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## Youth Empowered Towards Independence

### YETI Services Available to Young People 12-25:

Case Management    Support    Advocacy    Information    Education    Referrals    Practical Assistance

6<sup>th</sup> May 2010

The Secretary  
House Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Youth Empowered Towards Independence (YETI) welcomes the Inquiry into the high level of involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system. YETI is actively engaged in supporting young people in the Cairns region to improve social, emotional, health and wellbeing. YETI works with vulnerable young people 12-25 years old and we currently have very high demand for our services, particularly from young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, most involved with the care and statutory justice systems. Young people who attend the centre are frequently disconnected from community and family with many young people attending the centre originally from Cape York communities, Torres Strait Islands, Southern Murri communities (e.g., Woorabinda) or the Central Desert.

The following submission will speak broadly of both the youth justice system and statutory care system relatively interchangeably. This is primarily because YETI have observed that most young people involved with the statutory justice system that attend our service have some level of involvement with the care and protection system (current or historical) and as such the two systems interweave extensively.

### Overview of YETI

YETI's mission is to provide a community-based, supportive and therapeutic environment for at-risk, young people through the provision of services that foster social, emotional, physical and psychological well-being. YETI employs approximately 12 staff and receives funding from three primary funding sources: Queensland Department of Communities, Queensland Health and the Federal Department of Health and Ageing. YETI provides young people with a range of support options including: participation in drop-in or recreation/creative activities; case management; and counselling.

The service provided to young people is fluid around young people's needs and may change across time as support needs emerge and dissipate. An intake/assessment worker or counsellor assesses young people referred to YETI and then YETI practitioners work collaboratively with the young person to find a support model and style that works for them. These models include:

- Counselling;
- Case management with a support plan specifically designed for young people;
- Outreach support (including assertive outreach);
- Supporting the linkages and connections young people have with other agencies (e.g., interagency case collaboration models, participating in planning with government etc.);
- Individual, peer and family interventions;
- Further formal assessment of substance use, bio-psycho-social factors and mental health issues using appropriate tools and methods (e.g., Psycheck, Menzies School of Health Research Keeping You Strong etc.);
- Crisis intervention;
- Seamless referrals to other government and non-government agencies;
- Therapeutic groups, with a dialectical behaviour therapy skills training/mindfulness focus
- Participating in groups with a community participation/creative arts focus to promote communication and living skills and provide opportunities for young people to participate in drug free, social activities; and
- Provision of emergency brokerage funding to young people engaged in case management and counselling.

YETI facilitates a popular 'drop-in' service, open from 9am to 1pm weekdays. The drop-in space at YETI is designed to be relaxed, youth friendly and is supported by workers who undertake opportunity driven interventions aimed at providing young people with information related to safety, self care, living skills, housing needs and substance misuse. The drop-in space has a critical role as an intake method for the more structured case management and counselling programs. YETI specifically focuses on attempting to engage young people that may fall through the gaps at mainstream services. At present, approximately 90 per cent of participants in the 'drop-in' centre are from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds many young people are homeless, engaging in opportunistic sex work and have histories of extensive family violence and trauma.

All interventions at YETI are provided within a holistic, empowerment and strength base model of care. Building rapport and relationships with young people is central to service delivery and young people have attested that this is a key strength of the program.

YETI believes strongly in coordinating with other government and non-government agencies and is committed to supporting integrated treatment initiatives with a focus on interdisciplinary, concurrent treatment approaches to substance use, mental health and other client related needs.

YETI believes in qualities of persistence, reliability, respect and delivering comprehensive, practical support. YETI believes strongly in establishing common ground between practitioners and young people, by making a young person 'feel like somebody'. YETI workers seek to make meaningful connections with the young people who attend their service, and believes that counselling, yarning and the critical practical dimensions of support arrangements including for example, shopping, attending doctors appointment, cleaning and providing rides are elements in building the emotional bonds of relationships with young people. YETI believes that via this approach resilience is increased and the relationship promotes social inclusion.

The drop in space at YETI attracts many vulnerable young people, most who have contact with the statutory justice system and many involved with the child protection system. From January to March

2010, 145 different young people attended the drop-in centre. Over 90 per cent of these young people were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Problematically, the age group demographic of young people attending the centre has fallen substantially over the past six months and the service is now engaging high numbers of many young people 14 years old and under.

