



Office of the Hon Troy Grant MP

Deputy Premier
Minister for Justice and Police
Minister for the Arts
Minister for Racing

MM15/52

Mr Alex Greenwich MP
Member for Sydney
58 Oxford Street
PADDINGTON NSW 2021

Dear Mr Greenwich

Thank you for your recent correspondence to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Police and Justice, the Hon Troy Grant MP, regarding the over representation of Indigenous young people in custody. The Deputy Premier has asked me to respond on his behalf.

While I have been encouraged that the average number of Indigenous young people in custody has fallen by 26 percent in the past five years and the number entering custody fell by 15 percent last year, I believe we still have some way to go to address over representation in the criminal justice system.

The reasons Aboriginal young people are over represented in the justice system are diverse and complex and related to social, educational and health, as well as justice issues. Reports like Amnesty International's *A Brighter Tomorrow: Keeping Indigenous Kids in the community and out of detention in Australia* are an essential guide to the reform of service delivery in NSW Government.

The Department of Justice is implementing a number of initiatives to address the over representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. Action is aligned with the NSW State Government Priorities and the NSW Aboriginal Justice Plan and focuses on reducing contact with the criminal justice system.

The NSW Aboriginal Justice Plan was developed by the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council. It is a unique partnership between the Aboriginal people of NSW and the NSW Government. It aims not only to reduce the number of Aboriginal people coming into contact with the criminal justice system, but also to improve the way the system serves all Aboriginal people, whether they are victims of crime or offenders. The Plan also recognises that factors such as health, housing and education are important, and require the participation of other Government departments working together with the community.

The Aboriginal Services Division of the Department of Justice is involved in a number of projects that support the Plan. A key initiative is the establishment of Aboriginal Community Justice Groups. These are local groups of Aboriginal people who work together to develop ways to address local law and justice issues. The groups operate in rural, remote, and metropolitan NSW and work with juvenile and adult offenders as well as victims of crime.

The Department's Juvenile Justice division delivers services and programs to reduce re-offending, increase young offenders' capacity to re-integrate back into their community and provides early intervention to prevent young people becoming entrenched in the justice system. The division's Aboriginal Strategic Direction focuses efforts to deliver better outcomes for juveniles in detention and in the community. This includes building an evidence base of 'what works' with Aboriginal clients to reduce re-offending.

The Juvenile Justice Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Respect Framework is the division's blueprint for creating cultural respect across services, programs and staff. A key feature is the development of cultural standards and practices for program development and service delivery.

Juvenile Justice also has two specific Aboriginal programs as well as other offence focused and education programs and interventions that Aboriginal young people have access to. *Dthina Yuwali* (thi-nah you-wah-lee) is an Aboriginal specific drug and alcohol program which deals with the relationship between substance abuse and juvenile offending in the community and custodial environment. *Our Journey to Respect* is an Aboriginal specific program which aims to reduce the incidence of inter-generational violence. It seeks to facilitate participants' movement from relationships based on power and control towards relationships based on respect.

The Youth on Track early intervention scheme provides family based intervention and support to young people at the early stages of their interaction with the justice system. The aim of the scheme is to divert young people from becoming further entrenched in the justice system by addressing the underlying factors of their offending behaviour and working with their families. The scheme has the benefit of multi-agency support and provides police and schools with an avenue to refer young people at risk of offending into support without requiring a mandate. Almost half the young people in the program are Aboriginal.

The Youth Koori Court is currently being trialled at Parramatta Children's Court. The court provides greater Aboriginal involvement in the court process ensuring it's culturally relevant, reducing the risk factors that impact on re-offending behaviour and ultimately reducing the number of Aboriginal young people being sentenced to a period of detention.

Thank you for taking the time to write to the Deputy Premier about this issue.

Yours sincerely



The Hon David Clarke MLC
Parliamentary Secretary for Justice