenda Kickett**, Co-Chair of SRWA; **Chelsey King**, Lived Experience Advocate; **Ronald Bin Swani**, SRWA Campaigner; **Sophie Stewart**, SRWA Manager; **Jacqueline McGowan Jones**, Commissioner for Children and Young People; **Eamon Ryan**, Inspector for Custodial Services; **Denis Reynolds**, Former President of the Childrens Court; **Daniel Morrison**, Co-Chair SRWA & CEO Wungening; **Lulkbudia McClean**, SRWA Campaigner; MC **Jim Morrison** and Welcome to Country by **Nick Abraham**.
- The comprehensive report outlines an evidence-based alternative to our failing youth justice system. It proposes a whole-of-system approach that responds to the underlying causes of offending to reduce crime, ensures the wellbeing of children and young people, and deliver better futures for our most disadvantaged communities.
- The report is the culmination of several years' work by Social Reinvestment WA, and is informed by the contributions and collective expertise of SRWA's coalition of 30 non-government organisation members, and over 70 individuals who represent these organisations on SRWA's committees.
- It's launch comes amidst an evident crisis in the youth justice system. There has been increasing community concern regarding high profile youth offending across the state, with media, political leaders, and communities crying out for responses, particularly in the Kimberley, Pilbara, and Gascoyne regions. Meanwhile, in April the Inspector of Custodian Services raised concerns regarding the alarming conditions in Banksia Hill Youth Detention Centre, before the State Government moved a group of children to the adult maximum-security Casuarina Prison in July. Just yesterday, the Supreme Court ruled ongin lockdowns in Banksia Hill were unlawful.
- SRWA hope the report will launch ongoing conversation and action to reform how we provide truly just outcomes for young people and build safe communities in WA. It calls on the West Australian Government to:
 - Develop a whole of government vision and strategy to improve justice outcomes across the life-course
 - Identify and resource 10 communities in most urgent need of action on youth justice to deliver place-based community-led justice reinvestment
 - Review legislation including the young offenders act, to modernise it and prioritise wellbeing, prevention and diversion.

The *Blueprint for A Better Future* Report, including full recommendations, is available from:

<https://www.socialreinvestmentwa.org.au/blueprint-for-a-better-future>

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

- *"No one wants to see children in prison, and everybody wants to live in safety and free of fear in their communities. We know the current system isn't working to achieve this, our blueprint answers the question: what do we do instead?"*
- *"We want our children to be in community, on Country, and with their family. We don't want them locked up in prison. They are our future we want them to be strong cultural leaders and warriors for our people."*
- *"We know communities are crying out for responses to youth justice issues. We need a whole of government strategy, not just knee-jerk responses which lack an overarching vision"*

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

- *"Our state has a unique opportunity to be a leader in youth justice reform; to harness social reinvestment and reform our system through investing and empowering the next generation of leaders, instead of criminalising them."*
- *"Our young people need to be given a greater start, a greater chance and greater hope."*

Comments attributable to Sophie Stewart, Manager Social Reinvestment WA:

- *"WA's juvenile justice system isn't just harmful, but is the most expensive response and it fails to rehabilitate and reintegrate young people into our communities."*
- *"This report seeks to answer the question: "What do we do instead?" Whilst we're of the firm belief there are plenty of better options and alternatives, many already running, what was clear is there was no recent document that summarised the evidence, and laid out in detail how such a different system could look. That is why we've developed the Blueprint."*
- *"We have 3 key asks of the WA Government- To commit to developing a whole of government vision and approach for youth justice reform across the whole life course. To reform laws starting with the outdated Young Offenders Act to fix this failing system. And to urgently resource the communities most in need of action for place based, community led justice reinvestment solutions."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Chelsea King, Lived Experience Ambassador with Social Reinvestment WA:

- *"When my son was first in the justice system, he completed his order - but the root of the issue wasn't identified or addressed, which eventually resulted in him going to Banksia Hill for two years. The experience showed me how many gaps there are in our justice system"*
- *"We need to reform the system to create better outcomes for our children and future generations. We need more support from grassroots upwards, with wrap around support for the whole family."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Jacqueline McGowan-Jones, WA Commissioner for Children and Young People:

- *"I refuse to call it a juvenile justice system. It's a legal system. There is nothing in that system which is about justice. We need to change that. "*
- *"We need a holistic child and family wellbeing strategy, which goes over the life course."*
- *"To think that one program fits all people, all the time, is a gap in our thinking. Something that works well for kids in Carnarvon won't necessarily work well in Kalgoorlie. That's why we need to ensure community led design for initiatives."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Eamon Ryan, Inspector of Custodial Services:

- *"In the last 12 years we've punished 10 reports on Banksia Hill Detention Centre, and they've largely covered the same thing; the system lurching from crisis to slight recovery and back to crisis again. If even there was chance for change it's now."*
- *"It is a mistake to only focus on Banksia Hill as the source of these issues. The Blueprint for a Better Future looks at the whole journey that brings young people into the justice system. It fills a void in public policy, and it's a great opportunity to come together"*
- *"There an enormous opportunity right now for all of us to achieve change."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Dennis Reynolds, past President of the WA Children's Court:

- *"The problem is that the system is punitive. It's not fit for purpose. It should be therapeutic & it needs to deal with the trauma these kids come with."*
- *"These kids aren't inherently bad, & we all need to understand that."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Lulkbudia McLean-Gerrard, Campaigner with Social Reinvestment WA:

- *"For Aboriginal people working in this space, it's not just a job, it's personal. It's our lives."*
- *"We need Aboriginal self-determination to be at the heart of it; with Aboriginal first responders, and Aboriginal leaders & elders leading programs with young people - both the system and in the community."*

Comments from the launch event attributable to Ronald Bin Swani, Campaigner with Social Reinvestment WA:

- *"Instead of punitive responses, we need to prioritise policies, programs and supports that are trauma-informed and address the unmet needs of children young people and families to achieve cultural and emotional wellbeing"*
- *"We shouldn't be waiting until a child commits a crime to provide support to them and their family. We need to be able to respond when there are the first warning signs; when they're suspended for the 3rd, 4th or 5th time."*

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About Social Reinvestment WA:

Social Reinvestment WA is a coalition of 29 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/

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