### **Specific comments to the Inquiry**

YETI seek to make the following broader comments regarding systems based issues and good practice relevant to the Inquiry. Five young Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people (12-15 years old) were interviewed briefly regarding their experience of detention and the statutory justice system. Some of their comments have been included throughout the following observations. It should be noted that currently YETI is experiencing our busiest period in five years, building collaborative partnerships and most importantly supporting the very vulnerable young people attending our service. This work is very time consuming and as such the following comments are brief and grounded in our local experiences. Some of our observations are obvious and confirmed by broader research and findings, others are mere 'grass roots' views of our experiences on the ground. The service gaps we identify are not intended to blame other services or government shortcomings rather highlight local opportunities for interventions and change. Finally, they do not purport to speak representatively of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their communities, or even the experiences of people in the Cairns region. The comments are informed by the young people who attend our service and the workers who support this very vulnerable target group. We provide them to the Inquiry with the sole intent of hopefully contributing to the development of better interventions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who attend our service and reducing the contact of these very valuable and caring young people with statutory justice systems.

#### **Family, community and care**

YETI validates broader research and findings that implicate young people's involvement in the criminal justice system and statutory care system as associated with young people's experiences of trauma and poor attachment. Young people need to be viewed as part of a system of family and community with consideration to Intergenerational trauma and historical failures in government policy. YETI believes that all efforts to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples disadvantage need to consider 'ecological' systems around young people as well as providing tailored individual interventions. In particular YETI believes that interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people need to be acutely aware of the importance of family, including extended family as central to program/policy development. As a concrete example, whilst youth services have a broad tendency to work primarily with the young person, YETI's approach ensures family are always included in support plans where practical. In YETI's drop in space grandmothers, aunties and mothers are welcome to visit and 'get to know' the service and workers. In our experience non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people may be more concerned as to their privacy and confidentiality in this respect. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people attending our service have been keen to have older family members visit, meet workers and their peers.

YETI believe in building caring relationships by being approachable and friendly, listening and working to foster a sense of belonging in young people. YETI understand many vulnerable young people have experiences of trauma, abuse and neglect and so seeks to work with young people sensitively and compassionately to cause no further harm. YETI also believes that systemic or 'ecological' approaches in supporting young people are the most effective. That is, stabilising:

families (via family support programs, housing provision, domestic violence support etc.), residential care placements (e.g., culturally appropriate, long term, in country), housing (preferably via no or low conditional long term housing options for example 'Housing First' type models) and education/schooling options will bring the best outcomes. In addition diversionary activity programs have evidenced results to mitigate against boredom and provide young people with social skills and recreational/creative outlets.

*Recommendation: All efforts to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples' disadvantage need to consider 'ecological' systems around young people as well as providing tailored individual interventions.*

*Recommendation: Interventions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people need to be acutely aware of the importance of family, including extended family as central to program/policy development.*

### **Specialist services**

YETI assert that vulnerable young people, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, with multiple problems related to their alcohol and drug use, including involvement with statutory justice systems, have often experienced abuse and neglect in the family home and have poor connections with family and mainstream community structures. These young people often struggle to understand support systems, are easily discouraged and regard services (particularly 'welfare') with deep suspicion.

Mainstream services (particularly statutory or government services) can find it very difficult to engage such vulnerable young people. Clinical models, appointment based settings and highly structured models risk alienating vulnerable young people. Informal, voluntary settings with caring and responsive service delivery targeted at young people and cognizant of culture and identity can provide important interventions in the lives of young people. YETI believes that specialist youth services are essential components in the care system and reduce young peoples contact with statutory justice systems. Youth services, particularly drug and alcohol services are well placed to deal with the behaviours of young people that may be associated with their grief and trauma, substance misuse and fear and anger.

Informal settings such as drop in centres also enable broader peer interventions whereby group behaviours are discussed and explored. YETI is not convinced that formal clinical settings are providing the best outcomes for vulnerable young people. Whilst there is evidenced need for individualised drug and alcohol interventions, our best outcomes have generally occurred as we provide simultaneous input into stabilising the external environment around a young person.

