

**Submission
No 137**

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN REGIONAL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: The Salvation Army

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Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities

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Table of Contents

Our Commitment to Inclusion.....	iv
Executive Summary.....	5
Summary of Recommendations	6
1 Defining Regional and Rural New South Wales.....	9
2 Strengthening Responses for Children Who Experience Disadvantage	10
3 Improving the Capacity of the Workforce and Youth Services Sector.....	18
4 Working in Partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, Families and Communities.....	21
5 Addressing Other Drivers of Youth Crime	25
6 Implementing Coordinated and Wraparound Responses to Address Youth Crime	28
7 Enhancing Prevention and Early Intervention Responses	30
8 Implementing Integrated and Effective Diversionary Models	33
9 Conclusion	41
Appendix A About The Salvation Army	42



Our Commitment to Inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: salvationarmy.org.au/about-us

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

More information about The Salvation Army is at **Appendix A**.





Executive Summary

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the New South Wales Government's Committee on Law and Safety (the Committee) in relation to the Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities (the Inquiry).

This submission responds to all terms of reference of the Inquiry.

The Salvation Army provides a variety of services that support children and young people across Australia. These services include housing and homelessness, education, employment and training, social and community activities, drug and alcohol services, and youth justice programs.

Our experience tells us that responses to children and young people who offend, must be compassionate, holistic, and prioritise the safeguarding of children. We identify the critical need for all people, including children, young people, and families, to live in communities which are safe and supportive.

We recognise the damaging impact of offending behaviour on victims, survivors, families, and communities. We also acknowledge that hardline, punitive responses and locking up children and young people does not free communities from crime and that young people in regional and rural areas are disproportionately impacted by these responses.

The Salvation Army strongly supports a rights respecting, best interests approach, which contains interventions that effectively reduce the drivers and root causes of youth crime. We support a model which prioritises sustainable, targeted investment in place-based, community led programs.

Our frontline experience tells us that any youth justice reforms, must consider the following:

- Most children and young people who offend engage in relatively low-level conduct. Children who engage in more harmful conduct have generally been exposed to more frequent and extreme risk factors.
- Early contact with the criminal justice system is a strong predictor of reoffending. The consequences of criminalising children and young people without acknowledging their development, unique context, or experiences of disadvantage and social adversity, perpetuates offending and exacerbates the seriousness of harmful behaviour,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are overrepresented in the criminal justice system despite evidence not suggesting higher rates of offending,
- Responses to youth crime must prioritise prevention and early intervention to address the drivers of crime and avoid the onset of harmful behaviour,
- In cases where young people do offend, diversion models which focus on building the capacity of young people through restorative justice approaches are essential to break cycles of crime, reduce recidivism and prevent long term criminal justice involvement.

The Salvation Army has made **21** recommendations for the Committee to consider. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

2.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales invest in meaningful support which aims to alleviate experiences of financial hardship and poverty. This should include working with the Commonwealth Government to meaningfully increase the rate of Government benefits such as Youth Allowance and JobSeeker to ensure children and families can live with dignity.

Recommendation 2

2.13 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increase investment in regional and country NSW schools to promote equitable access to educational opportunities for children and young people.

Recommendation 3

2.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increases funding to specialised services for children and young people who have experienced violence. This should include:

- *Partnering with family violence and youth specific services to address the unique needs of the young person, holistically.*
- *Focusing on early intervention efforts which support children and young people using, or at risk of using, violence in the home.*

Recommendation 4

3.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increases targeted, sustainable funding to better resource community organisations that support the needs of children and young people. Such services might include youth homelessness, mental health, drug and alcohol and wellbeing services.

Recommendation 5

3.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise and invest on developing robust and innovative initiatives to address ongoing workforce shortages outside of metropolitan Sydney.

Recommendation 6

3.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government invest in governance and funding models that support place-based approaches to youth services and within the youth justice system. This should include funding to monitor, evaluate and incorporate learning into practice.

Recommendation 7

4.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop and deliver prevention, early intervention, and diversionary responses which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and controlled. This could investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Elders to develop and deliver culturally appropriate, on Country, responses to youth offending.



Recommendation 8

4.16 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work to address community, and systemic discrimination by actively increasing cultural competency and capability across the youth justice, child protection, and community service system. This should include:

- *Strengthening and centring the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within local communities.*
- *Implementing cultural support staff or mentors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and young people under youth justice supervision. This should aim to assist in maintaining connection to culture, community, and kin, and to promote proactive, culturally informed advocacy for the young person's cultural needs.*
- *Supporting targeted recruitment and prioritising identified positions within child protection, frontline justice responses, and community service organisations. This should include identified youth liaison officers in frontline law enforcement who can better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.*
- *Implementing mandated, cultural, anti-racist and unconscious bias training for staff across youth justice, frontline law enforcement, child protection, first responders, and community support organisations.*
- *Reviewing statutory child protection tools and processes to ensure they are trauma-informed, culturally safe, and free from bias.*

Recommendation 9

5.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work to better support and build the capacity of parents and carers to address experiences of hardship and disadvantage so that their children can thrive. This could include holistic family support services and individual-focused services such as those which work to address trauma, mental ill-health, and substance use, as well as those which provide legal representation, and living skills support (e.g., obtaining documents).

Recommendation 10

5.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work towards increasing access to after hours and weekend recreational activities which will engage children and young people in a meaningful and prosocial way. Activities should be free of cost, conveniently located and linked with opportunities for young people to learn how to access support services.

Recommendation 11

5.17 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government commit to raising the age of criminal responsibility to a minimum of 14 years old, in line with developmental research and internationally accepted standards.

Recommendation 12

6.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise the notion of safeguarding children as a matter of paramount importance, when considering any youth justice reform.

Recommendation 13

7.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth crime which are holistic, community led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should leverage existing, quality youth service infrastructure to expand services' support capability.

Recommendation 14

7.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increase investment in place-based, community led programs, which foster community collaboration and empower young people to build the skills they need for a fulfilling life.

Recommendation 15

8.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government ensure all prevention, early intervention and diversionary responses are situated in locations external to the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 16

8.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise responses to young people who offend, which are individualised, focus on relationship building, and wherever possible, promote choice.

Recommendation 17

8.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government draw upon the learnings from current successful programs in other Australian states and territories, to ensure effective delivery of diversionary responses to crime, which are focused on capacity building and occur outside of traditional criminal justice structures.

Recommendation 18

8.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government appropriately resource police and frontline justice systems, to ensure responses are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and proportionate.

Recommendation 19

8.22 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government ensure developmentally appropriate information is provided to children during all interactions with the justice system. This should include access to independent, and robust complaints mechanisms.

Recommendation 20

8.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government implement specialist training for frontline workers across the youth sector. This training should be mandated, repeated regularly, and cover the impacts of trauma, child-centred practice, and de-escalation techniques.

Recommendation 21

8.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government invest in service models which better integrate cross-service communication, and collaboration. This could include improving information sharing practices and technology across government and non-government services, or developing 'hub' models, where young people can access several specialist supports in one place.



1 Defining Regional and Rural New South Wales

- 1.1 For this submission we have used State Electoral District (SED) based geography obtained from NSW Parliamentary Research Service, to determine the boundaries of regional and rural NSW.¹
- 1.2 Regional NSW makes up approximately 38 per cent of the total population of NSW and includes all SEDs outside of Greater Sydney. Regional NSW is not a homogenous region and therefore community needs differ across the region. The Salvation Army on the basis of feedback from our services, for this submission has separated regional 'metro' areas (which include the Central Coast, Hunter Valley, and Newcastle) from rural 'country' areas (which include Orange, Coffs Harbour and Northern Tablelands).²
- 1.3 Evidence from our youth support services which span across regional metro and country NSW demonstrates the need for responses and solutions for youth crime to be specific to each community's needs, in order to be effective.
- 1.4 In keeping with the Inquiry Terms of Reference this submission will focus on youth crime in regional and rural NSW whilst acknowledging that this is only a portion of the crime committed in NSW.
- 1.5 There are many known risk factors which contribute to children and young people's offending, no matter where they live. In regional and rural communities, children and young people face additional unique challenges as a result of their geographical location. These challenges include limited access to services, poorer educational and employment opportunities, high rates of poverty, limited availability of recreational activities, limited digital connectivity and isolation.³
- 1.6 Although rural and regional communities can provide a sense of community, belonging and support, young people in these areas require supports and services that are responsive to their individual, unique needs and the needs of their community.⁴

¹ Angus, C. (2020). Regional NSW: A Demographic and Economic Snapshot. *NSW Parliamentary Research Service*. No. 01/2020. Parliament of NSW. <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Documents/Regional%20NSW%20Snapshot.pdf>.

