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# WORKING COLLABORATIVELY TO HIGHLIGHT THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN TOWNSVILLE

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## ABSTRACT

Youth crime and crime prevention have been the focus of media attention and policy reforms in Australia. Recent inquiries, reports and reforms have brought about policy changes in the youth justice field, including engaging young people through diversionary services. The Lighthouse operated by the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service is an afterhours diversionary youth service. In this paper we present and discuss the current youth justice policy and funding context that led to the establishment of The Lighthouse, the service delivery model and practice of The Lighthouse, and report on the research collaboration, establishment, procedure and current status. We then describe a research collaboration between The Lighthouse and social work academics from James Cook University ('JCU'), based on research needs identified by The Lighthouse staff. This research is focused on exploring the voices of young people about service delivery, experiences and needs and mentoring Indigenous leadership. The collaborative research process and endeavours will be described and interim findings of the collaborative research presented.

## I INTRODUCTION

Youth crime and crime prevention have been the focus of media attention and policy reforms in Australia.<sup>1</sup> Community members, politicians and practitioners are concerned about youth crime and interested in finding ways to reduce offending. Recent investment by the Queensland State Government includes a focus on engaging young people by way of diversionary services aimed at keeping them engaged in early intervention services and diverted from offending behaviours. The Lighthouse is an afterhours diversionary youth service provided by the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service ('TAIHS'), funded by the Queensland Government through the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women ('DCSYW').

In this article we describe the research collaboration between The Lighthouse and social work academics from James Cook University ('JCU'). In order to explore the policy context of the collaboration, we outline the current youth justice policy and funding context that led to the establishment of The Lighthouse, the service delivery model and

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Government, *Youth Justice Strategy Action Plan 2019-2021* (Plan, 2019)  
<<https://www.youthjustice.qld.gov.au/reform/youth-justice-strategy-action-plan-2019-2021>>.

practice of The Lighthouse and report on the research collaboration, establishment, procedure and current status. The partnership between The Lighthouse and JCU is based on research needs identified by The Lighthouse staff and is particularly focused on exploring the voices of young people about service delivery, experiences and needs, and mentoring Indigenous leadership. The collaborative research process and endeavours will be described and interim findings of the collaborative research presented. All aspects of the research are undertaken collaboratively by practitioners, academics and, occasionally, by field education research students.

## II BACKGROUND

### A *Policy and Legal Scope of Practice Context*

#### 1 *Youth Justice, Restorative Justice, Child Safety contexts*

Current legislation concerning young people, those of and under the age of 17, and associated crime is guided by the Youth Justice Act.<sup>2</sup> The principles outlined in the Act are intended to ensure that the community is protected from offences, that young people be held accountable and encouraged to accept responsibility for their actions, that consideration should be given to a child's age, maturity and, where appropriate, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, and that the youth justice system should uphold the rights of children, keep them safe and promote their physical and mental wellbeing.<sup>3</sup> The Act has been reviewed over the past 27 years and recent changes to the Youth Justice Strategy largely were informed by three recent reports, Bob Atkinson's *Report on Youth Justice*<sup>4</sup>; Major General [retired] Stuart Smith's *Townsville's Voice: local solutions to address youth crime*<sup>5</sup> and; the Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce *Adjust our settings: A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland (Report on cyberbullying)*.<sup>6</sup>

The current Youth Justice Strategy for Queensland<sup>7</sup> includes reforms to policy and legislation to address '4 pillars' of the Youth Justice Strategy as recommended by Atkinson<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> *Youth Justice Act 1992* (Qld).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* s 3, Schedule 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>5</sup> Major General (Retd) Stuart Smith, AO, DSC, ('Smith') *Townsville's voice: local solutions to address youth crime* (Report, 5 December 2018) <<https://townsvillecommunities.premiers.qld.gov.au/assets/docs/tsv-voice.pdf>>.

<sup>6</sup> Queensland Government, Queensland Anti-Cyberbullying Taskforce, *Adjust Our Settings – A community approach to address cyberbullying among children and young people in Queensland* (Report, September 2018) <<https://campaigns.premiers.qld.gov.au/antibullying/taskforce/assets/anti-cyberbullying-taskforce-final-report.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Queensland Government, (n 1).

<sup>8</sup> Bob Atkinson, AO, APM, ('Atkinson') *Report on Youth Justice* (Report, 8 June 2018) <<https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/youth-justice-report.strategy/youth-justice-report.pdf>>.