In particular relation to substance use, which YETI sees as featuring prominently in the reasons for young people's incarceration or involvement with the youth justice system, there seems some belief that drug and alcohol services or particular individual information/counselling sessions can 'fix' a young person of their substance use issues. It is YETI's belief that most often substance use (particularly inhalant use) is largely associated with neglect/trauma and attachment issues (highly prevalent with young people who have experienced abuse and neglect in the family home). These issues, particularly trauma and grief are very difficult to address in culturally appropriate ways in fixed appointment clinical sessions. YETI has found that increasing support to young people's networks whilst simultaneously providing information in discrete, opportunity driven formats (e.g., via posters, reading materials, informal conversations whilst providing outreach) 'at the pace' that matches young people's learning or willingness to engage is very effective. YETI believes that group

programming; a blend of case management and therapeutic support; and informal engagement options are very effective in diverting young people from offending behaviours.

*Recommendation: Specialist youth services are seen as essential components in the care system and reduce young peoples' contact with statutory justice systems.*

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners**

YETI believes that the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners in all aspects of the justice, care and education systems to be of paramount importance to successfully engaging and diverting young people from the criminal justice systems. In YETI's experience the targeted recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers has enabled more culturally appropriate service delivery, good role modelling for young people attending the service and specialist advice regarding our practice and service intervention frameworks.

*Recommendation: Support for training, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners in all facets of service delivery associated with working with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at risk of involvement with statutory justice system.*

### **Contact with country**

YETI finds that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people attending our centre are significantly disconnected from country and family. YETI believes strongly that much more work is required in providing opportunities for young people involved in care systems and youth justice systems to maintain links with family and country. YETI works with a number of young people who have been removed from community and have little opportunity to visit or return home when they request.

Dislocation from country and family impacts significantly on young people we work with. Furthermore, the impact on peer networks people by these severely isolated, young people can be profound. In YETI's experience it is these young people who are most likely to form their own 'family' of peers on the streets, and consequently engage in risk taking, substance misuse and opportunity driven offending. YETI provides easy access to phone cards and telephones for young people to make contact with family and frequently family call the centre looking for young people who may have relocated to the Cairns region. YETI also provides brokerage for young people over 18 to return to country.

*Recommendation: Improved efforts are made to ensure young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds involved with statutory systems have regular contact with family and country.*

### **Access to education**

Very high numbers of young people involved with the statutory justice system have inconsistent or scant involvement in formal education systems. Many of the young people YETI works with have been disengaged from the school system for many years and this frequently follows years of sporadic school attendance. Formal education systems appear to struggle in successfully engaging some vulnerable young people and there are substantial barriers for young people attempting to access the education system. This includes: a lack of understanding by schools regarding the backgrounds and experiences of vulnerable young people; a lack of individual support within schools; a lack of education alternatives; and a general lack of coordination regarding young people who are disengaging from school in the critical period transitioning from primary to secondary school.

YETI commends services such as the Flexible Learning Centre in Cairns who provide education alternatives to young people in the local region.

#### ***Comments from young people***

*Young people attending YETI express their frequent desires to be involved in education and schooling. Young people interviewed for this submission reported that in their ideal school they could: 'Do sports and just go sometimes in the afternoon', 'smoke cigarettes', 'have nice educated, better friends than I have now', 'do art stuff and have shorter days in the afternoon, only when I want to go', 'teach dancing and sports and do more computer stuff'.*

**Recommendation:** *Development and provision of more alternative, culturally appropriate education programs targeted at vulnerable young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.*

#### **Dual diagnosis issues**

Many young people attending YETI and involved with the statutory justice system are experiencing issues related to the complex interplay between their substance misuse and underlying mental health concerns. YETI has forged strong relationships with Cairns and Hinterland Mental Health Services and programs such as the Homeless Health Outreach Team visit YETI on a regular basis. These programs, particularly those with outreach based service delivery models are essential elements in the service delivery continuum. That said, YETI has noted some gaps in the availability of culturally appropriate mental health support for young people attending our service. YETI sees many young people with untreated mental health concerns and/or drug and alcohol issues entering and re-entering the criminal justice system. In Cairns there is currently no youth specific rehabilitation centre and we regard this as a critical gap in the service delivery system.

