

## Juvenile Justice Report Launch Q&A

### 1. Have you any comments on OOHC residential care services that use the police service as a disciplinary measure that then lessens the likelihood that police will attend when serious criminal behaviours occur?

Our report includes findings from [Gerard et al.'s 2019 research](#) into frontline workers' perceptions of the criminalisation of young people in residential care. Their project drew on interviews with 46 professionals in NSW, including care staff, police, lawyers and Youth Justice caseworkers. Across the board, interviewees believed that adolescents in residential care were more likely to be charged with criminal offences for behavioural problems which could be dealt with less punitively in other settings (e.g. the home).

The research did not include any specific comments on the police's reluctance to attend residential care due to a history of frequent call-outs. But it did find that police respondents were frustrated with how staff used their presence as a behaviour management tool, as opposed to managing the issue themselves, 'in-house'. This was particularly the case for 'missing children' reports, many of whom, according to the police returned to the facility that same day. During interviews, the residential staff explained that their reliance on calling the police was due to the lack of adequate training and remuneration for staff, which left workers ill-equipped to deal with challenging behaviour.

### 2. Are these young people engaged with their schools? They could spot the disabilities earlier than when they get to youth justice.

Research tells us that young people involved in the criminal justice system have high rates of [disrupted education](#), poor [literacy levels](#) and [early school leaving](#). [In a 2008 study](#) of 50 boys and young men under community-based orders in Victoria, 64% had only completed schooling up to Year 8.

But in the cases where at-risk children and young people are still attending school, it can be a fruitful site for early intervention. This is the logic behind the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model, which is a homelessness program offering in-school screening for disadvantaged youth. Those who are identified as having early risk factors are then linked to appropriate local services to prevent their situation from escalating. An [evaluation of the COSS model](#) in Geelong found that the program reduced the number of adolescents presenting to local homelessness services by 40%. Yfoundations would support the expansion of evidence-based early intervention programs which screen students for risk factors including offending.

### **3. What special assistance can be offered to children in youth justice who are in OOHC? Many are homeless both pre and post detention, notwithstanding that they already live in a care system that is supposed to protect them from homelessness?**

As described in our report, the adolescents who have a history of care and end up homeless or in detention are amongst the most vulnerable in our society. Better outcomes for this cohort rely on both specific, targeted responses and structural changes to the child protection system. Our report makes several recommendations to better support this vulnerable group, including increasing the number of evidence-based placements for adolescents with complex needs.

But more placements alone will not be sufficient. Our [submission](#) to the 2020 Inquiry into Child Protection and Social Services outlines the broader reforms which are needed to address this failing system. These include reviewing the role of voluntary out-of-home care and increasing funding for early intervention. Yfoundations also stands with the [Home Stretch campaign](#) in calling for the NSW Government to raise the age of leaving care to 21, which would extend support for this vulnerable group and [reduce their risk of negative long-term outcomes](#).