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- Intervene early (linking families and children with supports as early as possible);
- Keep children out of court (the use of diversion);
- Keep children out of custody; and
- Reduce re-offending

Reforms to the youth justice were important to achieve better outcomes for young people, families and the community. Liebesman and Briskman, for example, advocate for reforms to develop more culturally appropriate solutions aimed at keeping young people out of justice systems.<sup>9</sup> They highlighted that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people are disproportionately over-represented in welfare and corrective systems, and have been seen as a ‘new stolen generation’.<sup>10</sup> The Queensland Productivity Commission found that Indigenous incarceration rates are higher and increasing more rapidly than those of non-Indigenous people and that between 2011 and 2016 the youth detention rates grew by 32% to 38 in 100 000.<sup>11</sup> Equally, it has been argued that Indigenous youth and adult imprisonment for criminal activity needs to be examined in a holistic way, as multiple factors are involved. For example, young people in out-of-home care are much more likely than their peers to be in contact with the justice system.<sup>12</sup> Indigenous young people are 16 times more likely than non-Indigenous young people in both the youth justice system and out-of-home care.<sup>13</sup> Once young Indigenous people come to the attention of authorities, they are often faced with a justice system that can further entrench disadvantage and trauma, rather than facilitate rehabilitation or healing.<sup>14</sup> Further, a distinction needs to be made between the contexts and interventions for adolescent and adult populations while admitting that persistence in offending will mean young people may transition into adult systems.<sup>15</sup>

Young people who have experienced abuse or neglect are more likely to offend than young people who have not experienced such trauma. Thus, in order to address recidivism and achieve better outcomes for young people, families and communities, trauma-informed approaches are essential in youth justice systems. Therefore, workers dealing with young offenders need to be trained appropriately so that they can identify

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<sup>9</sup> Terri Liebesman and Linda Briskman, ‘Indigenous Australians: Continuity of colonialism in law and social work’ in Simon Rice, Andrew Day and Linda Briskman (eds), *Social Work in the Shadow of the Law* (Federation Press, 2018) 256-276.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Queensland Productivity Commission, *Imprisonment and Recidivism* (Issues Paper, September 2018) <<https://qpc.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2018/09/Issues-Paper-Imprisonment-and-Recidivism.pdf>>.

<sup>12</sup> CREATE Foundation, *Youth Justice Report: Consultation with young people in out-of-home care about their experiences with police, courts and detention* (Report, 2018) <<https://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Youth-Justice-Report-Standard-2018.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Koorie Youth Council, *Ngaga-dji (Hear me): Young voices creating change for justice* (Report, 2018) <<https://www.ngaga-djiproject.org.au/about-the-report>>.

<sup>15</sup> Marie-Pierre Villeneuve, Isabelle F.-Dufour and Daniel Turcotte, ‘The Transition Towards Desistance from Crime Among Serious Juvenile Offenders: A Scoping Review’ (2019) 72(4) *Australian Social Work* 473-489.

trauma-influenced behaviour and offer opportunities for the development of new skills, behaviours and roles.<sup>16</sup> In the broader context, Liebesman and Briskman suggest that the solution to the over-representation of Indigenous people in justice systems needs to encompass wider policy and legal changes, including closing the gap strategies, sovereignty and land recognition, and leadership opportunities.<sup>17</sup> Work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people needs to consider the totality of their disadvantage and aspirations, and include ongoing consultation and support.<sup>18</sup> The Koorie Council highlights that the guiding principles to achieve better outcomes for young people in the youth justice space are self-determination, youth participation and culture, families, elders and community. They are all needed to underpin the successful implementation of solutions.<sup>19</sup>

The recent Queensland Productivity Commission found that most 'crime rates in Queensland have trended downward over the last two decades, with rates for property crime, violence and murder all declining'<sup>20</sup>, yet there has been a rapid rise in prisoner numbers. Queensland prison population grew by 52% between 2012 and 2017, at a rate higher than the general population growth.<sup>21</sup> This is replicated in the youth crime rates. For example, the ABS statistics report a decline in youth offender rates, but that youth offender rates are disproportionate to youth population statics.<sup>22</sup>

In the overall population, high rates of recidivism is one of the factors contributing to current imprisonment rates.<sup>23</sup> In Townsville the issue of recidivism is particularly pertinent to exploring responses to youth crime, as '... a group of high-risk youth offenders [was] assessed as being responsible for half of all youth crime'.<sup>24</sup> Reasons for recidivism include untreated mental health, drug or other issues; lack of skills, support networks and financial assets, unemployment after being released and lack of support services and housing for people leaving prison.<sup>25</sup>

Recidivism is likewise a significant issue for young offenders. The Queensland Government recognises in its Youth Justice strategy that detention is not conducive to reducing crime and highlights that if detention is necessary, pre- and post-release therapy programs are needed to achieve the best possible outcomes.<sup>26</sup> In 2015, the *Youth Justice Act 1991* (Qld) and the *Children's Court Act 1992* (Qld) were amended

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<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. CREATE Foundation, (n 12) and Marie-Pierre Villeneuve, Isabelle F.-Dufour and Daniel Turcotte, (n 15) 473-489.

