

Community Services Update

June 2008

Factsheet

Youth Services – Reforms and new Initiatives

Youth initiatives

The inappropriate or antisocial behaviour of young people in public places is an issue of concern to the Northern Territory community. These same issues are being faced by all jurisdictions across Australia and research has found that family dysfunction and breakdown accounts for a reasonably high proportion of this behaviour.

However, it is also acknowledged there are young people from more stable environments who also engage in these behaviours.

Youth Justice Strategy and Legislation

In February 2008 the Northern Territory Government introduced to Parliament a comprehensive reform plan to tackle youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

The Youth Justice (Family Responsibility) Bill 2008 provides non-Government organisations, agencies and the Courts with a legislative framework and tools to target efforts to support young people and their families.

The main elements of the Youth Justice (Family Responsibility) Amendment Bill include:

Family Responsibility Agreements

- These will be used to outline a plan of services and supports for the young person, their parents and family.
- They will require parents to better monitor their children and may require parents to attend counselling or guidance programs.
- Families will be assigned a dedicated support officer to help them access services so they can comply with the agreement.

Family Responsibility Order

- Parents who are unwilling to enter an agreement, or breach their agreement, may face a court-imposed Family Responsibility Order.
- Police may also seek a Family Responsibility Order where a youth has been charged with an offence or has breached a bail condition.
- Parents will be provided with help and referrals to ensure the conditions of the Order are met.
- If conditions of the Order are not met, parents will face fines of up to \$2200 or the seizure of non-essential household items or a Community Work Order.

Stopping the 'revolving door' of juvenile diversion

- The Bill also prevents juvenile offenders being referred to diversion programs more than twice.
- Repeat offenders will have to go to court to face the consequence of their actions, including detention.



Supporting parents and young people

For these legislative amendments to operate effectively, there is a need to support them with a range of appropriately designed and targeted programs for:

- parents or guardians who are failing, for whatever reason, to adequately or appropriately influence the behaviour of young people in their care; and
- young people disengaged from the mainstream education and training system or who are engaged in antisocial behaviour.

The Strategy incorporates the:

- introduction of a new Family Responsibility Program to manage the Agreements and Orders which will be located with NT Families and Children in the Department of Health and Families.
- the delivery of targeted parenting support services, including the establishment of local Family Support Centres
- coordination of support outreach services.
- commencement of youth camps in Central Australia (Hamilton Downs) and the Top End (initially the Balunu Foundation at Talc Head and the Brahminy Foundation near Batchelor will run an interim service) as part of integrated services for young people at risk of serious offending
- the provision of flexible learning and Vocational Education and Training to young people at risk of, or engaging in low level offending behaviour
- bringing together youth related services across Government into one agency – NT Families and Children.

Work is already underway to implement the family responsibility program and integrate a range of initiatives supporting youth and families and target dates have been set to establish new services: