



# New South Wales Youth Justice Inquiry

March 2026

## About The Salvation Army

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The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence and modern slavery services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at: <

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>

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## Our commitment to inclusion

The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children. Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

The Salvation Army is a worldwide movement known for its acceptance and unconditional love for all people. We love unconditionally, because God first loved us. The Bible says, “God so loves the world” (John 3:16, RGT). As both a church and charity, we believe all people are loved by God and are worthy of having their needs met. Everyone is welcome to find love, hope, and acceptance at The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army Australia Territory wishes to acknowledge that members of the LGBTIQA+ community have experienced hurt and exclusion because of mixed comments and responses made in the past. The Salvation Army is committed to inclusive practice that recognises and values diversity. We are ensuring our services affirm the right to equality, fairness, and decency for all LGBTIQA+ people, rectifying all forms of discriminatory practice throughout the organisation.

We seek to partner with LGBTIQA+ people and allies to work with us to build an inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe environment in every aspect of Salvation Army organisation and services. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected.

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: [salvationarmy.org.au/about-us](https://salvationarmy.org.au/about-us)





## Executive summary

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The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the New South Wales (NSW) Select Committee on Youth Justice (the Committee) in relation to the Inquiry into Youth Justice.

The Salvation Army supports children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation in every jurisdiction across Australia. This support includes specialist children, youth and family programs, youth justice programs, housing and homelessness services, family and domestic violence programs, financial counselling and material aid, education, employment and training services, social and community activities, and drug and alcohol services.

A list of the services we provide that are most relevant to young people at risk of, or who are engaging in offending, and services relevant to addressing intergenerational offending, can be found in **Appendix A**. Case studies that detail stories of young people supported by The Salvation Army who have encountered justice system responses, can be found in **Appendix B**.

We have approached this submission from the perspective of our frontline services, both youth and adult focused, bringing to the Committee's attention the critical need for youth justice reform to be compassionate, holistic and evidence-based. We have drawn upon the expertise of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander team to highlight the disproportionate impact of harmful youth justice responses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, our Research and Outcomes Measurement team to provide insights related to monitoring and evaluation, and our Safeguarding team to demonstrate the importance of embedding the voices of young people in guiding solutions.

At the heart of our submission is the need to address the unique risks and vulnerabilities of children and young people who offend, and to ensure responses do no further harm.

What this means in practice is that responses must:

- Prioritise the rights, safety and best interests of children and young people;
- Work alongside families to ensure they can live with dignity, break cycles of violence and offending, and intervene early to reduce the need for statutory intervention;
- Reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people;
- Prioritise prevention, early intervention and diversion, ensuring programs are strengths-based and responsive to the impacts of trauma;
- Ensure timely, supported transition planning for young people exiting incarceration to promote effective reintegration back into the community; and
- Embed meaningful participation for young people themselves in matters that impact them.

The Salvation Army's submission also underscores the importance of ensuring the workforce and sector are well supported and resourced, and recognises the role of data collection and outcomes measurement in identifying impact and fostering continuous improvement.

The Salvation Army has made **35** recommendations for the Committee to consider. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

# Summary of recommendations

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## Recommendation 1

1.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government immediately raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.

## Recommendation 2

1.17 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government:

- *Work with the Commonwealth Government to increase investment in alternative educational pathways that promote equitable access to schooling and training opportunities for all children and young people;*
- *Work with the Commonwealth Government to increase access to flexible learning programs and additional tailored support that is available onsite in mainstream schools; and*
- *Invest in education pathways that are accessible before, during, and after encountering justice responses. This should include a specific focus on continuity and quality of education, that is culturally safe and appropriate and meets the unique needs of the young person.*

## Recommendation 3

1.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government commit to a dedicated youth housing and homelessness response within the NSW Homelessness Strategy. This should acknowledge and address the multidimensional needs of children and young people in a manner that adult homelessness responses cannot.

## Recommendation 4

1.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government fund frontline services – including youth and family violence services – for the provision of brokerage funds so children and young people can access sport and recreational activities.

## Recommendation 5

1.28 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government on measures to alleviate financial hardship. This should include meaningfully increasing income support payments, such as Youth Allowance and JobSeeker, to ensure children, young people and their families can live with dignity.

## Recommendation 6

1.31 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase access to services that address substance use as a risk factor for youth offending. This should include programs for young people engaging in substance use, or families where intergenerational substance use is present.

## Recommendation 7

1.39 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure young people experiencing mental ill-health and disability can access timely, non-judgemental and effective support in- and outside of custody. This requires:

- *Education and awareness training across the frontline justice system to improve understandings of mental health and disability, including neurodiversity, learning disability and acquired brain injury;*

- *Increased access to specialists co-located within existing youth services and law enforcement settings, including disability support workers and mental health workers; and*
- *Increased screening for young people upon first engagement with justice responses.*

### **Recommendation 8**

1.46 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase investment in community-based prevention and early intervention services to increase early detection of families at risk of statutory child protection services. Where possible, families should be supported to reduce the need for responses which mandate out of home care arrangements.

### **Recommendation 9**

1.52 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government treat intergenerational offending as a family-system issue, delivering responses that work with whole families to break offending cycles. Responses should address exploitative relationships, unsafe home environments, institutionalisation and intergenerational trauma and disadvantage.

### **Recommendation 10**

2.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in an integrated service system that is well equipped to respond to the intersectional needs of children and young people who are impacted by family and domestic violence.

### **Recommendation 11**

2.18 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government focus early intervention efforts on supporting children and young people experiencing, using, or at risk of using, violence in the home.

### **Recommendation 12**

3.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensures that responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who offend are non-discriminatory, minimise compounding trauma and promote the wellbeing and safety of children, families and communities.