<sup>17</sup> Terri Liebesman and Linda Briskman, (n 9) 256-276.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Koorie Youth Council, (n 14)

<sup>20</sup> Queensland Productivity Commission, *Imprisonment and Recidivism* (n 11).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Youth offender rate falls for seventh consecutive year' (Media Release, 8 February 2018)

<[https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4519.0~2016-17~Media%20Release~Youth%20offender%20rate%20falls%20for%20seventh%20consecutive%20year%20\(Media%20Release\)~17](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4519.0~2016-17~Media%20Release~Youth%20offender%20rate%20falls%20for%20seventh%20consecutive%20year%20(Media%20Release)~17)>.

<sup>23</sup> Queensland Productivity Commission, (n 11).

<sup>24</sup> Smith (n 5) 11 <<https://townsvillecommunities.premiers.qld.gov.au/assets/docs/tsv-voice.pdf>>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Queensland Government, (n 1).

to reinstate the principle that youth detention would be a last resort and that childhood offences could not be admitted in adult sentencing.<sup>27</sup> Young people who return to the same environment post detention release are at higher risk of re-offending. Contributing factors to recidivism include ‘poor school attendance, mental health concerns, domestic violence, drug and substance misuse, housing and dysfunction within households’.<sup>28</sup>

The current legal framework in Queensland is aimed at reducing offending behaviour and keeping young people out of detention.<sup>29</sup> The Queensland Government outlines that ‘early intervention activities such as diversionary programs, along with engagement in education, training, employment, and sport can have a positive impact on young people before they become ingrained in the criminal justice system’.<sup>30</sup> In 2016, the Queensland Parliament ended the automatic transfer of 17 year olds to adult prisons and the Queensland Police Service established a Community Policing Board.<sup>31</sup> Current initiatives, including early intervention and diversionary programs, are aimed at reducing youth offending with a targeted reduction of 5% by 2020/21.<sup>32</sup>

## 2 *Prevention of youth crime*

The importance of preventative strategies to address youth offending were already identified in a 2002 research project that explored responses to young people at risk of offending in the local Townsville CBD.<sup>33</sup> The report recommended a whole-of-community response, supporting young people at risk of leaving home and school early and at risk of substance abuse. It recommended the development of strategies that addressed both the immediate and ongoing needs of the identified target group and devised strategies that can identify and divert young people at risk of becoming part of the target group’.<sup>34</sup> Research highlights the importance of considering the structural, political and cultural contexts, and the social pathways that influence young people’s offending behaviour.<sup>35</sup> Multiple risk factors in young people’s lives need to be targeted in preventative initiatives. These include family, school, peers, employment, new positive relationships, and encouraging positive identity formation (reducing offending identity), involving elders and the community in interruptions to behaviour, and

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<sup>27</sup> Major General (Retd) Stuart Smith, AO, DSC, (n 11).

<<https://townsvillecommunities.premiers.qld.gov.au/assets/docs/tsv-voice.pdf>>.

<sup>28</sup> Queensland Government, *Working Together. Changing the story. Youth Justice Strategy 2019-2023* (Report, 2019) 14 <<https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/youth-justice-report-strategy/strategy.pdf>>.

<sup>29</sup> Queensland Government, *Our Future State. Advancing Queensland’s Priorities – Keep communities safe*. <<https://www.ourfuture.qld.gov.au/safe-communities.aspx>>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Sue Birch, ‘Ain’t got no home, no place to roam. Research project report on responding to young people at risk of offending in Townsville CBD’ (Research Paper, Queensland Youth Services, Townsville, 2002).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 21.

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g. Alan France and Ross Homel, ‘Societal access routes and developmental pathways: Putting social structure and young people’s voice into the analysis of pathways into and out of crime’ (2006) 39(3) *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 295-309, and Mary Salverson, Samantha Fian and Leah Blomfield, ‘Why wait?: Engaging with children and young people in child protection research to inform practice’ (2013) (37) *Developing Practice* 24-34.

targeting factors such as substance misuse.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, attention to these factors needs to be inclusive of the voices of young people themselves in order to uphold their rights to participate and be heard and to inform intervention strategies.<sup>37</sup>

### 3 *The context of youth crime in Townsville*

Among Queensland cities, Townsville has received much media attention in regards to youth crime and youth detention over the years.<sup>38</sup> This resulted in the development and institution of various strategies to address youth crime including the formation of a multi-agency Townsville Stronger Community Action Group ('TSCAG') in 2016 comprising of senior government department representatives reporting to a police inspector.<sup>39</sup> Seven government agencies collaborate in TSCAG. The intention of TSCAG is to hold agencies accountable for delivering the actions that have been developed in the family goal plan.<sup>40</sup> Fundamental to TSCAG are partnerships, innovation, multiple agency-partnerships, action learning and recognition and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.<sup>41</sup> A royal commission into the experience of young people in detention was established due to significant media attention about the mistreatment of young people in detention, particularly at the Townsville-based Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and the Don Dale Youth Detention Centre in Darwin.<sup>42</sup> The royal commission review authored by McMillan and Davis recommended raising the detention age to 12 years in order to lighten the load of detention centres and reduce re-offending.<sup>43</sup> Other recommendations included partnership between the community and service providers to address the causes of the young person's offending and an investment in community-based wrap-around services to support and co-ordinate with youth justice.<sup>44</sup> The Queensland Government accepted all 83 recommendation of the report and highlighted the need for integrated, culturally appropriate support services across sectors and a focus on preventing offending through a range of strategies, including diversion services and intensive case management.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See, e.g. Stephen Case and Kevin Haines, 'Promoting Prevention: Evaluating a Multi-agency Initiative of Youth Consultation and Crime Prevention in Swansea (2004) 18(5) *Children & Society* 355-370, and Marie-Pierre Villeneuve, Isabelle F.-Dufour and Daniel Turcotte, (n 15).