² Ibid.

³ Ellem, K., Baidawi, S., Dowse, S. & Smith, L. (2019). Services to young people with complex support needs in rural and regional Australia: Beyond a metro-centric response. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 99, 97-106. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S019074091830882X>; New South Wales Auditor-General. (2023). *Regional, rural and remote education: Performance Audit*. Audit Office of New South Wales. [Report on Rural and remote education.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NCOSS_MappingEconomicDisadvantage_Report_April23_v7.pdf); NSW Council of Social Services. (2023). *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales*. https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NCOSS_MappingEconomicDisadvantage_Report_April23_v7.pdf; McCosker, T. et al. (2023). *Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: Australian Digital Inclusion Index: 2023*. https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ADI-2023-Summary_Report_Final-1.pdf

⁴ Moeller-Saxone, K. (2018). *Factors Influencing the Wellbeing of Rural and Regional Young People*. Australian and New Zealand Mental Health Association. <https://anzmh.asn.au/blog/youth/factors-influencing-the-well-being-of-rural-and-regional-young-people>.

2 Strengthening Responses for Children Who Experience Disadvantage

- 2.1 The Salvation Army believes that all children and young people must be afforded the right to a childhood where they can thrive, be supported, and empowered. In our experience, children who become engaged in the justice system are those who face the greatest disadvantage.
- 2.2 Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) encompass cumulative experiences during childhood, such as maltreatment and disadvantage, which are stressful and potentially traumatic.⁵ ACEs are closely linked risk factors which contribute to offending behaviours amongst children and young people, and result in contact with police and the youth justice system.⁶
- 2.3 Medical evidence suggest that ACEs disrupt brain development in critical early childhood years, affecting self-regulation, reward-seeking, executive function, and threat perception, all of which is linked with behaviour.⁷

“

“A large portion of our population are on the poverty line, struggling to make ends meet, unable to provide for their families, or battling addictions. All of these issues create an environment that leads to more offending.”

”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Orange

- 2.4 Our experience is that the following ACEs are key criminogenic risk factors, which commonly foreshadow young people becoming caught up in the youth justice system.

Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Poverty

- 2.5 The Salvation Army highlights the interface between socioeconomic disadvantage, poverty, financial hardship, and criminality. In our experience, increasing cost of living pressures are at least one contributing factor to increases in young people offending. Evidence supports this experience, demonstrating that young people who experience inequalities related to financial hardship and poverty are at increased risk of offending.⁸ In 2024, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found children who experienced socioeconomic disadvantage, were ten times more likely to be under youth justice supervision.⁹

⁵ Malvaso, C., Day, A., Cale, J., Hackett, L., Delfabbro, P., & Ross, S. (2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Among Young People in the Youth Justice System. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651_adverse_childhood_experiences_and_trauma_among_young_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso,short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20cut%2E%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Emerging Minds. (2020). *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Summary of Evidence and Impacts*.

<https://d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net/content/uploads/2020/02/19102540/ACES-Summary-of-Evidence-and-Impacts-V2.pdf>.

⁸ Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People. (2021). Residential Care Contributing to 'Criminalisation' of Young People. <https://gcyp.sa.gov.au/2021/10/14/residential-care-contributing-to-criminalisation-of-young-people/>.

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2023). Youth Justice in Australia. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3fe01ba6-3917-41fc-a908-39290f9f4b55/aihw-juv-140.pdf?v=20230605182448&inline=true>.

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- 2.6 There is evidence that the poverty rate across regional and rural NSW is slightly higher and more widespread than Greater Sydney, with the highest rates of poverty scattered along the Mid and Far North coasts, in Northwest NSW and parts of New England and Central West. The poverty rate for young people (15-24 years) is 25% higher in rural and regional NSW.¹⁰
- 2.7 Our frontline services see a lack of appropriate and affordable services and opportunities for young people being available to children and families who experience poverty in rural and regional NSW. There is a strong need for increased government attention and investment in services which offer holistic support and targeted focus on addressing criminogenic risk factors, such as poverty, for young people and families as it will address the drivers of youth crime and in turn, increase community safety. Alleviating experiences of financial distress and hardship in families will prevent the corrosive impact of poverty on the “*capacity of parents to parent*.”¹¹ It may also prevent the onset of harmful behaviour in young people, where the behaviour is made necessary by experiences of disadvantage and social adversity.

Recommendation 1

- 2.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales invest in meaningful, support which aims to alleviate experiences of financial hardship and poverty. This should include working with the Commonwealth Government to meaningfully increase the rate of Government benefits such as Youth Allowance and JobSeeker to ensure children and families can live with dignity.**

School Disengagement

- 2.9 The Salvation Army's experience is that schools in regional country NSW have access to fewer resources than those available to young people in metropolitan Sydney. This compounds experiences of disadvantage and results in poorer educational engagement and outcomes for these young people.
- 2.10 In our experience, school offers not only an opportunity for learning development and a gateway to employment pathways, but also stability, consistency, and a safe place to engage with peers and the community. Students in rural and remote areas experience disadvantage which begins in early childhood and continues onto school and employment outcomes. In regional and remote areas students are less likely to continue secondary schooling to Year 12 compared to matched students in major cities, narrowing their range of post-school options.¹²

¹⁰ NSW Council of Social Services. (2023). *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales*. https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NCOSS_MappingEconomicDisadvantage_Report_April23_v7.pdf

¹¹ Homel, R., Freiberg, K., Branch, S. & Le, H. (2015). Preventing the Onset of Youth Offending: The Impact of the Pathways to Prevention Project on Child Behaviour and Well being. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 481. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi481>.

¹² New South Wales Auditor-General. (2023). *Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Performance Audit*. Audit Office of New South Wales. [Report on Rural and remote education.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/reports/Regional%20Rural%20and%20Remote%20Education%20Performance%20Audit.pdf)

- 2.11 Our experience with children and young people is that a lack of school engagement, coupled with antisocial peer and friendship groups, places them at increased risk of offending. Disengagement from school, characterised by low academic achievement, truancy, and exclusion¹³ are risk factors for involvement in the youth justice system, and are predictive of antisocial cognition and youth re-offending.¹⁴
- 2.12 The Salvation Army urges that school pathways must be accessible for all young people and that educational opportunities must be equitable for communities in rural and regional NSW.

“

“COVID did bring an increase in crime, young people weren't in school and found new ways to fill their days. Now, a large number of those young people have not returned to school.”

”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Orange

Recommendation 2

- 2.13 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increase investment in regional and country NSW schools to promote equitable access to educational opportunities for children and young people.**

Family and Domestic Violence

- 2.14 The Salvation Army highlights that many of the young people who seek support from our services, do so due to family violence. We also identify that family violence often becomes a risk factor resulting in children encountering youth justice responses and wellbeing support systems. Evidence shows that family violence can have lifelong harms for children and those around them, including psychological and behavioural impacts, health and socioeconomic impacts, and increased risk of intergenerational violence and re-victimisation.¹⁵
- 2.15 This effect is particularly notable in regional and rural areas of NSW which has seen an increase in family violence incidents of, on average, 5.6 per cent per year over the past five years, compared to Greater Sydney which have remained stable.

¹³ Hancock, K., & Zubrick, S. (2015). *Children and Young People at Risk of Disengagement from School*. Western Australia: Commissioner for Children and Young People. <https://ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/1422/report-education-children-at-risk-of-disengaging-from-school-literature-review.pdf>.

¹⁴ Victoria State Government Sentencing Advisory Council. (2016). *Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria*. [https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria.pdf](https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending%20by%20Children%20and%20Young%20People%20in%20Victoria.pdf).

¹⁵ Richards, K. (2011). *Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence in Australia. Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 419. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi419>.