### **Recommendation 13**

3.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government develops and implements youth justice responses that are grounded in kinship systems, cultural values, community expectations, and cultural law.

### **Recommendation 14**

3.20 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government significantly expand and adequately resource culturally responsive specialist courts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. This should include:

- *Investing in culturally grounded models; and*
- *Ensuring that community-led, culturally informed processes are embedded across jurisdictions to strengthen engagement, improve understanding, and reduce recidivism.*

### **Recommendation 15**

3.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government expand access to culturally safe and appropriate, community-led legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

children, young people and their families. This should ensure they can engage effectively with the legal system and navigate complex statutory processes.

#### **Recommendation 16**

4.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensures that responses to young people who encounter the justice system prioritise physical and emotional safety, stability and consistency.

#### **Recommendation 17**

4.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth offending that are holistic, community-led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should be sustainable, by leverage existing, quality, youth service infrastructure to expand support capability.

#### **Recommendation 18**

4.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase investment in social, creative, sporting and recreational activities that will engage children and young people in a meaningful and prosocial way. Activities should be free or low cost, conveniently located and linked to support services.

#### **Recommendation 19**

4.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government draw on learnings from successful diversionary responses and invest in those which promote capacity building and positive behaviour change. These should include police diversion, restorative justice conferencing and work development orders.

#### **Recommendation 20**

4.38 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in and deliver programs which encourage building sustainable connections and model healthy relationships for young people who offend, or who are at risk of offending.

#### **Recommendation 21**

4.43 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure law enforcement prioritise building strong, positive, and meaningful relationships with young people, families and community-based organisations.

#### **Recommendation 22**

4.47 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure responses to young people who offend prioritises choice and autonomy for best outcomes.

#### **Recommendation 23**

5.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in transition planning processes and programs that promote a seamless and supported transition back into the community upon release for young people. Programs should include practical and psychosocial, accommodation-related and living skills support.

#### **Recommendation 24**

6.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government commit to adequate funding for community-based services. Funding cycles should be long-term, be reflective of year-on-year increasing service delivery and administration costs, include scaling-up opportunities for successful initiatives and account for program evaluation.

#### **Recommendation 25**

6.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure funding models allow for flexibility in service delivery to remove barriers to access services for children, young people and families.

#### **Recommendation 26**

6.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure frontline services and programs are properly funded to provide interventions and opportunities among the workforce that address employee burnout and fatigue, and promote job satisfaction.

#### **Recommendation 27**

6.20 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in funding models that promote cross-service communication, collaboration, partnership and relationship building. This should also include co-locating services and specialists and should extend to collaboration with courts and justice services.

#### **Recommendation 28**

6.24 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government consider the significant social and economic benefits that affordable housing for essential workers can offer individuals and the community, and prioritise the development and delivery of affordable housing initiatives and reforms.

#### **Recommendation 29**

6.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government mandate specialist training for frontline workers across the youth sector. This training should be regular, and cover the impacts of trauma, child-centred practice, and de-escalation techniques.

#### **Recommendation 30**

7.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government:

- *Support organisations to develop outcomes measurement frameworks that can ensure program accountability and impact, whilst also fostering innovation and continuous improvement; and*
- *Ensure policy decisions, funding, investment and system reform is based on research and outcomes measurement.*

#### **Recommendation 31**

8.3 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in oversight mechanisms that are equipped to respond to the needs of young people across both government and non-government programs. This should include avenues for information sharing between frontline services, justice responses, health and education programs, cultural leaders and informal community-based programs.

#### **Recommendation 32**

8.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in governance and funding models that support community-led, place-based approaches to youth services within the youth justice system.

**Recommendation 33**

8.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions, to develop a nationally consistent framework for young people who offend across Australia.

**Recommendation 34**

8.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government prioritise the rights and best interests of children in designing, developing and delivering responses to youth justice in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Recommendation 35**

9.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in the development of formal mechanisms that empower children and young people with lived experience of the justice system to provide advice to government regarding service delivery, policy and legislative reform.

# 1 Underlying drivers of children's contact with the criminal justice system

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1.1 There are many known risk factors that contribute to children and young people offending, no matter where they live. Children and young people who encounter justice system responses often present with a range of complexities, and we know that many have been victims themselves. In regional and rural communities, children and young people face additional unique challenges because of their geographical location. Ensuring that the physical, mental, emotional, cultural, spiritual and social health needs of children and young people are met will likely reduce offending behaviours and consequently increase community safety.<sup>1</sup>

## Childhood development and susceptibility to peer pressure

1.2 Transitioning through childhood and adolescence is a period of profound physical, physiological, emotional, cognitive and social change.<sup>2</sup> This period of development has a significant impact on children and young people's risk taking and potentially offending behaviours, and their susceptibility to peer pressure.

1.3 Most children and young people who offend, engage in relatively low-level conduct. Often behaviours are impulsive, opportunistic, and driven by peer pressure with most children and young people desisting over time.<sup>3</sup> Many of the young people who encounter youth justice responses and are supported by our frontline youth services, have engaged in risky and offending behaviours due to pressure from friends or peers.

1.4 Evidence demonstrates that children under the age of 14 cannot have developed sufficient cognitive capacity to assume criminal culpability.<sup>4</sup> This developmental immaturity affects several skills including impulsivity, cognitive reasoning, and consequential thinking, all of which can be linked with the impacts of peer pressure on offending behaviour. The effect is more pronounced in younger children.<sup>5</sup> By incarcerating or punishing young people within the justice system, the child's development and long-term health and wellbeing outcomes will be impacted. Early engagement in the justice system also increases their susceptibility to engage in further offending.<sup>6</sup> This is amplified where children are incarcerated alongside adults or justice system responses are analogous with those provided to adults.