**Recommendation:** *Further recognition and research of the links between young people's involvement in statutory justice systems and lack of culturally appropriate mental health and drug and alcohol services.*

#### **Offending and policing**

In general, YETI sees most of the offending behaviours by young people attending our service as associated with substance use and for young people performing a function to deal with the pressures of what appear to be insurmountable difficulties. A significant proportion of offending by young people who attend YETI is impulsive and has immediate rewards and other benefits attached, in spite of the harmful legal outcomes. Such types of offending include: graffiti, theft of food, possession of drug implements such as bongos, theft of i-pods, mobile telephones, bicycles etc. Young people seem to view some of this offending as risk taking, having fun, the need to impress or comply with peers or a way of dealing with complex and highly stressful life circumstances. Most of the offences for which young people who attend YETI are charged are at the minor end of offending scales, even the older target group within the service, whilst frequently 'in and out' of adult detention are normally incarcerated due to substance use and public nuisance related charges.

YETI has received many reports from young people in the service regarding their overall interactions with the police. YETI understands that this issue is not just relevant to Cairns but impacts on young people across Australia. YETI understands that young people use public space in very different ways

to other demographics within the community. Such use of public space can include: gathering in groups, being noisy, public dancing, substance use, graffiti and socialising. YETI recognises considerable support and effort by Queensland Police Service to work collaboratively in efforts to better support vulnerable young people in the community. In particular YETI values the input of Queensland Police to current cross-government/non government initiatives aimed at ensuring improved safety for vulnerable young people in the local area. That said, young people who attend YETI report they are frequently stopped by police, questioned, searched and detained. Young people are frequently detained in the Cairns adult watch house for days at a time, this includes young people 11-15 years old. YETI is opposed to the use of the adult watchhouse to detain young people and believes it is contrary to International human rights conventions. Young people who attend YETI have been made subject to 'Move On' powers and at times large groups of young people have attended YETI 'banned from the CBD' for 24 hours. Young people seem to not understand the reasoning or application of move on powers. These issues are particularly relevant to young people under 14 years old. Young people who attend YETI have been fined for trespassing in a local market 'walkthrough' thoroughfare that is regularly frequented by tourists. Other homeless young people have been charged with trespassing on school grounds as they passed through. YETI asserts that young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Cairns are subject to more policing than other young people. This particularly applies to those in state care who are not staying in placements, are homeless and are known to the police.

#### **Comments from young people**

*Young people interviewed believed they were picked up by police for some of the following reasons: 'To do name checks day and night, sometimes they take me before my curfew is even started'; 'because I am a missing person, because of my friends or stealing'; 'Normally just curfew'. Young people made the following comments about the watch house: 'It's boring and cold, I can't smoke and I am treated bad, not allowed to have a shower for up to three days. Some coppers are nice to me others are cheeky and nasty' (Female, 14 years old); 'It's slack, too cold, foods not good in there and sometimes I get treated bad' (Male, 11 years old), 'Slack, I get sworn at by the police and they give us food sometimes and separate us'. 'One time there were too many boys in the young boys area so I had to go in the girls section'.*

*Recommendation: Young people not to be detained in the adult watch house.*

*Recommendation: Support for 'youth focussed' police positions and further training for police regarding issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.*

#### **Appropriate legal representation**

YETI believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people require appropriate legal representation when facing criminal charges. YETI understands that ATSILS provides court support representatives who attend Children's Court and explain legal processes to young people and their guardians. This service is considered very valuable, particularly for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guardians whose first language is not English. Use of Creole and language by court workers/legal assistance is a very important and valuable service in the local court system.

YETI believes that young people often need access to legal representation prior to their court appearance. The use of duty lawyers means that representatives often have no time to attain a knowledge and understanding of complex 'ecological' issues that are setting the scene for young

people's contact with the court system. Many young people are not aware of their ability to access independent legal advice at early stages in investigations. YETI is supportive of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations such as Gumba Gumba and its involvement with the Murri court program. YETI has seen improved outcomes for young people involved with the Murri court, particularly in terms of culturally appropriate sentencing and diversion of young people away from the detention system. YETI believes that young people, are not aware of the intersections/opportunities for them to attend Murri court and the differences/capacities of the two courts. YETI values the advice of Gumba Gumba and believes such services are vital in the delivery of culturally appropriate youth justice interventions.