- 2.16 Some regional and rural areas have seen more alarming increases, with the Hunter Valley and Coffs Harbour regions seeing 21.8 per cent and 30.6 per cent increases in family violence incidents respectively, over the previous two years.¹⁶
- 2.17 Our services identify a lack of available specialist services and funding which provide therapeutic responses to children and young people exposed to family violence particularly in regional and remote areas. These services are vital in preventing ongoing cycles of violence. We support the continuation and expansion of funding for child youth specialist workers in all family and domestic violence refuge services. This will assist in addressing the impacts of trauma at the earliest available opportunity and will create systems which prioritise long term prevention for both youth and adult offending.
- 2.18 Children need to be recognised and treated as victim-survivors in their own right. Children need to be engaged and supported as individuals, through systems that recognise their needs and the benefit of intervention to prevent long-term negative impacts of trauma. To minimise ongoing trauma and reduce the potential for children to model harmful behaviours in future, The Salvation Army urges that children and young people be able to access timely case management and therapeutic responses that promote their participation and are tailored according to age and development.¹⁷
- 2.19 The Salvation Army believes that it is critical that the NSW Government direct attention on adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) as a criminogenic risk factor, to best support people using or at risk of using violence in future, to get help early. AVITH is a term which describes a pattern of violent behaviour used by a young person within their family, and may include property damage, financial, psychological, physical, and sexual forms of violence.¹⁸ Many young people using violence against family or intimate partners, have experienced family violence themselves.
- 2.20 In Victoria data has shown that 80 per cent of young people with initial police interventions for AVITH go on to have future contact with justice systems.¹⁹ AVITH research has pointed to an acute need for early intervention for families and young people that takes the form of wraparound, collaborative responses,²⁰ which reduce the risk of intergenerational transfer of violence supporting attitudes and offending behaviours.²¹

¹⁶ NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR). (2023). *NSW Trends in Domestic & Family Violence – Quarterly Report Sep 2023*. <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Documents/RCS-Quarterly/NSW%20Trends%20in%20Domestic%20n%20Family%20Violence%20-%20Quarterly%20report%202023Q3.pdf>.

¹⁷ Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi419>.

¹⁸ 14 Safe + Equal. (Undated). *Supporting Children and Young People*. <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/tailored%20inclusive-support/children-and-young-people/>.

¹⁹ Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). *The PIPA project: Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home (AVITH)* (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS

²⁰ Crime Statistics Agency. (2022). *Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria*. <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/publications/adolescent-family-violence-in-victoria>.

²¹ Campbell, E., Ellard, R., Hew, E., Simpson, S., McCann, B. & Meyer, S. (2023). *WRAP around families experiencing AVITH: Towards a collaborative service response* (Research report, 04/2023). ANROWS.

²² Cameron, P. (2016). *Expanding Early Interventions in Family Violence in Victoria*. Melbourne, Vic: Domestic Violence Victoria.

Recommendation 3

2.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increases funding to specialised services for children and young people who have experienced violence. This should include:

- Partnering with family violence and youth specific services to address the unique needs of the young person, holistically.
- Focusing on early intervention efforts which support children and young people using, or at risk of using, violence in the home.

Exposure to, or Lived Experience of Substance Use

2.22 In our experience, intergenerational substance use has a significant impact on the capacity of parents to support their children and is linked with childhood and youth offending.

2.23 The use of alcohol or drugs by parents, caregivers, or children themselves increases the risk of offending through exposure to substance related risks.²² The Australian Institute of Criminology reported in 2021 that incarcerated children and young people were found to use a wider range of drugs, use more frequently and start using at a younger age, than those not in custody.²³

2.24 The Salvation Army emphasises that better support for addressing substance use concerns for young people and their families, can have a positive impact in reducing harmful behaviours and in turn, contact with the justice system. Our frontline services identify the critical need for drug and alcohol treatment programs to embed the voices of lived experience through mentors or peer workers to reduce stigma in seeking treatment, promote shared understandings, and improve relationship building amongst those seeking treatment. Evidence echoes this sentiment.²⁴ See The Salvation Army's example below.

"Young people can relate to people with lived experience, we need to talk the same language as them. To them, we [youth services] are just another clinical service."

- A Salvation Army Aboriginal Identified Youth Caseworker in Newcastle

²² Dodd, J., & Siggers, S. (2006). The Impact of Drug and Alcohol Misuse on Children and Families. *Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth*. https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/143/filename/The_impact_of_drug_and_alcohol_misuse_on_children_and_families.pdf.

²³ Payne, J., & Prichard, J. (2005). Key Findings from the Drug Use Careers of Juvenile Offenders Study. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 304. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi304>.

²⁴ Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF). (2019). *Lived Experience*.

The Salvation Army's Equip Workshop, Oasis Newcastle

The Equip Workshop is a Salvation Army initiative run through Oasis Newcastle which targets at-risk young people between 12 to 25 years, who are actively engaging in alcohol and other drug use.

The psychoeducation workshop is designed to teach young people about substance use, its consequences, and support young people at-risk of offending, through engagement with a mentor who has lived experience.

The workshop includes group and one-on-one engagement with a mentor who has lived experience of substance use. Mentors prioritise relationship building to encourage and empower young people to make positive changes to their life, in a supportive environment.

Homelessness

- 2.25 The Salvation Army draws attention to the impact of gaps in service provision coupled with shortages of youth crisis accommodation and increasing rental competition pressures post-COVID-19, on young people in regional and rural NSW who encounter increased risk of homelessness.²⁵ Approximately one third of young people who accessed homelessness support in 2022-23, lived in regional and rural areas.²⁶
- 2.26 Youth homelessness often originates from challenging home lives and turbulent family relationships.²⁷ In our experience issues of homelessness are a risk factor for initial offending. We also observe homelessness being perpetuated where children and young people face extended involvement in the justice system, exit from institutional care and have no suitable housing available to return to or are held in detention due to experiencing homelessness.²⁸
- 2.27 Children within care systems experience many risks which impact childhood,²⁹ and we see these children facing disproportionately higher levels of contact with the youth justice system.³⁰

²⁵ YFoundations. (2022). *Youth Homelessness in Regional and Rural New South Wales*. <https://assets.nationbuilder.com/yfoundations/pages/195/attachments/original/1654145803/Youth-homelessness-in-regional-and-rural-New-South-Wales-position-paper-FINAL-2021.pdf?1654145803>.

²⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2023). *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Watt, E., Iannelli, O. & Booth, S. (2021). *Under 18-Year-Olds are Still Being Locked Up Simply Because They Are Homeless*. <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2021/10/under-18-year-olds-are-still-being-locked-up-simply-because-they-are-homeless/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Baidawi, S., & Sheehan, R. (2019). Maltreatment and Delinquency: Examining the Contexts of Offending Amongst Child Protection-Involved Children. *British Journal of Social Work*, 50(7), 2191-2211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcz113>.

Family Breakdown and Instability

- 2.28 In our experience, family dynamics, structure and stability play a key role in feelings of safety and security throughout childhood. Children and young people who experience turbulent family relationships and family breakdown face increased risk of contact with the justice system.
- 2.29 The Salvation Army observes that these children commonly experience an accumulation of disadvantage across childhood and adolescence where formative early life experiences are disrupted, and therefore offending behaviours become more prevalent.³¹

Exposure to Abuse, Neglect, and Trauma

- 2.30 Trauma, abuse and neglect have a criminogenic effect on children and young people. Parenting plays a significant part in childhood development. In circumstances where children are exposed to child abuse and neglect, wellbeing outcomes are impacted, and offending becomes more common.³² This phenomenon is stable regardless of whether treatment was intentional or not. Consequently, children exposed to abuse may develop dysregulated behaviours in response to difficult life experiences, which amount to offending.³³
- 2.31 A study by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that 94 per cent of young people under youth justice supervision were known to child protection and 83 per cent had at least one notification for alleged maltreatment.³⁴
- 2.32 Children outside of major, metropolitan cities are disproportionately impacted by abuse, neglect, and other maltreatment. In 2021-22, children living in remote areas were almost four times more likely to have experienced maltreatment and those in regional and rural areas were twice as likely to be in out-of-home care.³⁵

³¹ Bosick, S., & Fomby, P. (2018). Family Instability in Childhood and Criminal Offending during the Transition into Adulthood. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 62(11), 1483-1504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218787000>.

³² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020). *Australia's Children*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69-australias-children-print-report.pdf?v=20230921161957&inline=true>; Cashmore, J. (2011). The Link Between Child Maltreatment and Adolescent Offending: Systems Neglect of Adolescents. *Family Matters*, 89, 31-41. https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm89d_0.pdf.

³³ White, R., & Cunneen, C. (2015). Social Class, Youth Crime and Justice. In Goldson, B., & Muncie, J. (Eds) *Youth, Crime and Justice* (pp. 17-30), (2nd ed), Sage, London. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLRS/2015/59.pdf>.