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, S., Southwell, A., Stafford, N., Goodhue, R., Jackson, D. and Smith, C. (2015). *Better Systems, Better Chances: A Review of Research and Practice for Prevention and Early Intervention*. Canberra: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/335168/better\\_systems\\_better\\_chances\\_review.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/335168/better_systems_better_chances_review.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Mastorci, F., Lazzeri, F., Vassalle, C. & Pingitore, A. (2024). The transition from childhood to adolescence: between health and vulnerability. *Children*, 11(8). <https://doi.org/10.3390/children11080989>.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022-23). *Recorded Crime – Offenders*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-offenders/latest-release>.

<sup>4</sup> Cunneen, C. (2017). Arguments for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. *The University of New South Wales, Research Report*. <https://www.cypp.unsw.edu.au/sites/ypp.unsw.edu.au/files/Cunneen%20%282017%29%20Arguments%20for%20raising%20the%20minimum%20age%20of%20criminal%20responsibility.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Richards, K. (2011). What makes juvenile offenders different from adult offenders? *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 409. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti274705>.

- 1.5 Consistent with the advocacy of the Raise the Age campaign, of which The Salvation Army is a public supporter, we maintain that the minimum age of criminal responsibility must be raised to 14 years, without exception.<sup>7</sup>

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*“It’s important to discuss the distinct ages in child development because under 18 we are talking about children...and having an incarceration response to children engaged in normal risk-taking behaviour...but if we continue to criminalise people during this age then we’re going to put them into a life of criminality.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth Services Manager**

### **Recommendation 1**

- 1.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government immediately raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years old, without exception.**

### Adverse childhood experiences

- 1.7 Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) encompass cumulative experiences during childhood, such as maltreatment and disadvantage, which are stressful and potentially traumatic.<sup>8</sup> These experiences permeate the life of most of the young people supported within The Salvation Army’s frontline youth services.
- 1.8 ACEs are closely linked risk factors which contribute to offending behaviours amongst children and young people, and result in contact with police and the youth justice system.<sup>9</sup> Many of the young people we support have encountered justice system responses – being forced to navigate these alongside experiences of disadvantage such as family breakdown or violence, abuse or neglect, poverty, homelessness or substance use related concerns.
- 1.9 Medical evidence suggest that ACEs disrupt brain development in critical early childhood years, affecting self-regulation, reward-seeking, executive function, and threat perception, all of which is linked with behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Raise the Age New South Wales. <https://raisetheagensw.org.au/>; Raise the Age. <https://raisetheage.org.au/>.

<sup>8</sup> Malvaso, C., Day, A., Cale, J., Hackett, L., Delfabbro, P., & Ross, S. (2022). Adverse Childhood Experiences and Trauma Among Young People in the Youth Justice System. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. [https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651\\_adverse\\_childhood\\_experiences\\_and\\_trauma\\_among\\_young\\_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso.short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20cut%2E%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.](https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/ti651_adverse_childhood_experiences_and_trauma_among_young_people.pdf#:~:text=In%20fact%2C%20a%20recent%20systematic%20review%20by%20Malvaso.short%20of%20the%20diagnostic%20cut%2E%80%91off%20for%20mild%20PTSD.)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Emerging Minds. (2020). *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Summary of Evidence and Impacts*. <https://d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net/content/uploads/2020/02/19102540/ACES-Summary-of-Evidence-and-Impacts-V2.pdf>.

### *School disengagement and educational exclusion*

- 1.10 Educational opportunities, both mainstream and alternative, must be equitable and accessible for all children and young people across NSW. Our experience is that a lack of school engagement, coupled with antisocial peer and friendship groups, places them at increased risk of offending. School and educational pathways offer not only an opportunity for learning and a gateway to employment pathways, but also stability, consistency, and a safe place to engage with peers and the community.
- 1.11 Disengagement from school, characterised by low academic achievement, truancy, and exclusion<sup>11</sup> are risk factors for involvement in the youth justice system, and are predictive of antisocial cognition and youth re-offending.<sup>12</sup> Our frontline services report that disengagement from school can have a variety of causes. For example, a young person may not have access to transport to get them to school, they may have limited family support at home, or they may have had negative experiences at school where their needs are neither understood nor met.
- 1.12 The Salvation Army understands that schools in regional and rural NSW have access to fewer resources than those available to young people in metropolitan Sydney, resulting in poorer educational engagement and outcomes for these young people. In regional and remote areas students are less likely to continue secondary schooling to Year 12 compared to matched students in major cities, narrowing their range of post-school options.<sup>13</sup>
- 1.13 For some, mainstream educational institutions or programs may not be appropriate. Alternative education pathways can be protective, providing flexibility and an opportunity for prevention and early intervention when children and young people are meaningfully engaged in a way that meets their needs. Pathways can include flexible learning programs onsite in mainstream schools or be outside of the mainstream education system and should include additional supports for the young person, and where appropriate, their family.
- 1.14 We point to our Independent Schools initiative (operating in Queensland), and our Tools for the Trade Program (operating in Victoria) as examples of alternative education pathways. These programs are outlined in **Appendix A**.
- 1.15 School holiday immersion camps could also present opportunities to engage children and their parents or carers to encourage social connection, develop living skills and build capacity across the whole family unit.

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<sup>11</sup> Hancock, K., & Zubrick, S. (2015). *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*. Western Australia: Commissioner for Children and Young People. <https://ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/1422/report-education-children-at-risk-of-disengaging-from-school-literature-review.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Victoria State Government Sentencing Advisory Council. (2016). *Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria*. [https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending\\_by\\_Children\\_and\\_Young\\_People\\_in\\_Victoria.pdf](https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Reoffending_by_Children_and_Young_People_in_Victoria.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> New South Wales Auditor-General. (2023). Regional, Rural and Remote Education: Performance Audit. *Audit Office of New South Wales*. [Report on Rural and remote education.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/reports/2023/regional-rural-and-remote-education).

