

MEDIA RELEASE

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creating a better life
for children and young
people in care

CREATE FOUNDATION CALLS ON QLD TO CEASE LOCKING UP CHILDREN IN ADULT WATCH HOUSES

CREATE Foundation has renewed calls on the Queensland Government to immediately cease detaining children in adult watch houses following the [Guardian Australia article](#) that exposed “horrendous” and “inhumane” conditions in the Cairns police watch house.

The allegations of human rights abuses inside the Far North Queensland watch house, including children not receiving adequate food, medical attention and legal support are disturbing and show that the practise is unsustainable and unsafe.

Jacqui Reed, CREATE CEO said, “Children do not belong in adult watch houses. It is unsafe to lock children up with adults. This is an outright breach of children’s rights, an ineffective approach that does not address the core issues leading to reoffending.

Detaining children in watch houses does not offer long-term or even short-term solutions to the youth crime crisis and does not keep our communities safe, especially not its most vulnerable members.

The Queensland Government urgently needs to raise the age of criminal responsibility and detention, and improve access to effective therapeutic services. The focus should be on intervening early for children who need support.”

Watch houses should never be an accepted part of youth justice responses. Detention has a devastating impact on children’s health, development, mental health, and wellbeing ([Human Rights Law Centre, 2023](#)), and evidence shows that the earlier a child has contact with the criminal justice system, the more likely it is they will have long-term involvement in crime ([AIHW, 2022](#)).

Young people with an out-of-home care experience are far more likely to have contact with the justice system than young people without a care experience. More than half (53%) of the young people under youth justice supervision during 2020–21 had an interaction with the child protection system in the preceding 5-year period and 21% had been in out-of-home care in the last 5 years ([AIHW, 2022](#)). CREATE has called on the Queensland Government to consider this as part of its recent submission to the Youth Justice Reform Select Committee’s inquiry into the youth justice system.

For children with a care experience who come into contact with the youth justice system in Queensland, they are being failed by two broken systems – a child protection system that has not provided the care and support it should, and then a youth justice system that punishes young children and fails to uphold their human rights, causing more damage.

CREATE Foundation is the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We provide programs to children and young people with a statutory care experience. We listen to what those with a lived experience of the care system tell us, and advocate with and for them to achieve systemic change.

For more information, please visit the CREATE website at www.create.org.au

For further comment from CREATE's Chief Executive, Ms Jacqui Reed, contact Taylor Toovey, Communications and Media Specialist via (m) 0478 814 752 or taylor.toovey@create.org.au

Key statistics on the youth detention in Australia:

- 28% of children and young people in youth justice custody in 2022 had an active child protection order.
- 39% of children and young people in youth justice custody in 2022 were living in unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation.
- 35% of children and young people in youth justice custody in 2022 had a mental health and/or behavioural disorder.
- 95% of young people that go to Cleveland Detention Centre allegedly reoffend within the year of their release.

Queensland Government. (2023). *Youth Justice Summary Census 2022*.

https://desbt.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/17083/census-summary-custody.pdf

Queensland Government. (2022). *Response to Question on Notice, No. 859*.

<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tableoffice/questionsanswers/2022/859-2022.pdf>

Key statistics on the care sector in Australia

- 30% of young people who have left care or preparing to leave care are unemployed.
- 36% children and young people in care do not live with any of their siblings.
- 35% of young people in care have five or more caseworkers during their time in care.
- 67% of young people in care over the age of 15 are not aware of having a leaving care plan.
- Young people in out-of-home care are 16 times more likely to be under a youth justice order than the general population.
- About one fifth (21%) of young people with Youth Justice experience have been in out-of-home care in the last five years.

McDowall, J. J. (2018). *Out-of-home care in Australia: Children and young people's views after five years of National Standards*. CREATE Foundation.

McDowall, J. J. (2020). *Transitioning to adulthood from out-of-home care: Independence or interdependence?* CREATE Foundation.

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