<sup>37</sup> Alan France and Ross Homel, (n 35).

<sup>38</sup> Smith (n 5).

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g. Zac Murphy, Mechelle Hofmann and Vicki Miles, 'Townsville Stronger Action Group: Intensive case coordination of families and young people' (2018) 24 *James Cook University Law Review* 261-276, and Major General (Retd) Stuart Smith, AO, DSC, (n 5).  
<<https://townsvillecommunities.premiers.qld.gov.au/assets/docs/tsv-voice.pdf>>

<sup>40</sup> Zac Murphy, Mechelle Hofmann and Vicki Miles, (n 39).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Kathryn McMillan QC and Megan Davis, *Independent Review of Detention Report* (Report, December 2016) <<http://www.youthdetentionreview.qld.gov.au/review-of-youth-detention-centres-report-updated-28-June-2017.pdf>>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Queensland Government, *Government response to the independent review of youth detention* (Report, 2016) <<http://www.youthdetentionreview.qld.gov.au/governments-response-to-the-report.pdf>>.

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Retired Queensland Police Commissioner Bob Atkinson was assigned to examine and report on various youth justice matters through consultation, specific visits, and considering prior research.<sup>46</sup> Atkinson recommended that the Government's Youth Justice Policy adopt the above-noted four pillar model. Atkinson's recommendations included early intervention for high risk communities, ensuring youth receive a restorative justice experience, approaching schools for early intervention with children who require target support, collaborative work with families, approaching high risk communities, and collective work with non-government organisations.<sup>47</sup>

The report highlighted that young people who have disrupted lives and/or behaviour problems need to have alternative education options, especially young people transitioning to school from detention. It also highlighted that each young person has their own individual needs and an assessment of physical health, mental health, disability and educational assessments should be completed to ensure the young person's specific needs are being met. Atkinson pointed out that staff need to be trained in trauma-informed, trauma-specific care and substance abuse with evidence-based treatment options. He recommended that the implementation of a collaborative model between the Department of Education, Department of Child Safety Youth and Women, and the Children's Court, based on the Victorian Education Justice Initiative, should be considered.<sup>48</sup>

Major General Stuart Smith was commissioned by the Queensland Government as the Townsville Community Champion in order to explore community members' views about youth crime in Townsville.<sup>49</sup> He undertook seven community forums that were attended by a total of 800 Townsville residents. His enquiry and report considered Atkinson's earlier report<sup>50</sup> and the Queensland Government's Keeping Communities Safe Initiative<sup>51</sup> and the Queensland Productivity Commission's enquiry into imprisonment and recidivism.<sup>52</sup> The majority of those who attended the forums did not support harsher penalties for young people, with a minority suggesting the use of boot camps, curfews, and relocation.<sup>53</sup> Smith proposed what he coined a 'fair and suitable' approach, focused on sharing information on action being taken to address youth crime, holding youths accountable, and supporting them to participate in education. The report overall prioritised prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.<sup>54</sup> Specific recommendations included the use of role models and mentors, community service activities for offenders, and improving the diversionary justice process and timeliness within the youth justice system.

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<sup>46</sup> Atkinson (n8) <<https://www.csyw.qld.gov.au/resources/dcsyw/youth-justice/youth-justice-report.strategy/youth-justice-report.pdf>>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Smith (n 5).

<sup>50</sup> Atkinson (n 8).

<sup>51</sup> Queensland Government, *Our Future State. Advancing Queensland's Priorities – Keep communities safe.* (n 29)

<sup>52</sup> Queensland Productivity Commission, *Imprisonment and Recidivism* (n 11)

<sup>53</sup> Smith (n 5)

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.



The three abovementioned inquiries and subsequent reports influenced the Queensland Government policy direction in addressing youth crime. In particular, taking on the recommendations of the Smith<sup>55</sup> and Atkinson<sup>56</sup> reports, the Queensland Government supported and funded a Townsville Community Youth Response, including a High Risk Specialist Youth Court, a cultural mentoring program, Intensive Case Management by Youth Justice Staff, the Burragah Flexi schooling to re-engage young people in education in Townsville, and the TAIHS The Lighthouse Diversionary Service.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, TSCAG operates a case-management approach with key stakeholders in order to assess, plan, implement and review young offenders within a risk needs responsibility model.<sup>58</sup>

### III THE LIGHTHOUSE

The Lighthouse is a youth after-hours diversionary service provided by TAIHS and funded by DCSYW. At the time that the original funding was received in February 2017, The Lighthouse was funded by the Department of Justice and Attorney General ('DJAG'). However, changes were made in jurisdiction between Queensland Government departments concerning youth in late 2017.<sup>59</sup> Consequently the funding responsibility for The Lighthouse was reallocated to DCSYW.