1.16 School disengagement is also a consequence of young people being detained and incarcerated. Incarceration is highly disruptive, both when a young person is removed from the community and again when they are released. Access to educational pathways in custodial settings differs across institutions, is dependent on the age of the child, but these programs are inconsistent across facilities. In our experience, TAFE or one-day courses (for example, White Card - Australia's mandatory construction induction training) or emotional learning, communication and living skills programs are offered in some detention facilities but not all. Education which meets the diverse needs of the young person must be a priority throughout the lifecycle of justice system responses.

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*“The school system is a place where young people are falling through the cracks. How can the [mainstream] school system better support young people at risk? How can they [young people] be reconnected and re-engaged?”*

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**- A Salvation Army Employment Plus Manager**

## Recommendation 2

### 1.17 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government:

- **Work with the Commonwealth Government to increase investment in alternative educational pathways that promote equitable access to schooling and training opportunities for all children and young people;**
- **Work with the Commonwealth Government to increase access to flexible learning programs and additional tailored support that is available onsite in mainstream schools; and**
- **Invest in education pathways that are accessible before, during, and after encountering justice responses. This should include a specific focus on continuity and quality of education, that is culturally safe and appropriate and meets the unique needs of the young person.**

### *Homelessness and housing instability*

1.18 Young people often experience homelessness or housing instability due to a combination of factors including challenging home lives, trauma, discrimination, mental ill-health or turbulent family relationships.<sup>14</sup> More than half of children and young people who received support from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2024-25, experienced co-occurring vulnerabilities.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2025). *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2024-25*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

- 1.19 Australia's housing crisis is now entrenched, affecting individuals and households across age, income levels and geographic locations. For young people, where it is no longer safe for them to live at home, gaps in service provision are coupled with shortages in youth crisis, transitional and supported housing. Increasing rental pressure often means that homelessness becomes the only alternative.
- 1.20 We see the impact of the lack of safe and affordable housing on young people; homelessness often acts as a risk factor for initial offending. Offending can become necessary to survive for a young person without housing and experiencing crisis. Homelessness is also a consequence of justice responses, incarceration and institutional child protection responses. Children and young people might lose their accommodation upon incarceration and are then held in detention for prolonged periods due to no suitable accommodation upon release.<sup>16</sup> Many young people leaving institutional care settings also exit into homelessness due to being ill-prepared for independent living upon completion of care orders and due to severe shortages of appropriate and affordable housing. This is discussed in pages 15-16.

### Recommendation 3

- 1.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government commit to a dedicated youth housing and homelessness response within the NSW Homelessness Strategy.<sup>17</sup> This should acknowledge and address the multidimensional needs of children and young people in a manner that adult homelessness responses cannot.**

#### Poverty and financial hardship

- 1.22 Socioeconomic disadvantage, poverty, financial hardship, and criminality are often interrelated. Children from the lowest socio-economic areas are seven times more likely to be under supervision than children from the highest socio-economic areas.<sup>18</sup> The poverty rate across regional and rural NSW is higher and more widespread than Greater Sydney, being 25 per cent higher for young people (15-24 years) in rural and regional NSW.<sup>19</sup>



*“They [a 10- and 11-year-old child] were stealing food because they were hungry. Because their grandmother doesn’t get paid to care for them.”*



**- A Salvation Army Youth Services Regional Manager**

<sup>16</sup> Watt, E., Iannelli, O. & Booth, S. (2021). *Under 18-Year-Olds are Still Being Locked Up Simply Because They Are Homeless*. <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2021/10/under-18-year-olds-are-still-being-locked-up-simply-because-they-are-homeless/>.

<sup>17</sup> NSW Government. (2025) *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035*. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2025-08/nsw-homelessness-strategy-2025-2035.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Hollonds, A. (2024). 'Help way earlier!' How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/25477/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_accessible\\_0-1-2.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_accessible_0-1-2.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> NSW Council of Social Services. (2023). *Mapping Economic Disadvantage in New South Wales*. [https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NCOSS\\_MappingEconomicDisadvantage\\_Report\\_April23\\_v7.pdf](https://www.ncoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/NCOSS_MappingEconomicDisadvantage_Report_April23_v7.pdf)

- 1.23 We hold concerns that increasing cost of living pressures are contributing to young people offending. Our frontline services have seen cases where young people offend to survive, for example shoplifting to obtain their basic needs, or to sell off for money to afford basic necessities. Evidence supports this experience; young people who experience inequalities related to financial hardship and poverty are at increased risk of offending.<sup>20</sup> We have also observed instances where young people offend to address their family's needs, or due to family pressure related to experiences of poverty and financial disadvantage.
- 1.24 Alleviating financial hardship may prevent the onset of harmful behaviour in young people, where the behaviour is made necessary by disadvantage or social adversity. We identify a need for the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government to meaningfully increase the rate of income support payments.
- 1.25 Experiences of financial hardship and distress have a corrosive impact on families and can impact the actions and choices made by parents and carers.<sup>21</sup> This can include being unable to enrol children into recreational activities due to prohibitive costs, which can result in conflict or behavioural issues. We see the issue being particularly pervasive in circumstances where a parent is leaving family and domestic violence, where financial hardship is exacerbated and access to finances is critical for safety.
- 1.26 Discussed in Chapter 3 of this submission, recreational activities provide a space for children and young people to engage with their peers and the community in a prosocial way, build resilience, and decreases opportunities to engage in anti-social or risky behaviour.<sup>22</sup> Appropriate and affordable recreational opportunities must be financially accessible to prevent the pervasive impact of poverty. Whilst we acknowledge existing NSW Government initiatives to increase access to recreational activities,<sup>23</sup> financial support remains nominal. We have seen the benefit of frontline services providing brokerage funds so children and young people can access sport and recreational activities. By providing brokerage, the young person can have agency and choice in how to use funds to engage in recreational activities.