³⁴ Malvaso, C., Day, A., Cale, J., Hackett, L., Delfabbro, P., & Ross, S. (2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Among Young People in the Youth Justice System. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651_adverse_childhood_experiences_and_trauma_among_young_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso.short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20cut%20%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.

³⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2024). *Child Protection Australia 2021-22*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/2cebc62-8c65-4031-a6df-5fec9422b0cf/child-protection-australia-2021-22.pdf?v=20240516104741&inline=true>.

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“COVID has a strong negative impact on young people's mental health, perspective on life, and motivations.”

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- A Salvation Army Youth Regional Manager, Northern NSW

- 2.33 The prevalence of mental ill-health and cognitive disability amongst children and young people in the youth justice system is significantly increased. 60 per cent of children who interact with youth justice present with two or more mental health disorders, and 33 per cent of incarcerated young people report high levels of psychological distress.³⁶
- 2.34 Mental ill health has been linked with increased likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviours resulting in police engagement,³⁷ as has cognitive disability.³⁸
- 2.35 The prevalence of people experiencing mental ill-health in rural and remote areas is similar to major cities. The key issue is that access to mental health services is significantly restricted in rural and remote areas.³⁹ Similarly people with disability living in rural, regional, and remote areas experience challenges accessing support with fewer services available.⁴⁰

³⁶ National Mental Health Commission. (2023). *Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia*. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/getmedia/28c7008e-2b2f-43e1-b558-2cd3d96c277d/Submission-for-the-Youth-Justice-and-Child-Wellbeing-Reform-across-Australia-Human-Rights-Commission.pdf>.

³⁷ Morgan, M., & Higginson, A. (2023). Police and Procedural Justice: Perceptions of Young People with Mental Illness. *Policing and Society*, 33(7), 841-860. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2023.2207714>.

³⁸ Boiteux, S., & Poynton, S. (2023). Offending by Young People with Disability: A NSW Linkage Study. *Crime and Justice Bulletin*. No. 254. NSW: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publication%20Supporting%20Documents/CJB/CJB254-Page%20Summary-Offending-by-young-people-with-disability.pdf>.

³⁹ National Rural Health Alliance. (2021). *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Australia: Fact Sheet*. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-mental-health-factsheet-july2021.pdf>.

⁴⁰ National Rural Health Alliance. (2023). *Disability and Access to the NDIS in Rural Australia*. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-disability-factsheet-feb-2023-final.pdf>.

3 Improving the Capacity of the Workforce and Youth Services Sector

“The whole [community service] system is busted. I feel like I want to give up, but I have to exist with it. At the moment we just tread water and do what we can do with what we have got.”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Moree

- 3.1 The Salvation Army identifies a significant need to increase strategic funding and investment in local community organisations which support the unique needs of children and young people experiencing disadvantage, such that they are diverted away from the justice system.
- 3.2 We identify that targeted investment will better resource community organisations to engage in planned, coordinated responses which address the criminogenic risk factors of at-risk children. Ensuring the physical, mental, emotional, and social health needs of these young people can be met⁴¹ will likely reduce offending behaviours and consequently increase community safety.
- 3.3 With any diversionary justice reform, there becomes inevitably an increase in demand for specialist child and youth support services. The complexities experienced by children who offend, mean that it is likely these children will require several support services and community programs to meet their needs. These may include youth homelessness services, alcohol and other drug programs, mental health supports, community centres and youth wellbeing programs.

Recommendation 4

- 3.4 **The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increases targeted, sustainable funding to better resource community organisations that support the needs of children and young people. Such services might include youth homelessness, mental health, drug and alcohol and wellbeing services.**

⁴¹ Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C. (2015). Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/274/filename/Better-systems-better-chances.pdf.

Addressing Staffing Challenges

- 3.5 In our experience, regional and rural communities in NSW experience greater challenges in maintaining quality service delivery for young people due to additional barriers, including ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining enough qualified staff to respond to demand, and a general lack of services available.
- 3.6 The Salvation Army highlights that the regional and rural NSW youth workforces experience high staff turnover and therefore ongoing staff shortages due to the demand for services outweighs the resources available in community-based programs.
- 3.7 We recognise the need for targeted recruitment drives to incentivise youth sector jobs, including teachers, youth workers, youth liaison workers and other positions targeted to working with young people at risk.

Recommendation 5

- 3.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise and invest on developing robust and innovative initiatives to address ongoing workforce shortages outside of metropolitan Sydney.**

Implementing Community-Led, Place-Based Responses which are 'Fit for Purpose.'

- 3.9 In our experience, young people who are supported by community-led programs and services, especially those tailored to the young person's specific community context, experience better outcomes. We caution that the process of implanting existing solutions into the community, must be done with community consultation, to ensure programs address the unique community needs, and are fit-for purpose for the children and young people they support.
- 3.10 Communities across regional and rural NSW are not homogenous and have different strengths and challenges to work with. Place-based programs are effective at building on local leadership and empowering locally led solutions to local problems.⁴²
- 3.11 The Salvation Army is embedded in local communities, and we are locally focused. In our experience, when external organisations, including government organisations, come in with new programs there can be resistance to change, a lack of trust and concern that programs do not properly address community needs.

⁴² Department of Social Services. (2023). *National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration Discussion Paper*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/place-based-collaboration-key-documents>.

- 3.12 Instead, place-based solutions to youth justice issues can involve valuing local knowledge and lived experience as well as community-defined priorities to develop responses.⁴³ Effective place-based solutions include sharing decision-making powers with the community and investing time to build genuine trust. Place-based approaches must take a long-term outlook to ensure complex youth justice issues can be meaningfully addressed.
- 3.13 In the Salvation Army's experience, some successful locally developed programs in regional and rural NSW have been unable to continue due to inadequate funding, resources, or leadership. In our experience, inconsistent and unreliable support service erodes trust in institutions. The Salvation Army advocates for adequate support to be provided to local communities so they can develop local solutions for local problems. This support should primarily focus on building the capacity and empowering local communities.

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“In the country you don't have to change much to stay relevant, it just needs to be consistent.”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Moree

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Recommendation 6

- 3.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government invest in governance and funding models that support place-based approaches to youth services and within the youth justice system. This should include funding to monitor, evaluate and incorporate learning into practice.**

⁴³ Alderton, A. Villanueva, K., Davern, M., Reddel, T., Lata, L.N., Moloney, S., Gooder, H., Hewitt, T., DeSilva, A., Coffey, B., McShane, I. & Cigdem-Bayram, M (2022). *What Works for Place-Based Approaches in Victoria Part 1: A Review of the Literature*. <https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/733>.



4 Working in Partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children, Families and Communities

- 4.1 The Salvation Army draws particular attention to the ongoing impacts of systemic discrimination, intergenerational trauma and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Our experience in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is that many of them continue to be disproportionately impacted by intergenerational trauma, child protection involvement, school disengagement, and youth justice systems.
- 4.2 Many systems including child protection and youth justice systems, primarily adopt punitive approaches and operate in conflict with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. As a result, experiences of disadvantage and marginalisation amongst children, families, and communities exposed to these systems, are exacerbated.
- 4.3 The consequences of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are vast, intergenerational, and ongoing. Forced displacement and assimilation, removal of children, cultural dispossession, social exclusion, and racism continue to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and creates an environment which perpetuates socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation.⁴⁴
- 4.4 In our experience, racism and discrimination directed toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is prevalent amongst communities within regional and rural NSW. This often results in feelings of separation and isolation for affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 4.5 Our frontline services see links between these experiences and young people exhibiting harmful behaviours, due to feeling disconnected from the wider community. Experiences of racism and discrimination can also perpetuate and compound feelings of fear,⁴⁵ shame, intergenerational trauma, and a general lack of trust in the community, resulting in a reluctance to reach out for help and engage with supports available.

⁴⁴ Victoria State Government. (2022). *Underlying Causes of Aboriginal Over-representation*. <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/the-agreement/aboriginal-over-representation-in-the-justice-system/underlying-causes-of-aboriginal>.

⁴⁵ Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2020). *Improving family violence legal and support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: Key findings and future directions*. (Research to policy and practice, 25-26/2020). Sydney: ANROWS. <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/improving-family-violence-legal-and-support-services-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-key-findings-and-future-directions/>.