The Lighthouse was funded after recommendations were made by Townsville Stronger Communities,<sup>60</sup> a taskforce established to combat youth crime in the region,<sup>61</sup> for an after-hour's diversionary service.<sup>62</sup> The service was launched as part of youth justice reform which was seen as 'vital to breaking the cycle of youth offending and giving young people who come in contact with the justice system a chance at a better life'.<sup>63</sup> The intended outcomes of the after-hours diversionary service were to achieve a decrease in youth crime; a decrease in youth 'roaming the streets' after hours; and to provide a safe space for young people who might be experiencing unsafe environments at their place of residence. The latter outcome expectation was made on the presumption that young people were more at risk of engaging in criminal or after-hours activities if they did not have a safe place to stay at night. The funding for the after-hours diversionary service came to TAIHS through nomination by the funding body rather than through an application by TAIHS.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Atkinson (n 8)

<sup>57</sup> Di Farmer, 'More funding of \$19.2 million to keep Townsville safe' (Media Release, 30 April 2019) <<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2019/4/30/more-funding-of-192-million-to-keep-townsville-safe>>.

<sup>58</sup> Zac Murphy, Mechelle Hofmann and Vicki Miles, (n 39).

<sup>59</sup> Di Farmer, 'Historic youth justice reforms commence today' (Media Release, 12 February 2019) <<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2018/2/12/historic-youth-justice-reforms-commence-today>>.

<sup>60</sup> Nathalie Fernback, 'Lighthouse beacon for Townsville Youth', *ABC* (online at 11 May 2017) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-09/lighthouse-beacon-for-townsville-youth/8510644>>.

<sup>61</sup> Di Farmer (n 59).

<sup>62</sup> See, e.g. Di Farmer, '\$7M for Townsville's Lighthouse Service' (Media Release, 16 July 2019) <<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2019/7/16/7m-for-townsvilles-lighthouse-service>>, and Smith (n 5)

<sup>63</sup> Di Farmer (n 59).

A *The Original Service Outline*

When The Lighthouse was originally established, it was to provide a late night drop-in service that was an inviting and safe space for young people at risk of offending. The objectives of the service were two-fold: firstly to engage young people in non-criminal activities, onsite, through after-hours programs and second, to provide a safe space where the Queensland Police Service ('QPS'), including police personal and police liaison officers ('PLO'), could divert young people. The intention was that QPS would transport young people picked up whilst patrolling the streets, to the Lighthouse. This intention has never been fully met as QPS identified that they did not have the capacity or delegation to transport at-risk young people without it being a police matter (e.g. commission of a criminal offence). The after-hour's service delivery was based on it being operational from 6pm–9am every night. The service would provide food, transport and pro-social activities for young people.

Youth Justice Workers would work closely with the service-provider to ensure service delivery is responsive to the needs of young people who are at high risk of offending. Lighthouse staff would provide support and case management to young people with complex needs who have been diverted from police contact. It was identified that this may include young people who are unable to go home because of family problems or conflict, young people with behaviours which may challenge staff and/or other service users, young people from residential services, young people with substance misuse issues and/or mental health issues. The expectation was that Lighthouse would work collaboratively with other local services and develop sufficient rapport with the young people to develop a soft referral entry into more intensive services such as health services, family intervention services, and drug and alcohol services.

The performance of the service was to be assessed against four measures: the number of drop-ins identifying the referral source (i.e. police, self, family, Youth Justice etc); the types of activities provided and number of participants; service user reports of feeling safe; and Lighthouse providing case study reports highlighting failures/success/trends observed in the user group.

B *Issues with the Original Service Structure and Subsequent Changes*

The service was started by TAIHS in April 2017, with the structure of the service primarily designed around the contract details supplied by DJAG. After the Lighthouse was established, the operational cost of an after-hour's service impeded service delivery:

First, the stipulation that the service was only operational after-hours was an expensive endeavour that meant that there was only a small budget for business hours administration. The high cost also did not provide for extra support services for clients (i.e. case management), or management of the service. Although case management was required in the service agreement, it was not affordable within the available budget. Second, the service had been designed specifically to respond to QPS needs. However, it was quickly established the QPS did not routinely divert young people they found

loitering, by providing transport. In discussions between QPS and TAIHS, it was established that QPS would not be able to routinely provide transport to divert young people from crime due to limited police resourcing, priorities and responsibilities. This meant that Lighthouse would need to provide transport services and complete community checks to identify young people who are out after-hours. The transport was particularly important to the service provision due to the location of the Service (industrial Garbutt), and the catchment area of the service being the entire City of Townsville.