#### Recommendation 4

- 1.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government fund frontline services – including youth and family violence services – for the provision of brokerage funds so children and young people can access sport and recreational activities.**

<sup>20</sup> Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People. (2021). *Residential Care Contributing to 'Criminalisation' of Young People*. <https://gcyp.sa.gov.au/2021/10/14/residential-care-contributing-to-criminalisation-of-young-people/>.

<sup>21</sup> Homel, R., Freiberg, K., Branch, S. & Le, H. (2015). Preventing the Onset of Youth Offending: The Impact of the Pathways to Prevention Project on Child Behaviour and Wellbeing. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 481. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi481>.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (Undated). *Crime Prevention through Sports*. <https://www.unodc.org/dohadecclaration/en/topics/crime-prevention-through-sports.html>.

<sup>23</sup> New South Wales Government. (2024). *Active and Creative Kids Voucher*. <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/active-and-creative-kids-voucher>.

## Recommendation 5

**1.28 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government on measures to alleviate financial hardship. This should include meaningfully increasing income support payments, such as Youth Allowance and JobSeeker, to ensure children, young people and their families can live with dignity.**

### *Exposure to, or lived experience of substance use*

- 1.29 The use of alcohol or drugs by parents, caregivers, or children themselves increases the risk of offending through exposure to substance related risks.<sup>24</sup> The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) reported in 2021 that incarcerated children and young people were found to use a wider range of drugs, use more frequently and start using at a younger age, in comparison to those not in custody.<sup>25</sup>
- 1.30 Better support for addressing substance use concerns for young people and their families, can have a positive impact in reducing harmful behaviours and in turn, contact with the justice system. Our frontline services identify the need for drug and alcohol treatment programs to embed the voices of lived experience through mentors or peer workers to reduce stigma in seeking treatment, promote shared understandings, and improve relationship building amongst those seeking treatment. Evidence echoes this sentiment.<sup>26</sup>

## Recommendation 6

**1.31 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase access to services that address substance use as a risk factor for youth offending. This should include programs for young people engaging in substance use, or families where intergenerational substance use is present.**

### *Mental ill health and cognitive disability*

- 1.32 The prevalence of mental ill-health and cognitive disability amongst children and young people in the youth justice system has increased. Sixty per cent of children who interact with youth justice systems present with two or more mental health disorders, and 33 per cent of incarcerated young people report high levels of psychological distress.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Dodd, J., & Sagers, S. (2006). The Impact of Drug and Alcohol Misuse on Children and Families. *Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth*. [https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download\\_file/id/143/filename/The\\_impact\\_of\\_drug\\_and\\_alcohol\\_misuse\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_families.pdf](https://www.aracy.org.au/publications-resources/command/download_file/id/143/filename/The_impact_of_drug_and_alcohol_misuse_on_children_and_families.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Payne, J., & Prichard, J. (2005). Key Findings from the Drug Use Careers of Juvenile Offenders Study. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*. No. 304. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi304>.

<sup>26</sup> Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF). (2019). *Lived Experience*. [https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/Lived\\_Experience\\_PP1.pdf](https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/Lived_Experience_PP1.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> National Mental Health Commission. (2023). *Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform across Australia*. <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/publications/justice-and-child-wellbeing-reform-across-australia>.

- 1.33 Mental ill-health has been linked with the increased likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviours resulting in police engagement,<sup>28</sup> as has cognitive disability.<sup>29</sup> For those experiencing mental ill-health in rural and remote areas, a key issue is restricted access to mental health services.<sup>30</sup> People with disability living in rural, regional, and remote areas experience similar challenges in accessing support with fewer services available.<sup>31</sup>
- 1.34 Custodial settings for young people with mental ill-health or cognitive disability can be especially challenging and exacerbate concerns, making early identification and therapeutic responses preferred. Many young people who have encountered justice responses have not had access to screening or the appropriate resources and support from an early age.
- 1.35 Recognition, diagnosis, support and outcomes throughout a young person's time connected with justice responses is often dependent on the level of awareness, mental health and disability literacy and competence of key decision makers. This includes legal representatives, youth justice workers, magistrates and law enforcement. In our experience, screening and support for both mental health and disability within the justice system is often poorly understood or not given sufficient consideration.
- 1.36 Young people who are experiencing significant mental ill-health at or around the time an offence occurs may be diverted under the *Mental Health Act 2007* (NSW). To access this pathway, they must be properly screened and must agree to participate in that screening. When a young person lacks understanding of the process, does not have appropriate support, or does not have a trusted person to advocate for them, they can face substantial barriers to accessing this form of diversion.
- 1.37 Young people who have been incarcerated can access a range of supports, including psychologists and services provided through Justice Health. However, this engagement generally ends once a young person is released, and transition planning into community-based support services after release tends to occur on an ad hoc basis.
- 1.38 There is a need to ensure that justice interventions recognise psychosocial factors and adopt therapeutic responses where possible, rather than punishment-oriented responses for young people experiencing mental ill-health or disability.

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<sup>28</sup> Morgan, M., & Higginson, A. (2023). Police and Procedural Justice: Perceptions of Young People with Mental Illness. *Policing and Society*, 33(7), 841-860. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2023.2207714>.