In some cases, YETI sees parents/care givers of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people confused regarding the processes associated with their children/young people's involvement with the statutory justice system. There appears a need for additional culturally appropriate information on Children's court days targeted at parents and caregivers regarding the process and meaning for their families. YETI believes that if more culturally appropriate advice and information was provided to families there may be more consistency and support for enforcing orders and adhering to conditions.

*Recommendation: Further exploration and development of culturally appropriate support/information options for parents/guardians attending Children's Court.*

*Recommendation: Improving young people's awareness regarding their rights and access to legal representation.*

#### **Understanding youth justice orders**

For some young people attending YETI, the youth justice system is very confusing. YETI acknowledges that local youth justice workers make good efforts to ensure young people understand orders and associated conditions. This includes demonstrated flexibility and commitment to engaging vulnerable young people. For example, workers from the local Youth Justice Service Centre have been attending YETI to 'sign-on' young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and engage in collaborative case planning and partnerships.

That said, some young people who attend our service do not seem to understand the processes associated with their youth justice orders. This issue particularly applies to those young people with disabilities and/or those young people attending our service with mental health/Fetal Alcohol Disorder (FAS) related issues. There is also an overwhelmingly low level of literacy and numeracy amongst young people attending YETI and this must factor into young peoples' ability to understand documentation associated with their engagement in the justice system.

#### ***Comments from young people***

*Young people interviewed reported their understanding as including: 'I just have to sign in once a week, that's all I have to do'; 'I sometimes understand it [the order] I just do whatever they tell me to do'; 'I don't understand my order, nobody explained it'.*



### **In and exiting detention**

YETI receives a number of calls weekly from young people incarcerated at Lotus Glen, Cleveland, Brisbane Youth Detention Centre and Brisbane Women's Prison. Young people call the centre to talk with their younger siblings, friends, cousins and aunts. YETI believes it is important that young people in detention have the opportunity for making contact with family and remain connected.

YETI shares broader sector concerns regarding the detention of 17 year olds in the adult prison system. Adult detention is not an appropriate option for 17 year old young people. YETI has seen an incidence of a young woman (17) incarcerated in adult detention for public nuisance recidivism and minor offences that following intervention via the Murri Court system was responded to in a far better culturally appropriate ways and she was returned to family in the Torres Strait.

YETI has concerns following the release of young people from detention, primarily those incarcerated in the adult prison system. In many instances, young people arrive in Cairns, with no housing, with bank accounts closed and unmet mental health/drug and alcohol needs. Over the past six months YETI has expressed serious concerns regarding the mental health of a number of young people recently incarcerated in the adult detention system. YETI believes that more work needs to occur in supporting young people exiting detention in order to reduce the risks of reoffending.

*Recommendation: Improved support for young people and young adults exiting the prison system, particularly in relation their housing needs.*

### **The interface between the youth justice and child protection systems**

Many young people attending YETI are involved with the youth justice system, have experienced abuse and neglect in the family home and are frequently involved with the child protection system. Some young people involved in both child protection systems and youth justice systems may have multiple case plans with unclear levels of coordination between relevant case managers and stakeholders. Meetings and coordination efforts do not always engage all stakeholders, some who may be the most active support people in these young peoples' lives. Meetings may occur infrequently for some young people in care and often months after a young person has left the family home. YETI believes that whilst it is easy to label Indigenous young people with 'challenging' behaviours or 'complex' needs, too frequently it is the service system itself that is complex and challenging, whilst young people's needs remain basic, generally revolving around love and care, safety, appropriate housing, access to culture and spirituality, primary health needs, food and education etc.

To address this issue locally, the Queensland Department of Communities is currently undertaking a project aimed at Government and non-government organisations collaborating to improve services to "young people with complex needs." Amongst other aims of the project, it intends to better integrate the youth justice and care system and streamline best practice responses to clients. YETI sees these types of coordination and service system responses as essential to reducing the levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people contact with the criminal justice system and believes the project is thoughtful, timely and commendable.