Consequently, it was concluded that without The Lighthouse providing transport for the young people, attendance rate would remain low. Moreover, The Lighthouse was unable to provide case management due to the high cost of after-hours work. Therefore, the service would not be in a position to respond to community needs.

Mitigation strategies were put in place by The Lighthouse. It would provide all transport, implement shorter program times and, during 'hotspot checks', staff would try to engage young people loitering. The Lighthouse staff would refer all clients who required case management to services already available in Townsville, such as the TAIHS Youth Support Service or Queensland Youth Services; and TAIHS would provide administration to The Lighthouse through other funded services. These strategies were intended to be short-term solutions.

### *C Current Service Structure*

In the following year, further funding was announced by the Queensland Government to support The Lighthouse identifying that the service was successful in getting young people off the street and diverting them from risky behaviour and the need to extend the service.<sup>64</sup>

The extra funding saw changes to service delivery:

- Transport services would be funded leading to an early start time for workers and allocated daily times for pick-up and drop-offs for the program at The Lighthouse seven days a week;
- Case management services would be funded for The Lighthouse; and
- Further funding was provided to have hotspot checks and outreach workers seven days a week from 6 pm to 9 am.

The service provides a four-fold service – outreach to 'hotspots', case management for current clients, activities and programs and a safe place to stay overnight, with the intention of reducing risk of engaging in criminal activities. With the exception of the Manager and Team Coordinator, all staff are classified as Youth Workers. Young people can engage with the service in three ways: they can self-refer, to request to be picked up for the program, or be contacted by service staff. Service staff identify

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<sup>64</sup> See, e.g. Di Farmer (n 62). and Di Farmer, 'More funding of \$19.2 million to keep Townsville safe' (Media Release, 30 April 2019) <<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2019/4/30/more-funding-of-192-million-to-keep-townsville-safe>>.

## *Working Collaboratively to Highlight the Voices of Young People in Townsville*

whether young people who attend the service are at Low, Medium or High risk of re-offending, and, accordingly, target young people to be contacted on a daily basis. When young people are picked up to participate in the programs, a guardian/parent is always informed that their young person will be attending a program at The Lighthouse and given a brief overview of what program in which the young person will be participating. This practice allows the parent/guardian to provide consent, ensures that they are aware where their young person is, and allows the youth workers to get feedback from the parent/guardian on how the young person 'has been' (wellbeing, behaviours, attendance in other programs such as schooling). Transporting staff and youth workers supervise and facilitate the programs. Staff provide transport home upon the completion of the program, when and where it is safe to do so.

Outreach staff begin work at 6pm and complete outreach to client homes and hotspot checks throughout the community. Hotspot checks are outreaches to known locations where young people loiter or congregate. The objective is to stop young people from loitering in public locations by encouraging/assisting them to return to their place of residence or, alternatively, to offer them The Lighthouse to engage in a program or an activity. The expected outcome of these outreach interactions is that young people will choose to engage with The Lighthouse rather than engage in criminal activities. The staff also visit client's homes earlier in the shift. Clients who are deemed as 'high risk' of reoffending, or those who have not recently engaged in the service, are prioritised. The visits rely heavily on workers having relationships and connections to the community as, often, visits involve 'cold calling' homes. As clients see workers interacting positively with their families and friends, they are more likely to engage with The Lighthouse.

Programs are run seven nights a week as diversionary activities, with the intention of engaging young people whilst also providing psycho-education to them. They are organised as 'structured' and 'unstructured' programs. Structured programs are planned programs that normally run over a period of weeks to address a certain subject. Many are facilitated by external service providers. An example of such a program is the 'Yarning about a positive lifestyle program', facilitated by Lives Lived Well, a program targeting young people who are engaged in drug and alcohol use. The programs are designed according to needs identified within the current cohort of youth attending the service. Topics addressed within the different program include physical, mental, and social health. The 'unstructured' programs are designed as easy engagement activities. Examples include; a one-off or reoccurring BBQ in a public location; going to the Strand to play football; doing an art activity the service; and watching a movie at the service. The programs are advertised in a monthly calendar provided to the young people at the service, via a closed facebook group, specifically for current service users and other stakeholders, such as Townsville North and South Youth Justice.

### *D Reflections on the Service Innovation*

The service is well-attended by young people and often not all young people who want to participate on a night can attend due to a limitation on numbers relating to the

staff/youth ratio and transporting abilities. Young people are aware that Youth Workers commence work at 4 pm, and from 3:45 pm the phone rings, with young people wanting to come into the service. The Lighthouse is a choice for them, it is built on self-referrals. Young people ring home when they see the bus drive past by; they know they need their parent/ carer's permission to participate, i.e. 'they are coming to get the permission – can you sign it'. When they enter the service, and as they participate, young people take notes and tick themselves off. Once everyone returns to The Lighthouse after the pick-up, we discuss the principles. We do an acknowledgement to country at the beginning of the meeting and check how they are going.