<sup>29</sup> Boiteux, S., & Poynton, S. (2023). Offending by Young People with Disability: A NSW Linkage Study. *Crime and Justice Bulletin*. No. 254. NSW: Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. Full report available at [www.boscar.nsw.gov.au](http://www.boscar.nsw.gov.au).

<sup>30</sup> National Rural Health Alliance. (2021). *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Australia: Fact Sheet*. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-mental-health-factsheet-july2021.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> National Rural Health Alliance. (2023). *Disability and Access to the NDIS in Rural Australia*. <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/nrha-disability-factsheet-feb-2023-final.pdf>.

## Recommendation 7

### 1.39 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure young people experiencing mental ill-health and disability can access timely, non-judgemental and effective support in- and outside of custody. This requires:

- Education and awareness training across the frontline justice system to improve understandings of mental health and disability, including neurodiversity, learning disability and acquired brain injury;
- Increased access to specialists co-located within existing youth services and law enforcement settings, including disability support workers and mental health workers; and
- Increased screening for young people upon first engagement with justice responses.

## Out-of-home care

### *Exposure to abuse, neglect and trauma*

1.40 Child abuse and neglect impacts wellbeing outcomes for children and young people and increases the risk of offending.<sup>32</sup> This is regardless of whether treatment of the young person was intentional or not. Children exposed to abuse may develop dysregulated behaviours in response to difficult life experiences, which can amount to offending.<sup>33</sup> AIC found that 94 per cent of young people under youth justice supervision were known to child protection services and 83 per cent had at least one notification for alleged maltreatment.<sup>34</sup> Children outside of major metropolitan cities are disproportionately impacted by abuse, neglect, and other maltreatment. In 2023-24, children living in remote areas were three times more likely to have experienced maltreatment and more than twice as likely to be in out-of-home care than those living in major cities.<sup>35</sup>

1.41 Evidence demonstrates that children and young people who are placed in out of home care experience poorer wellbeing outcomes in general, than the broader population. This effect is consistent across educational attainment, physical and mental health, cultural identity, attachment behaviours and connection to community.<sup>36</sup> Our services have raised concerns about the pathway between encountering out-of-home care and statutory child protection responses and resultant youth justice system involvement.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). *Australia's children: in brief*. Canberra: AIHW. doi:10.25816/5e152818d082c; Cashmore, J. (2011). The Link Between Child Maltreatment and Adolescent Offending: Systems Neglect of Adolescents. *Family Matters*, 89, 31-41. [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm89d\\_0.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm89d_0.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> White, R., & Cunneen, C. (2015). Social Class, Youth Crime and Justice. In Goldson, B., & Muncie, J. (Eds) *Youth, Crime and Justice* (pp. 17-30), (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), Sage, London. <https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLRS/2015/59.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Malvaso C, Day A, Cale J, Hackett L, Delfabbro P & Ross S 2022. Adverse childhood experiences and trauma among young people in the youth justice system. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* No. 651. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti78610>.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2025). Child Protection Australia 2023-24. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/558c05da-13a9-4a2f-9afb-86a158318290/child-protection-australia-2023-24.pdf?v=20260122174257&inline=true>.

<sup>36</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020). *Australia's Children*. [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69\\_australias\\_children\\_print-report.pdf?v=20230921161957&inline=true](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6af928d6-692e-4449-b915-cf2ca946982f/aihw-cws-69_australias_children_print-report.pdf?v=20230921161957&inline=true).

- 1.42 Many of the children who encounter child protection responses do so due to experiences of significant harm. Over the lifespan of their care order, children and young people may be moved between several placements, often residing with strangers or in residential care facilities. Not only can this be scary and overwhelming, it is disruptive to their development, attachments and sense of stability and permanency; all of which can inhibit the development of ongoing safe and protective relationships and connections.
- 1.43 Children and young people within out-of-home care also experience obstacles to achieving success in education and employment, chronic homelessness and an accelerated need to develop independence and life skills. In our experience, a lack of sufficient coordination, transition planning and support to develop a young person's sense of 'readiness' impacts wellbeing outcomes, results in an over-reliance on crisis services, and increases the child's risk of encountering justice responses in the future.
- 1.44 Many children and young people who encounter statutory child protection responses have parents or family members who have also experienced this. The ongoing failure of care systems to respond to and support at-risk families early, perpetuates intergenerational transmission of trauma, child maltreatment and disadvantage.<sup>37</sup>
- 1.45 The Salvation Army is supportive of the recommendations made by the former National Children's Commissioner for reforming the child protection system.<sup>38</sup> The aim of institutional child protection responses must ensure that safety and wellbeing remain at the center, without setting children up to be funneled into the justice system.



*"We need responses for youth to be based on aspirational models. We need care to be stable and individualised so young people can forge sustainable connections."*



**- A Salvation Army Youth Specialist**

## **Recommendation 8**

- 1.46 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase investment in community-based prevention and early intervention services to increase early detection of families at risk of statutory child protection services. Where possible, families should be supported to reduce the need for responses which mandate out of home care arrangements.**

<sup>37</sup> Font, S., Cancian, M., Berger, L. & DiGiovanni, A. (2020). Patterns of Intergenerational Child Protective Services Involvement. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104247>.

<sup>38</sup> Hollonds, A. (2024). 'Help way earlier!' How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/25477/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_-\\_accessible\\_0-1-2.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0-1-2.pdf).