- 4.6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be overrepresented in child protection and youth justice systems. In 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 19 times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be under youth justice supervision (including both community based and detention),⁴⁶ and made up 42.8 per cent of children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care.⁴⁷
- 4.7 The National Agreement on Closing the Gap set the intention to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in detention by at least 30 per cent, by 2031, in target eleven. This target remains off-track.⁴⁸ In March 2023, NSW saw an additional 27 young people in detention compared to March 2019, bringing the total to 148 young people in detention, currently. Of the young people in detention in NSW, two-thirds are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and the majority, 78 per cent, are unsentenced (held on remand).⁴⁹
- 4.8 The National Agreement on Closing the Gap also set the intention to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent in target twelve. NSW have seen only minimal reduction in this overrepresentation and is not on track to meet this target.⁵⁰
- 4.9 In our experience, children who encounter child protection responses that are not culturally safe experience a vast array of social costs. These costs often become risk-factors for offending in childhood or youth, however it is critical to note, that evidence does not support the idea that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children offend more frequently.
- 4.10 It is alarming that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience a disproportionately higher risk of encountering the youth justice system. Encounters range from a higher likelihood of being stopped in public spaces to being more likely to be held on remand or given custodial sentences than non-Indigenous young people.
- 4.11 The Salvation Army acknowledges the NSW Government's commitment to reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in youth justice and child protection systems respectively.⁵¹ We urge the critical need for the NSW Government to continue to prioritise this commitment in its policy responses to youth crime, to achieve better outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, children, families, and communities.

⁴⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2023). *Youth Justice in Australia*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3fe01ba6-3917-41fc-a908-39290f9f4b55/aihw-juv-140.pdf?v=20230605182448&inline=true>.

⁴⁷ Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2023). *Closing the Gap: Annual Data Compilation Report*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/report/snapshot-socioeconomic#seo11>.

⁴⁸ Closing the Gap. (Undated). *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

⁴⁹ Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. (2024). *Number of Adults on Remand in NSW the Highest on Record, NSW Crime Statistics: Quarterly Update March 2024*. https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Pages/bocsar_media_releases/2024/mr-custody-Mar2024.aspx.

⁵⁰ Closing the Gap. (Undated). *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

⁵¹ South Australia State Government. (2021). *South Australia's Implementation Plan for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap*. <https://www.agd.sa.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-and-reconciliation/closing-the-gap/south-australias-implementation-plan/South-Australias-Implementation-Plan-for-Closing-the-Gap.pdf>; South Australia State Government. (2023). *Voices of Aboriginal Children and Young People to be Heard Through Peak Body*. <https://www.childprotection.sa.gov.au/news/dcp-news2/voices-of-aboriginal-children-and-young-people-to-be-heard-through-peak-body#:~:text=The%20State%20Government's%20commitment%20to,Strait%20Islander%20children%20in%20care>.

Enhancing Cultural Competency and Capability

- 4.12 The Salvation Army strongly supports advice from the national Aboriginal community controlled peak body, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) and in respect of Indigenous self-determination, that targeted consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to take place directly. This will encourage and empower the development and delivery of holistic prevention, early intervention and diversion responses in a manner which is culturally informed and safe, and which prioritises cultural connection.⁵²
- 4.13 The Salvation Army's own experience demonstrates the need for specific emphasis to be placed on ensuring that responses to youth offending are non-discriminatory, minimise compounding trauma, and promote the wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities. The strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, including kinship systems, cultural values, expectations, and law are considered and included when considering responses to youth offending.
- 4.14 We urge that cultural competency and capability training be provided to all frontline justice, law enforcement and community organisation staff, to ensure responses to young people who offend across all systems, is culturally safe and responsive.

Recommendation 7

- 4.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop and deliver prevention, early intervention, and diversionary responses which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and controlled. This could investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Elders to develop and deliver culturally appropriate, on Country, responses to youth offending.**

⁵² New South Wales Government. (2022). 2022-2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap. [https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/media/website_pages/closingthegap/nsw-implementation-plan/2022-24-implementation-plan/NSW-Closing-the-Gap-Implementation-Plan-2022-2024-\(4\)-accessible-Updated-\(1\).pdf](https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/media/website_pages/closingthegap/nsw-implementation-plan/2022-24-implementation-plan/NSW-Closing-the-Gap-Implementation-Plan-2022-2024-(4)-accessible-Updated-(1).pdf)

Recommendation 8

4.16 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work to address community, and systemic discrimination by actively increasing cultural competency and capability across the youth justice, child protection, and community service system. This should include:

- Strengthening and centring the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within local communities.
- Implementing cultural support staff or mentors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and young people under youth justice supervision. This should aim to assist in maintaining connection to culture, community, and kin, and to promote proactive, culturally informed advocacy for the young person's cultural needs.
- Supporting targeted recruitment and prioritising identified positions within child protection, frontline justice responses, and community service organisations. This should include identified youth liaison officers in frontline law enforcement who can better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Implementing mandated, cultural, anti-racist and unconscious bias training for staff across youth justice, frontline law enforcement, child protection, first responders, and community support organisations.
- Reviewing statutory child protection tools and processes to ensure they are trauma-informed, culturally safe, and free from bias.⁵³

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“If we had Elders who could sit and do interviews with kids, get data to identify a direction we can take, a direction to be a part of the solution. Let them be a part of the solution. We make too many solutions for them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities]. We need to come back to Elders and let them be a part of this process with kids.”

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- A Salvation Army Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator

⁵³ Allan, L. & Bogle, A. (2024). NSW to Review Child Protection Screening Algorithm Over Concerns About Racial Bias. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/08/nsw-child-protection-laws-indigenous-children-in-care>.

5 Addressing Other Drivers of Youth Crime

Increasing Access to Holistic Family Support

- 5.1 Our frontline services identify that many well-intending parents may find it difficult to care for their children due to intergenerational challenges. These can include challenges which are perpetuated within adult justice and child protection systems, which impact the ability of parents to engage with, and be present for their children. In our experience, social adversity, hardship, school disengagement, and trauma are also often intergenerational, and entrenched in family systems.
- 5.2 Experiences of social adversity and disadvantage significantly impact the parenting actions and choices made by parents and carers. We are concerned that in some cases, parenting decisions stemming from hardship faced by parents, may be negatively misinterpreted by services and professionals.
- 5.3 The Salvation Army recognises the vital importance of supporting parents to better support their children. We advocate for targeted programmes designed to educate and empower parents to help them be the best caregiver they can. By providing these resources, we enable parents to better create nurturing environments where their children and families can thrive.

Recommendation 9

- 5.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work to better support and build the capacity of parents and carers to address experiences of hardship and disadvantage so that their children can thrive. This could include holistic family support services and individual-focused services such as those which work to address trauma, mental ill-health, and substance use, as well as those which provide legal representation, and living skills support (e.g., obtaining documents).**

Alleviating Boredom and Encouraging Positive Community Engagement

- 5.5 It is The Salvation Army's experience that youth crime in regional and rural NSW, is sometimes driven by young people's experiences of boredom. Evidence also suggests that 'boredom proneness' is a significant predictor of youth offending.⁵⁴
- 5.6 There is disparity in the availability of recreational activities and extra-curricular opportunities across different regional and rural communities. Many communities outside of Greater Sydney, experience a more limited number and diversity of opportunities for young people.

⁵⁴ Malizia, N. (2018). Boredom and Social Deviant Behaviour: An Empirical Study. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 8, 174-187. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2018.82010>.

- 5.7 We also draw attention to the pervasive impact of poverty on families who are unable to access recreational activities and provide opportunities for their children to engage in recreational activities due to prohibitive costs.
- 5.8 Activities provide a space for children and young people to engage with their peers and the community in a prosocial, healthy way, build resilience, and decreases opportunities to engage in anti-social or risky behaviour such as offending.⁵⁵
- 5.9 Whilst we acknowledge existing NSW Government initiatives to increase access to recreational activities,⁵⁶ financial support for this remains nominal. The Salvation Army urges increased investment into recreational programs and opportunities such as performing arts, or sporting groups for children and young people. Emphasis must be placed on ensuring these opportunities are financially and physically accessible, and are developmentally appropriate.

Recommendation 10

- 5.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government work towards increasing access to after hours and weekend recreational activities which will engage children and young people in a meaningful and prosocial way. Activities should be free of cost, conveniently located and linked with opportunities for young people to learn how to access support services.**

Understanding Childhood Development, Criminal Culpability, and the Influence of Peer Pressure

- 5.11 The Salvation Army draws attention to the impact of development and susceptibility to peer pressure on children and young people's offending behaviours. Our frontline services identify that many of the young people who encounter youth justice responses, have engaged in harmful behaviour due to pressure from friends or peers.
- 5.12 Developmental evidence suggests that children under 14 cannot have developed sufficient cognitive capacity to assume criminal culpability.⁵⁷ This developmental immaturity affects several skills including impulsivity, cognitive reasoning, and consequential thinking, all of which can be linked with the impacts of peer pressure offending behaviour.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (Undated). *Crime Prevention through Sports*. <https://www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/topics/crime-prevention-through-sports.html>.