The practice is guided by a grassroots level management, and informed by community-based youth workers. The grassroots model meant developing a service that was for everyone; the main principle of this grassroots perspective is respect, extending across four key areas which are a right and responsibility for anyone accessing the service. It recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values, insights and knowledge. The importance of genuinely acknowledging culture to Indigenous people as underpinning all aspects of life and thus being central to community participation and service delivery has been highlighted in research.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, trusting relationships are important to have a safe space for community participation.<sup>66</sup>

In planning the service we articulated the principles that are important at The Lighthouse, 'Respect for yourself', 'Respect for staff', 'Respect for environment' and 'Respect for others'. These principles are re-enforced in our work. For example, we might have discussions with the young people exploring what respect for the environment means, such as not damaging cars or The Lighthouse space or not littering or breaking material objects. We are modelling an understanding and a sense of community at The Lighthouse service that can be extended to the wider community and their lives. In our service delivery we are considering the connection to community and place. We wanted to develop something that was for everyone. From a grassroots perspective when you come here you respect everyone. When they come on site, young people set other issues with each other aside. We build an environment where young people are safe and respected. Even though we set guidelines, in the end it is driven by the young people, and currently we are trying to implement what is happening in The Lighthouse with what is happening in the community.

The practice model fits well with social work values, frameworks ethics and values and practice frameworks. It is strengths-based, aiming at building young people's agency and engagement. This approach recognises the need for young people to be safe both physically and emotionally in the service. Thus, youth workers remind young people who are coming in of the principles of the program. This is based around a Virtues model which promotes these universal principles and values whilst also creating a

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<sup>65</sup> Nalita Nungarrayi Turner, Judy Taylor, Sarah Larkins, Karen Carlisle, Sandra Thompson, Maureen Carter, Michelle Redman-MacLaren, Ross Bailie, 'Conceptualizing the Association Between Community Participation and CQI in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PHC Services' (2019) 29(13) *Qualitative Health Research* 1904-1915.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

culture of universal language.<sup>67</sup> This is important for young people as they may interact with multiple youth workers in one night, meaning it is important that the workers speak the 'same language' to ensure that they do not 'throw' young people off. Staff model respect through ensuring young people know what is planned and ensure they have enough information around what is happening. This is done through discussions that occur at the start of the program and throughout, ensuring that young people are prepared and do not get insecure and escalate. Indications are that the participation in the services strengthens young people; they are engaged, but they also begin to see hope for the future in engaging positively with their peers and community. For example one young person recently commented, 'I want to work here, what do I have to be to be part of this, Aunty?'

At times young people do 'act up' or break rules while they are in the program. This is addressed to ensure the safety and well-being of all. However, youth workers explore with young people what should happen with the young person. Building self-efficacy in relation to young people choosing their own consequences, youth workers ensure that the principles of respect and the rights and responsibilities are addressed by holding them to their consequence of choice. The service holds young people to keeping the consequence they chose. As an example a young person might have said, 'ok, I will stay away for a month'. The youth workers, taking the decision seriously, might then make it more realistic by suggesting a week. Often young people will then ring every night to come in, reminding Youth Workers when they are 'allowed' to return to the service. Service staff remind them that they chose to not to come for a week as a consequence of breaking the principle. The Lighthouse's vision underlines that it is important to teach young people about rights and responsibilities, with particular importance placed on doing this without shaming them. As an Indigenous service the shame factor is highly important to consider, and it is essential to provide a consistently safe place for young people.

Weekly staff meetings are aiming at keeping staff on track and upskilling and training them. Case management is reliant on communication between the team coordinator and youth workers, particularly as The Lighthouse provides services to large numbers of young people. The feedback provided by youth workers helps guide the team coordinator to understand what young people should be prioritised, however all case management is strength based and led by the young person.

#### IV RESEARCH COLLABORATION

JCU Staff approached senior staff members of The Lighthouse with the opportunity to engage in research, should there be a want/need and the Lighthouse staff wanted to understand more why young people were engaging with the service and what they saw as important. The Lighthouse engages regularly with the young people accessing the service in order to evaluate service delivery. However, one of the questions that staff wanted to explore beyond service evaluation was, what young people thought about

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<sup>67</sup> Linda Kavelin Popov, *The Virtues Project: Educator's guide* (Jalmar Press, 2000).

services in the Youth Justice space, and what did they understand The Lighthouse was aiming to achieve. Did young people understand its diversionary purpose?. The research collaboration commenced in July 2018.