## Intergenerational offending

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*“It’s intergenerational...a lot of adults [in the justice system] are having children that are going through the system as well. They [children] see it as being quite normal to follow the same path and then they [children] get comfortable coming through the system.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Adult Justice System Program Team Leader**

- 1.47 The phenomenon of intergenerational offending, where offending behaviour is transmitted from one generation to another, is well established.<sup>39</sup> This occurs because of experiences, life events, and decisions made by members of one generation, that influence the next. It does not depend on “high crime families” and can originate out of a single role model that influences the behaviour over the life course of a young person.<sup>40</sup>
- 1.48 Our frontline services have identified that for young people whose parents, carers or significant role models are involved in the justice system, the effect is twofold.
- Firstly, engagement is normalised as they see adults cycle through the courts and custody, so this becomes familiar.
  - Secondly, young people and families become known in justice systems and so it becomes more difficult for young people to break free from these systems when they are often in the eyes of the law.
- 1.49 These intergenerational cycles are reinforced by trauma, institutionalisation, and a lack of viable pathways out. Many young people and their adult role models have experienced harm not only at home but within institutions themselves.
- 1.50 In our experience, intergenerational offending may also originate from exploitative relationships. Our services have identified, anecdotally, that young people are being criminalised due to being manipulated or coerced into engaging in harmful behaviour by adults; often those they rely on for care, housing, safety, or cultural connection. Such exploitation blurs the line between the young person offending or being victimised and can make it extremely difficult for them to break out of cycles of offending without sustained, trauma-informed intervention.
- 1.51 Punitive responses which fail to address intergenerational offending or exploitation as a root cause of the behaviour will not be effective. Diversionary responses, and programs that work with the whole family to address intergenerational disadvantage and antisocial behaviour are critical in reducing offending and reoffending among children and young people in this context.

<sup>39</sup> Tzoumakis, S., Burton, M., Carr, V., Dean, K., Laurens, K. & Green, M. (2019). The intergenerational transmission of criminal offending behaviours. Report to the Criminology Research Council. *Australian Institute of Criminology*.  
<https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/19-1415-FinalReport.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

“

*“We see instances where adults use the young people to commit crime...because they [young people] get lesser sentences. Once they’ve gone into the youth system, they get used to it and it’s hard to break the cycle”*

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**- A Salvation Army Adult Justice System Program Team Leader**

### **Recommendation 9**

**1.52 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government treat intergenerational offending as a family-system issue, delivering responses that work with whole families to break offending cycles. Responses should address exploitative relationships, unsafe home environments, institutionalisation and intergenerational trauma and disadvantage.**

## 2 Cycles of violence

### Family and domestic violence

- 2.1 Many of the children and young people who seek support from our services, do so due to family and domestic violence. Evidence shows that family violence can have lifelong harms for children and those around them, including psychological and behavioural impacts, health and socioeconomic impacts, and re-victimisation.<sup>41</sup> Though many children and young people who have experienced or witnessed violence at home will go on to use violence; it can increase the risk of intergenerational violence.<sup>42</sup>
- 2.2 Children need to be recognised and treated as victim-survivors in their own right. Under this principle, children need to be engaged and supported as individuals, through systems that recognise their needs and the benefit of intervention to prevent long-term negative impacts of trauma. To minimise ongoing trauma and reduce the potential for children to model harmful and violent behaviours in future, The Salvation Army urges that children and young people be able to access timely case management and therapeutic responses that promote their participation and are tailored according to age and development.<sup>43</sup>
- 2.3 We support the continuation and expansion of integrated services with funding for child and youth specialist workers to be co-located in specialist family and domestic violence services. This will assist in addressing the impacts of trauma at the earliest available opportunity and will create systems which prioritise long-term prevention for youth offending.



*“Some [young people see incarceration as a safer option than being on the street or being sent back to the parent or guardian who isn’t able to look after them, or taking advantage of them.”*



**- A Salvation Army Adult Justice System Program Team Leader**

### **Recommendation 10**

- 2.4 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in an integrated service system that is well equipped to respond to the intersectional needs of children and young people who are impacted by family and domestic violence.**

<sup>41</sup> Richards, K. (2011). Children’s Exposure to Domestic Violence in Australia. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 419. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi419>.

<sup>42</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2025). *Family, domestic and sexual violence*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/children-and-young-people>.

<sup>43</sup> Richards K 2011. Children’s exposure to domestic violence in Australia. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* no. 419. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti269351>; Safe + Equal. (Undated). *Supporting Children and Young People*. <https://safeandequal.org.au/working-in-family-violence/tailored%20inclusive-support/children-and-young-people/>.

## Adolescent violence in the home

- 2.5 The Salvation Army believes it is critical to focus attention on adolescent violence in the home (AVITH) to best support young people using, or at risk of using, violence to get help early. AVITH is a term that describes a pattern of violent behaviour used by a young person within their family, and may include property damage, financial, psychological, physical, and sexual forms of violence.<sup>44</sup>
- 2.6 Research by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) suggests that one in five young people surveyed had used violence against a family member.<sup>45</sup> Violence used by young people follows different patterns to those seen amongst adults. Young people's use of violence is commonly reactive and impulsive and may be driven by dysregulated emotional states, as a means of managing family conflict or a form of self-defence. This contrasts to more controlled patterns seen in adults.<sup>46</sup>

### *Ensuring responses are trauma-informed and fit-for-purpose*

- 2.7 AVITH research has pointed to an acute need for early intervention for families and young people that takes the form of wraparound collaborative responses.<sup>47</sup> The Salvation Army echo this sentiment, urging that responses aim to break down barriers and stigma surrounding seeking support. AVITH needs to be met with responses that are trauma-informed, address barriers to engagement, are flexible and tailored according to the individual needs of young people and their families and are intersectional and culturally safe.<sup>48</sup>
- 2.8 Trauma informed services should provide safe and nurturing spaces for young people to build trusting relationships with family and the community. We believe that AVITH interventions need to be completely external and prior to involvement with other intervention systems, such as youth justice or child protection services.
- 2.9 Anecdotally, our youth homelessness services are reporting rising numbers of young people entering our refuges who have used violence. We hold significant concerns around the lack of support options and interventions for these young people.
- 2.10 Our frontline services, including alcohol and other drug, youth justice, and homelessness services, have drawn attention to the uncharted nature of responding to AVITH. Within the family, domestic and sexual violence sectors, AVITH programs are limited, and investment is needed to adequately address the needs of young people using violence in the home. Interventions for adults who use violence are not effective for young people who require more tailored and individualised responses which are age and developmentally appropriate.