⁵⁶ New South Wales Government. (2024). *Active and Creative Kids Voucher*. <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/active-and-creative-kids-voucher>.

⁵⁷ Cunneen, C. (2017). *Arguments for Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility*. The University of New South Wales, Research Report.

<https://www.cypp.unsw.edu.au/sites/ypp.unsw.edu.au/files/Cunneen%20%282017%29%20Arquments%20for%20raising%20the%20mini%20age%20of%20criminal%20responsibility.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

- 5.13 Recently, there has been increased media attention on youth crime in regional and rural NSW. Some of our regional services have reported seeing increases in crime affecting their communities however, this needs to be placed in context. Most major offences, such as break and enter and robbery, remained lower than in 2019.⁵⁹ Greater Sydney has seen a more significant decline in property crime and violent crime than Regional NSW, widening the disparity between the areas. Crime is also not evenly distributed across regional and rural NSW with both violent and property crime in the far west of the state is almost three times the NSW average.⁶⁰
- 5.14 Research demonstrates four major offences that have significantly increased in Regional NSW over the five years from 2019 to 2023: motor vehicle theft, non-domestic assault, sexual assault, and domestic violence related assault.⁶¹ Each of these offences continue to be most frequently committed by an adult male and not children or young people. By contrast, most children and young people who offend, engage in relatively low-level conduct.⁶²
- 5.15 Often the behaviours of young people are impulsive, opportunistic, and driven by peer pressure with most children and young people desisting over time.⁶³ Criminalisation without acknowledging young people's susceptibility to peer pressure will perpetuate cycles of offending. It will be detrimental to the child's development and long-term health and wellbeing outcomes.⁶⁴ This effect is particularly notable amongst younger children, who are more susceptible to peer influence and pressure due to developmental immaturity.⁶⁵
- 5.16 The Salvation Army holds the view in line with medical experts, academics, advocates, and other non-government organisations that the minimum age of criminal responsibility should be raised to at least 14 years. This will acknowledge the impacts of development on behaviour, and susceptibility to peer pressure, and would reduce the risk of children becoming entrenched in the criminal justice system. It will promote an increased focus on prevention, early intervention, and diversionary responses, and in turn, increase community safety.

Recommendation 11

- 5.17 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government commit to raising the age of criminal responsibility to a minimum of 14 years old, in line with developmental research and internationally accepted standards.**

⁵⁹ Cook, A. and Fitzgerald, J. (2024). *Crime in Regional and Rural NSW in 2023: Trends and Patterns*. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/BB/BB169-Report-Crime-in-Regional-and-Rural-NSW-2023.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022-23). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/latest-release>.

⁶¹ Ibid (n 59).

⁶² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022-23). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/latest-release>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Richards, K. (2011). What Makes Juvenile Offenders Different from Adult Offenders? *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 409. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti274705>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



6 Implementing Coordinated and Wraparound Responses to Address Youth Crime

- 6.1 The Salvation Army supports a rights respecting approach when considering youth justice responses. As Australia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),⁶⁶ we would argue that all levels of Australian government are responsible for ensuring legislative and administrative processes are implemented such that they respect and uphold the rights of children and young people.⁶⁷
- 6.2 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) creates broad international obligations surrounding the treatment of children, including in the justice system. It directs that special consideration be taken to ensure adequate safeguards, care, and legal protections are afforded to children to account for “*physical and mental immaturity*.”⁶⁸
- 6.3 Hardline, punitive responses and locking up children and young people, does not free communities from crime.⁶⁹ In our experience, children’s engagement with the justice system is inherently criminogenic,⁷⁰ and children who face increasing periods of time connected to the justice system risk becoming entrenched.
- 6.4 The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) report that contact with the justice system before the age of 15 is a strong predictor of later offending.⁷¹ We therefore urge for responses to youth offending to be focused instead on holistically addressing criminogenic risk factors under prevention, early intervention, and diversionary models, to reduce recidivism and criminal justice involvement long term.
- 6.5 The Salvation Army draws attention to the disproportionate impact of punitive responses to crime on young people in regional and rural areas compared to those in metropolitan cities. On an average day in 2022-23, young people from remote areas of Australia were six times more likely to be in detention and seven times more likely to be under community-based supervision, than matched young people from major cities.⁷²

⁶⁶ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990).

⁶⁷ Fernando, M. (2013). Express Recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Family Law Act: What Impact for Children’s Rights to be Heard? *UNSW Law Journal*, 36(1), 88-106.

<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJl/2013/4.html><https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJl/2013/4.html>

⁶⁸ *Ibid* (n 66).

⁶⁹ Peak Care Queensland. (2023). *Youth Crime – Get Smarter, Not Tougher*. <https://peakcare.org.au/get-smarter-not-tougher/>.

⁷⁰ Shirley, K. (2017). The Cautious Approach: Police Cautions and the Impact on Youth Reoffending. *Crime Statistics Agency*. <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-09/apo-nid108381.pdf>.

⁷¹ Weatherburn, D. & Ramsey, S. (2018). Offending over the Life Course: Contact with the NSW Criminal Justice System Between Age 10 and Age 33. *Crime and Justice Statistics*. No. 132. NSW: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

<https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/BB/2018-Report-Offending-over-the-life-course-BB132.pdf>.

⁷² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2024). *Youth Justice in Australia 2022-23*. <https://aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b1d09f98-08b5-438b-ab8c-a9148de606ef/youth-justice-in-australia-2022-23.pdf?v=20240328075033&inline=true>.

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“It’s not a punitive response we need, we need a compassionate response.”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Moree

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- 6.6 The Salvation Army urges the critical need for compassionate responses to children and young people who offend, be compassionate and prioritise the safeguarding of children.
- 6.7 Broadly, Australian youth justice systems aim to provide a framework specialised responses for children and young people, based on notions of *“vulnerability, immaturity and inexperience.”*⁷³ However, components of the youth justice system mirrors that of the adult justice system, with many penalties analogous to that administered to adults.⁷⁴ This is directly opposed to the notion of safeguarding children.
- 6.8 In our experience, children who engage in more serious or persistent harmful conduct form a minority and have generally been exposed to many more risk factors. These include amongst others, family violence and conflict, abuse, neglect, intellectual impairments, mental ill-health, poverty, and homelessness.⁷⁵
- 6.9 The Salvation Army holds grave concerns about the rising sentiment that governments need to get ‘tough on crime’ in light of recent amendments to the *Bail Act 2013* and *Crimes Act 1900*.⁷⁶ We fear that these policy changes, driven by concerns over community safety, are counterproductive and traumatic for children and young people. Such measures undermine and erode youth justice rehabilitation efforts and contradict the principles of safeguarding children.

Recommendation 12

- 6.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise the notion of safeguarding children as a matter of paramount importance, when considering any youth justice reform.**

⁷³ Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Cornwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56.
<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

⁷⁴ Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Cornwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56.
<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

⁷⁵ Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Cornwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56.
<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

⁷⁶ *Bail and Crimes Amendment Bill 2024*

7 Enhancing Prevention and Early Intervention Responses

- 7.1 The Salvation Army highlights the need for increased strategic and targeted investment in proactive prevention and early intervention programs which address root causes of offending behaviours such as those described in chapter 1 of this submission.
- 7.2 Frontline justice responses and police interventions, remain a reactionary response to children and young people who offend. Well timed and high value early intervention programs and community supports for children who offend are crucial to address their needs and reduce recidivism.
- 7.3 Early intervention approaches are preferable also, to ensure a reduction of the costs that more intensive and invasive approaches (including youth justice supervision and incarceration) have on children and the community.⁷⁷ In our experience, a key challenge is the limited number of early intervention programs that effectively target criminogenic risk factors to prevent children and young people from reoffending. This issue is especially significant in regional and rural NSW.
- 7.4 We support strategic investment by the NSW Government in services which are evidence-based and demonstrate accountability through outcome measurement, to ensure that quality services have the resources to deliver quality support. We support sustainable investment which allows for community services which are effective in addressing criminogenic risk factors, to maintain or expand their support capability.

