

To Whom It May Concern,

I wish to draw your attention to my recently completed criminology honours thesis which I believe is relevant to the Value of justice reinvestment approach to criminal justice in Australia Senate Committee.

The aim of my study was to examine how disengagement and engagement in education, training and employment relate to the offending behaviour of young people who are at risk of entering the criminal justice system. My thesis focused on the Get Set for Work program, a Queensland government funded program delivered by service providers across the state, which has since been de-funded. I looked specifically at the Get Set for Work program delivered by Break Thru People Solutions in Townsville. The Get Set for Work program is a transitional program for young people aged 15 – 17 years who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from mainstream school. The program assists them to re-engage in education or move on to further study, training or employment.

During my research I interview four young people, two being Indigenous, to find out how they perceived mainstream school, the Get Set for Work program and their relationships to their criminal involvement. Each young person was known to have some involvement with the criminal justice system but had not progressed into the system further than contact with the police. I also interviewed five practitioners with experience of mainstream school and the Get Set for Work program to corroborate the young people's views.

The results of my research, while limited in their generalisability, are interesting. I found that a number of factors including family and friends influence a young person's involvement in education and crime. There appears to be a link, although mediated by these factors, between disengaging from school and involvement in criminal behaviour. I also found the Get Set for Work program to be engaging and to be effective in helping young people cease their involvement in crime. It also gives them hope and increased self-esteem. I was able to conclude that the program can help young people to stay away from criminal activities while taking into account other risk factors.

I think this is relevant to the senate inquiry for a number of reasons. Firstly, an early intervention approach targeting young people before they become involved in the criminal justice system may assist with the high number of young people in detention. I found in my research, and it is generally understood, that Indigenous young people often struggle in mainstream education settings. Working with them in their own areas of interest and the flexibility of the program was found to assist young people, including Indigenous young people, to stay engaged. By working with these young people before they become entrenched in the system the number of young people in detention should reduce.

Investing in education is so important. Not only have I found alternative programs to be effective for young people, a solid education is necessary for the future. As an example, the Get Set for Work program provided participants with hope and self-esteem. This is the most significant benefit. By educating young people they are able to make more responsible decisions now and in the long-term have increased self-esteem and confidence. They also develop the skills necessary to gain employment. They are diverted from the crime path and towards a path filled with opportunity and a positive future.

I believe there are many benefits to justice reinvestment in education. I believe that in the long term there are better outcomes for not only individuals but also for the community which will become filled with positive, capable young adults who function as productive members of society.

Kind Regards,  
Rhianne Goltz