#### A *Joint Work to Date*

Over the course of regular meetings new relationships and research ideas began to solidify. While we initially discussed a research project that would train young people to undertake peer-led inquiry about young people's views about The Lighthouse, we have, to date undertaken some groundwork to establish the collaborative research partnership and to gather background information. We submitted a funding application to begin Indigenous youth leadership, the first one was unsuccessful, but we are submitting it again for a small seed-funding grant. Three students on social work placement have participated in the research planning, development, implementation and writing. We have undertaken a systematic literature review exploring what prior research has been reported on listening to the voices of young people who are at risk of offending on social services delivery. The aim of the inquiry was to find out what children and young people said about their experiences with services. We are currently in the data analysis stage in the systematic literature project and interim findings highlight the importance of peers, and supportive and caring relationships, the need for respectful engagement, and the giving of accurate information and clarification, and worker practice and engagement that encourages agency.

We have received ethics approval for and planned a third research engagement with the service, a photovoice research project with young people. Photovoice is a research methodology that can be useful in work with disengaged young people and communities. For example, Strack, Magill, and McDonagh reported on engaging youth with photovoice, and the benefits this method had for the young people and community.<sup>68</sup> The photovoice project aims to actively engage young people who use The Lighthouse to discover how the young people perceive their community, self, culture and everyday lives through photovoice; to explore with young people what they need to be the best version of themselves into the future; to develop a resource that can be used in the work with young people; and to use the findings to further inform service delivery at The Lighthouse. The photovoice project will be run as one of the program activities at The Lighthouse in late 2019.

Documenting and reporting on the Lighthouse and our research collaborations in this publication has been a fourth focus of our research collaboration. Collaborative inquiry and writing is complex, but it can and will contribute to establishing a strong research and well-functioning research partnership that is mutually beneficial. The team felt strongly that it is vital to explore practice and report on current initiatives, as the practice/research divide can mean that innovative practice sometimes does not get the

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<sup>68</sup> Robert W Strack, Cathleen Magill and Kara McDonagh, 'Engaging youth through photovoice' (2004) 5(1) *Health Promotion Practice* 49-58.

attention it needs and, thus, more widespread learning cannot be taken up beyond in-house projects elsewhere.

## V DISCUSSION

This research collaboration has been useful to clearly understand and articulate the policy context of practice. While practitioners had this understanding, this was not recorded and that meant that it was difficult to share this information widely. The project has helped crystallise gaps and necessary action identified by practitioners in the reports and inquiries that led to policy changes. The research collaboration has been mutually beneficial and provided learning and insights for all involved.

### A *Policy and Reports — Gaps and Critique*

The major reports that explored youth crime and justice in recent years have taken on a strong community voice and focus.<sup>69</sup> However, an evident oversight that our work wants to remedy is that they did not appear to include engagement with young people who were offending or at risk of offending. The research aspirations reported on here were primarily motivated by the absence of a youth voice in the criminal justice and community arena in Townsville, and in many past reports. The identified inquiry and reports led to important changes in youth justice and a focus on collaborative work and providing diversionary activities aimed at engaging young people and their families in the process of reducing offending behaviour in the community. We would like to argue that not engaging the young people who are at risk of offending or are offending in the strategies and solutions to youth crime is an oversight that needs to be addressed. As evident from the interim findings, hearing the voices of young people is important as it produces positive change within their lives, empowering and encouraging participation within services, and enhancing agency.

### B *Learning Through the Research Collaboration*

Collaborating on this research is having positive impacts on the research team members, beyond the findings that we will be able to share with others. The research process has been a process of mutual learning and growing. For example, sharing research outcomes and discussing these as part of the data analysis has enriched the development and understanding of the emerging themes. It was practitioners on the team who emphasised the importance of youth ‘peer relationships’ evident in the data and, at other times, they guided our thinking about data collection and culturally appropriate ways of working. The process facilitated by a mutual two-way learning approach was crucial between non-Indigenous and Indigenous team members,<sup>70</sup> and between practitioners and academics. It was important to create a safe space for exchange and discussion and listening to each other.<sup>71</sup> Practitioner insights have helped the academic partners to develop new perspectives and ideas about how research can be made accessible to

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<sup>69</sup> See, e.g. Aitkinson (n 8), t Kathryn McMillan QC and Megan Davis (n 42) and Smith (n 5).

<sup>70</sup> Nalita Nungarrayi Turner et al (n 65)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



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practitioners, for example by including easy read posters for workplaces as summaries and appendixes to research publications. Academic involvement has facilitated research processes and understandings. The process of data analysis in the systematic review has been one of discovery and delight, helping practitioners and academics to engage with the research findings, and facilitating critical discussion that has further ignited and maintained enthusiasm for research and evidence-informed practice. The involvement of research students has helped the service to develop and articulate theory understanding for practice.

## VI CONCLUSION

This paper reports on the underpinning reasons for the establishment of The Lighthouse in this region within the context of current youth justice policy, the evolving nature of our research partnership, and emerging findings of our work together. Interim findings of the research are useful for practice and thus help to strengthen the practice-research integration. Findings from the collaborative research projects will be widely disseminated.