Recommendation 13

- 7.5 **The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth crime which are holistic, community led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should leverage existing, quality youth service infrastructure to expand services' support capability.**

Empowering Young People with Life Skills, Mentoring, and Leadership

- 7.6 It is the Salvation Army's experience, that providing young people with opportunities to develop skills, pursue interests, and build positive relationships with mentors can redirect their energy towards constructive activities, and away from offending behaviour through vocational and non-vocational training.

⁷⁷ Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). (2007). Cost Effectiveness of Early Intervention. *AICrime Reduction Matters*. No. 54. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/crm054.pdf>.

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- 7.7 Programs which focus on skill development and mentoring also support young people to build their independence so they can pursue goals which may have previously seemed unachievable. See The Salvation Army's examples below.
- 7.8 We strongly urge for Government prioritisation of wraparound support systems for young people and their families to break the cycle of offending and facilitate long-term change through the development of skills and leadership.

The Salvation Army's Deadly Diamond Leadership Program, Moree

The Deadly Diamonds Youth Leadership Program is a Salvation Army initiative in Moree which promotes age-appropriate development of leadership skills amongst local children and young people.

The program is targeted at 12-18 year olds and its aim is to nurture community young people to become community leaders through peer-to-peer, faith-based mentorship.

Deadly Diamonds aims to develop the skills and independence to empower young people to become positive role models for their community, boost their confidence and teach them how to support others. By offering a place of family, community and connection, The Salvation Army initiative hopes to give young people who are at-risk, hope for a better future.

The Salvation Army's Drive for Life, Orange

The Drive for Life program is a Salvation Army initiative, designed to support young people aged between 16-25 years, to obtain their driver's license.

Drive for Life believes all young people should have the opportunity to achieve their goals and reach their full potential. Having a driver's license is a key milestone in a young person's life and helps them move towards independence. Being able to drive gives young people the choice and control necessary to realise their education, employment, and housing goals.

The program partners with a variety of youth services and works closely with local public schools to provide a welcoming and accessible environment which is safe and supportive for at-risk young people to build a safe driving skillset.



The Salvation Army's Tools for the Trade Plus, Victoria

The Tools for the Trade Plus program is a Salvation Army initiative in Victoria which targets people experiencing disadvantage.

The education and work readiness program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people disconnected from education and work, and at risk of offending.

The program collaborates with local police who engage in positive and meaningful ways throughout the 10-week course, developing positive healthy relationships with young people, family and communities.

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“How do we get leaders in the community to achieve change in this community?”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Moree

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Recommendation 14

- 7.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government increase investment in place-based, community led programs, which foster community collaboration and empower young people to build the skills they need for a fulfilling life.**

8 Implementing Integrated and Effective Diversionary Models

- 8.1 The Salvation Army urges the critical need for early responses to children and young people who offend be developmentally appropriate and proportionate. We further identify that all support services minimise compounding trauma and be appropriate to the child's unique needs.

Minimising Stigma

- 8.2 The Salvation Army holds the view that prevention, early intervention, and diversion support services should exist outside of justice infrastructure. Stigma is commonly associated with those who are engaged with the criminal justice system and the effect is particularly pronounced in punitive environments.⁷⁸
- 8.3 Co-locating diversionary and other community support services within punitive criminal justice facilities will blur the separation between the two, thereby perpetuating unintended stigma and resulting in detrimental consequences for affected children.⁷⁹
- 8.4 Placing support services which address the underlying drivers of crime outside of justice infrastructure will ensure children understand that preventative, early interventions and diversions are not punishments. We prefer these services to be managed by reputable, community-based organisations.

Recommendation 15

- 8.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government ensure all prevention, early intervention and diversionary responses are situated in locations external to the criminal justice system.**

Promoting Individualised Responses and Relationship Building in Services

- 8.6 The Salvation Army highlights that responses to young people who offend should be personalised, considering each child's unique needs and experiences. We believe the best outcomes are achieved when systems are flexible and adaptable to fit the child's needs and not vice versa. Our frontline services identify the benefit of case management and support models which place young people at the centre and provide opportunities and empower young people to make meaningful changes in their own life.

⁷⁸Australian Human Rights Commission. (2001). Human Rights Brief No. 5 – Best Practice Principles for the Diversion of Juvenile Offenders. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/human-rights-brief-no5-best-practice-principles-diversion-juvenile-offenders>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

- 8.7 Quality relationships between the young person and service provider, where the young person feel genuinely heard and cared for, achieve better outcomes.⁸⁰ Programs which prioritise the development of strong and supportive relationships with young people who are at-risk of offending, including programs which work towards improving young people's relationships with police, see better outcomes in reducing recidivism.⁸¹ Strained relationships between frontline justice responses, community organisations, and young people, perpetuates mistrust and antisocial perceptions. This mistrust, exacerbates feelings of 'us and 'them' and creates a perceived barrier preventing young people from accessing support.⁸²

“

“Young people need someone who is here with them in the trenches. [Young people] need opportunities to grow, to be nurtured, encouraged, and believed in. We need to work with young people on a relational level”

”

- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator in Moree

Recommendation 16

- 8.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government prioritise responses to young people who offend, which are individualised, focus on relationship building, and wherever possible, promote choice.**

Building the Capacity of Young People through Restorative Justice Models

- 8.9 The Salvation Army identifies a significant need to support children and young people who engage in harmful and offending behaviour, to develop a better understanding of the impact of their behaviours on others, including victims or crime and the wider community.
- 8.10 Our frontline services highlight the importance of supporting at-risk young people to identify the consequences of their harmful behaviours to promote future behaviour change. We further highlight the need to support the development of young people's insight into the impact of offending through diversionary responses which prioritise reflection and education.
- 8.11 In considering how diversionary responses which operate outside of criminal justice models and court processes may practically be delivered, The Salvation Army highlights the success of one such model. See below example.

⁸⁰ Almqvist, A. & Lassnanti, K. (2017). Social Work Practices for Young People with Complex Needs: An Integrative Review. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 35(3), 207-219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-017-0522-4>.

⁸¹ Ravulo, J. (2023). The Role of Holistic Approaches in Reducing the Rate of Recidivism for Young Offenders. *Judicial Commission of New South Wales*. https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/publications/benchbks/children/CM_Holistic_approaches_reducing_recidivism.html.

⁸² Ibid.

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- 8.12 Geared for a younger cohort, the internally developed children's court youth diversion circle program, operating in Victoria has yielded positive outcomes in reducing recidivism and supporting the needs of children who have engaged in harmful behaviour. The program's aim is to keep young people out of traditional court proceedings and instead offers an opportunity for the young person to have their charges dismissed after meaningful engagement with the restorative process.
- 8.13 The Salvation Army affirms its support for diversionary responses such as this, which are voluntary, focused on capacity building and learning, and engage in collaborative and child-focused decision making.

Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle, Victoria

The Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle (CCYD) initiative is an educational opportunity which assists young people to develop insight and emotional understanding into their behaviour and its consequences. Borne out of our success in delivering restorative group conferencing,⁸³ this Salvation Army program provides space for children to identify the impacts of offending and take responsibility for this behaviour.

Informed consent must be provided by the child or young person to engage, and they must be afforded appropriate legal representation. The process is overseen and delivered via an independent Salvation Army convenor and during the conference, a collaborative diversion plan is discussed amongst the parties and collectively agreed upon. Reoffending is less frequent and less serious amongst children who have participated in the program.

Recommendation 17

- 8.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government draw upon the learnings from current successful programs in other Australian states and territories, to ensure effective delivery of diversionary responses to crime, which are focused on capacity building and occur outside of traditional criminal justice structures.**

⁸³ Victoria State Government. (2022). *Diversion: Keeping Young People Out of Youth Justice to Lead Successful Lives*. <https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2022-03/Youth-diversion-statement.pdf>.