Despite all efforts by child protection workers, YETI have observed inconsistencies in the care system, whereby some young people in care have their needs somewhat subsumed by competing workload priorities whilst others face high levels of scrutiny. That is, some young people may wait protracted periods to have case plans developed (particularly transition from care plans), placements stabilised and school entry interviews coordinated. Other young people may be subject to monitoring, sometimes beyond the experiences of other young people who are not in care

systems. Young people in care may be charged with minor drug possession charges when their residential units are searched, young people who have been violent to residential care workers may be charged with assault. Such cases may include minor assault charges such as throwing small objects at workers. Whilst YETI is not of the belief that residential care workers should endure physical assault and/or that there should be no consequence for violent behaviour; it is not frequently that a parent places charges against their children for such an act, or responds to substance use with police searches. Furthermore, young people who miss curfew times are reported to the police and may risk breaching bail. Young people in care who are not settled in placements may spend more time 'on the streets' and again are subject to higher levels of contact with the police and other statutory agencies.

YETI believes that education, recreation, cultural and creative opportunities provide some of the best means of diverting young people from the criminal justice system and provide young people with 'outlet's to express their emotions and energies. Young people involved in the care system may have problems negotiating process to purchase items associated with recreation, creative, family connection and cultural pursuits. For example, requests to purchase musical instruments, mobile telephones, sporting equipment etc can take some time to have considered and approved. YETI frequently purchases such items from client brokerage expenses. Opportunities for young people to visit country and family (if they are dislocated) homes. Risk averse practices, whilst understandable, seem to be preventing some young people from visiting or returning to country. YETI finds that young people who are disengaged from their community and place are more at risk of engagement in criminal justice systems.

YETI acknowledges that the current child protection system appears 'overstretched', workers case loads and capacity to respond to vulnerable young people is limited and there are a lack of specialist support services to refer to. YETI acknowledge some very good work undertaken locally by a number of Child Protection workers who have gone 'beyond' their duties in terms of providing consistency and care to very vulnerable clients. Despite this, YETI has noted some attitudes that the statutory justice system (particularly youth detention) is an appropriate forum for young people to 'learn consequences' and assist the care system in 'containing' a young person who is engaged in substance use or 'self placing' behaviours. YETI believes youth detention centres are not the appropriate places to deal with such behaviours or should be used to ensure safety for a young person. It is YETI's belief that safe, appropriate and engaging placements (particularly family foster care or kinship care options), drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, schools and other community based options are more appropriate options.

Safe, caring, culturally connected homes and out of home placements seem central to discussions regarding the over representation of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system. YETI has participated in National consultations regarding the Out of Home Care System and believes there is considerable scope for improvement in relation to the current situation. YETI sees young people placed in residential Out of Home Care Placements a great distance from extended family and cultural networks. This dislocation and isolation increases the vulnerability of young people and can see them more exposed to over policing (i.e., they may spend more time on the streets than in family homes) and engaging in criminal activities (e.g., substance use, theft to obtain basic food items etc.). YETI has observed that young people in stable placements are much more likely to have settled behaviours, make meaningful connections, attend school and decrease their contact with the statutory justice system.

**Transitioning from care**

Many young people 17 years and over who attend YETI have historical involvement with the statutory care system and continue their ongoing involvement with the statutory justice system. YETI finds that young people transitioning from care require support in accessing long term, low conditional housing options. Young people 18-25 years old who are experiencing protracted homelessness have often been involved with the statutory care system and YETI believes there is a need for more planning, particularly in relation to their housing options, as young people transition from care. Many young people are provided with one off payments to purchase household items (TILA payments) but there seems to be a need for more coordinated case planning with non-government organisations to assist in building more holistic safety nets. In Cairns there has been recent efforts to coordinate a youth housing project that is framed around non-conditional long term tenancies for very vulnerable young people (Bridges Project). All of the young people involved in the housing program are young people, with histories of contact with the statutory justice system and some who have previously been in state care.

*Recommendation: Extend support services for young people transitioning from care.*  
*Recommendation; Consideration to extending the support period for young people transitioning from care to 21 years old.*

Finally YETI believes that the vulnerable young people who attend our service are worthy of further community investment. Firstly, in terms of delivering evidence based, locally informed programs targeting vulnerable young people; broader family support programs; poverty reduction measures; homelessness interventions; and domestic and family violence support. Secondly, YETI believes that investing our hope and care in these young people will assist in closing the gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and help in creating real equality of opportunity for these young people to engage meaningfully in our community.

We hope that this information is of some interest to the Inquiry and welcome any opportunity to further discuss our observations. If you require more information please contact \_\_\_\_\_

Kind Regards,

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