Resourcing Frontline Justice and Law Enforcement Responses

- 8.15 The Salvation Army supports police and justice responses to crime, occurring in the most effective and least damaging manner. The police make up a critical part of our frontline system and due to the nature of offending behaviours and community safety priorities, police are likely to be first responders. It is crucial that police have a thorough understanding of trauma-informed practice to ensure that children who have experienced disadvantage and trauma are met with proportionate, compassionate, and supportive responses.⁸⁴
- 8.16 We urge the critical need for all frontline youth justice and law enforcement systems to be appropriately resourced and to ensure staff members receive adequate training to ensure equitable and developmentally appropriate treatment, in all law enforcement functions. The Salvation Army urges the critical need for all justice responses, including that of the police and court systems, to uphold the physical, cultural, and emotional safety of children and young people.⁸⁵
- 8.17 The Salvation Army supports the “strong focus” of NSW Police on prevention and early intervention strategies as a positive step in responding to and supporting ‘at-risk’ young people. We further support the commitment of NSW police in using evidence informed prevention and diversionary approaches to inform law enforcement strategy, and collaboration with external agencies to deliver these programs.⁸⁶ We urge for the continued prioritisation of these aims.
- 8.18 We caution that punitive justice responses and law enforcement that includes inappropriate use of force could be counterproductive or compound trauma for the children and young people affected.⁸⁷ Evidence shows that the use of physical force rarely results in behaviour change and instead causes psychological and physical harm to children.⁸⁸
- 8.19 The Salvation Army urges the NSW Government to implement appropriate oversight and accountability mechanisms to reduce the risk of oppressive or coercive over policing and surveillance of children and young people. This includes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are disproportionately impacted.⁸⁹ Accountability mechanisms should include independent complaints mechanisms that are accessible to children and consider their development.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Harris, A. (Undated). Trauma, Young People and Juvenile Justice. Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network. <http://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/Trauma%20and%20juvenile%20justice%20in%20Australia.pdf>

⁸⁵ Standing Council of Attorneys-General. (2023). Age of Criminal Responsibility Working Group Report. <https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-12/age-of-criminal-responsibility-working-group-report-2023-scag.pdf>

⁸⁶ New South Wales Police Force. (2023). NSW Police Force Youth Strategy 2023-2025. https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/616816/YouthStrategy_D17.pdf

⁸⁷ Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians. (2017). Statement on Conditions and Treatment in Youth Justice Detention. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ACCG_YouthJusticePositionStatement_24Nov2017.pdf

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Harrison, K., & Sentas, V. (2023). Excessive Police Power Causes Egregious Harm for First Nations and Other Young People. UNSW Law & Justice. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/law-justice/our-research/impact/excessive-police-power-causes-egregious-harm-first-nations-other-young-people>

⁹⁰ Sentas, V. (Undated). Redfern Legal Centre: Challenging Everyday Police Powers. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawSocCConsc/2018/8.pdf>

- 8.20 The Salvation Army supports the continued implementation of safeguards including the right to a support person during police interviews and the right to legal representation in cases where young people engage with the criminal justice process. We urge for all frontline justice responses to ensure principles of safeguarding children are prioritised during interactions with young people.

Recommendation 18

- 8.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government appropriately resource police and frontline justice systems, to ensure responses are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and proportionate.**

Recommendation 19

- 8.22 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government ensure developmentally appropriate information is provided to children during all interactions with the justice system. This should include access to independent, and robust complaints mechanisms.**

Prioritising Education and Training

- 8.23 The Salvation Army observes the need for increased levels of effective, tailored education, training and workforce capacity building across the youth justice, frontline law enforcement and broader community services workforce across NSW. This should include police and other emergency service workers, frontline services (housing, family and domestic violence, education), judicial system staff (judges, prosecutors), medical professionals, security guards, youth workers, cultural leaders, and parents/caregivers.
- 8.24 Achieving a trauma-informed and rehabilitative approach under any diversionary model is dependent on staff, organisations and other responders having a common understanding of the causes and impacts of trauma and how this affects children's behaviour.⁹¹ Quality leadership and staff recruitment is crucial, as is ongoing workforce training and education to increase the capacity of workers engaging compassionately with children and young people.⁹²

⁹¹ Children and Family Intensive Support. (2017). Child-Centred, Family-Focused Support.

https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04_2022/cafis_1b_-_child_centred_family_focused_support.pdf.

⁹² Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians. (2017). *Statement on Conditions and Treatment in Youth Justice Detention*. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ACCG_YouthJusticePositionStatement_2-Nov2017.pdf.

- 8.25 We believe greater work is required to ensure staff member's interactions with children are developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and trauma informed. We also urge that all training emphasise the importance of prioritising children's rights, voices, and unique experiences in decision-making.
- 8.26 The Salvation Army highlights that conflict and challenging behaviours are common concerns amongst children who offend. It is important that first responders, frontline justice responses including police, and community service providers are trained in quality de-escalation techniques for children to ensure sufficient capability in dealing with challenging behaviours in a proportionate, productive, and trauma-informed manner.⁹³ We caution that it is necessary for responders to youth offending to be fully equipped with the knowledge and tools to allow for the child's best interests' to be central in early intervention decision making.⁹⁴

Recommendation 20

- 8.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government implement specialist training for frontline workers across the youth sector. This training should be mandated, repeated regularly, and cover the impacts of trauma, child-centred practice, and de-escalation techniques.**

Improving Cross-Service Communication and Collaboration

- 8.28 The Salvation Army highlights the benefit of fostering multiagency collaboration across the community service and youth justice sector, in promoting better outcomes for young people who offend, or are at-risk of offending. Improving the efficacy of non-criminalising responses necessitates a holistic, multi-agency approach. Community support services are often under-resourced and due to limited capacity, work in silos.
- 8.29 Effective collaboration between service practitioners and wraparound support for children and young people is restricted when resources are limited.⁹⁵
- 8.30 Collaborative practice describes circumstances where individuals and organisations work together to address problems and achieve shared goals. Collaborate relationships allow the combination of expertise, effort, and professional networks which often produces greater benefits for clients.⁹⁶

⁹³ Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians. (2017). *Statement on Conditions and Treatment in Youth Justice Detention*. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ACCG_YouthJusticePositionStatement_24Nov2017.pdf.

⁹⁴ UNSW Centre for Crime, Law and Justice (CCLJ). (2021). *Replacing the Youth Justice System for Children Aged 10-13 Years in NSW: A 'Best Interests' Response*. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-coop/CCLJ%20Best%20Interests%20Response%20Report%20September%202021.pdf>.

⁹⁵ UNSW Centre for Crime, Law and Justice (CCLJ). (2021). *Replacing the Youth Justice System for Children Aged 10-13 Years in NSW: A 'Best Interests' Response*. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-coop/CCLJ%20Best%20Interests%20Response%20Report%20September%202021.pdf>.

⁹⁶ Community Door. (Undated). *Collaboration*. <https://communitydoor.org.au/resources/collaboration>.

- 8.31 In the Salvation Army's experience, by fostering communication and collaboration across services, we build a strong support system which is holistic and allows young people to access services which suit their diverse needs, seamlessly. See The Salvation Army's example below. We also see that collaborative practice improves referral pathways for children and families who may need support.

The Salvation Army's Partnership with Government Services

The Salvation Army operates several initiatives in partnership with government services to ensure wraparound support for at-risk young people.

Casework Support Program (CSP)

The Casework Support Program is an initiative operating in both regional NSW (Central Coast) and metropolitan Sydney. The program involves specialised casework by The Salvation Army and collaborates with Youth Justice, targeting young people in contact with the justice system.

CSP is designed to address criminogenic risk factors such as financial hardship, school disengagement, access to employment or mental ill-health. The program aims to reduce recidivism and reintegrate young people who are under youth justice supervision orders back into the community, by supporting them to gain the support, knowledge, and skills they need to engage pro-socially.

Shifting Gears Program

The Shifting Gears Program is an initiative which operates in partnership with The Salvation Army and Youth Justice.

Shifting Gears originated out of a significant need for driver education programs which target the overwhelming number of car theft and related offences amongst young people in rural and regional NSW.

The education program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people and provides support surrounding driving, awareness, and making positive choices.



Recommendation 21

- 8.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the New South Wales Government invest in service models which better integrate cross-service communication, and collaboration. This could include improving information sharing practices and technology across government and non-government services, or developing 'hub' models,⁹⁷ where young people can access several specialist supports in one place.**

⁹⁷ Settapani, C., Hawke, L., Cleverly, K., Chaim, G., Cheung, A., Mehra, K., Rice, M., Szatmari, P. & Henderson, J. (2019). Key Attributes of Integrated Community-Based Youth Service Hubs for Mental Health: A Scoping Review. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, 13(52). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-019-0306-7>.



9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The Salvation Army thanks the New South Wales Government's Committee on Law and Safety for the opportunity to provide a written submission to this inquiry.
- 9.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from 

The Salvation Army Australia Territory

May 2024

Appendix A About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: <
<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>