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<sup>44</sup> Campbell, E., Richter, J., Howard, J., & Cockburn, H. (2020). *The PIPA project: Positive interventions for perpetrators of adolescent violence in the home (AVITH)* (Research report, 04/2020). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, E., Ellard, R., Hew, E., Simpson, S., McCann, B. & Meyer, S. (2023). WRAP around families experiencing AVITH: Towards a collaborative service response (Research report, 04/2023). ANROWS.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Campbell, E., Ellard, R., Hew, E., Simpson, S., McCann, B. & Meyer, S. (2023). WRAP around families experiencing AVITH: Towards a collaborative service response (Research report, 04/2023). ANROWS.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

- 2.11 The Salvation Army highlights the need for the development of educational initiatives targeted at children and young people using, or at risk of using, violence. This could include school-based programs that focus on behaviour in healthy relationships, conflict resolution, positive coping mechanisms and emotional regulation. Consideration must be given to engage young people living with a disability and for young people across all cognitive abilities in the development of these programs.
- 2.12 We also urge the need to utilise cultural strengths when engaging with young people at risk of using violence who are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Emphasis should be placed, and investment focussed, on programs and initiatives developed and facilitated by these communities, for their communities.

#### *Working with families to keep them strong and together*

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*“Families will often do everything not to report [violence], so they endure so much pain and harm to keep that young person safe, away from systems of child protection and justice...to keep their young person safe.”*

”

**- A Salvation Army Alcohol and Other Drug Services Coordinator**

- 2.13 The Salvation Army acknowledges that there are instances where family units are struggling to support and keep a young person using violence safe and at home. Our frontline services draw attention to fear of institutional responses, such as the child protection or justice systems, acting as a barrier for parents seeking help early. As a result, families might endure extensive damage and harm at the hands of the young person as opposed to engaging with child protection or justice services and responses. This effect can be further pronounced in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities where a history of, and ongoing systemic racism and discrimination has eroded trust in institutions, and amplifies the fears already stated.
- 2.14 We highlight the benefit of reunification style programs that provide respite, alongside working towards family preservation, restoration and rebuilding familial relationships. For example, we point to the government-funded Ruby’s Reunification Program in South Australia.<sup>49</sup>
- 2.15 We also highlight the benefit of outreach programs which provide family-based, integrated case management as an early intervention response supporting young people using violence within their family, friendship and community context. For example, we point to the Step Up Program in Victoria.<sup>50</sup> We believe that such programs, when implemented early, can prevent families getting to a point of crisis and therefore reduce the risk of the young person needing crisis support in the future.

<sup>49</sup> Uniting Communities. (Undated). *Rubys Reunification Program*. <https://www.unitingcommunities.org/service/rubys-reunification-program>.

<sup>50</sup> The Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre. (Undated). *Adolescent Family Violence – Step Up Program*. <https://www.safvcentre.org.au/our-services/adolescent-family-violence-step-up-program/>.

- 2.16 Restorative approaches must consider the severity and length in which violence has occurred in implementing long-term support and must be integrated into care prior to a young person returning home. They must provide opportunity for the voice of the young person to be heard, and to determine what family dynamics and structure looks and feels like to them. In our experience, it is common for young people to exit incarceration prior to being connected with wraparound support services and therefore they experience a gap in support. We suggest that the NSW Government consider the development of dual-referral pathways for young people to access both family violence and youth justice support in the lead up to, and post release, as part of an integrated service system.
- 2.17 Pathways should include in-reach support at an earlier stage, while a young person is in the prison system. This will enhance rapport and relationship building between the young person and support services, promoting meaningful engagement prior to release and establishing a pathway for long-term engagement post release. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 of this submission. We believe that accessing both specialist supports concurrently and with services operating in partnership pre and post release, would be an effective option to support reparative relationship work and will ensure continuity of support for the young person to integrate back into community, well after release.

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*“We’re partnering with a family violence service to work with families. That’s the opportunity we have... to try and work with families to keep them strong and together.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth Services Regional Manager**

### **Recommendation 11**

- 2.18 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government focus early intervention efforts on supporting children and young people experiencing, using, or at risk of using, violence in the home.**

### 3 Disproportionate impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

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- 3.1 The Salvation Army draws particular attention to the ongoing and disproportionate impacts of systemic discrimination, intergenerational trauma and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Our experience in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is that many of them continue to be disproportionately impacted by intergenerational trauma, child protection involvement, school disengagement, and youth justice systems.
- 3.2 The consequences of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are disproportionate, intergenerational, and ongoing. Forced displacement and assimilation, intergenerational trauma experienced by Stolen Generations survivors and descendants, cultural dispossession, social exclusion, and racism continue to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and creates an environment which perpetuates socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation.<sup>51</sup>
- 3.3 Ignoring the history of Australia, the consequences and impacts of past and ongoing colonisation, means failing to address the pervasive and deep-rooted injustices that shape the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. When we dismiss this, we overlook that disadvantage is reinforced in systems, perpetuating disparities in health, wellbeing, employment, education and economic opportunities.<sup>52</sup>
- 3.4 Young people and their families often remain entangled in systems such as justice and child protection for generations, unable to break away from cycles of intervention and surveillance. Intergenerational trauma is repeatedly passed down, yet little is done to meaningfully address or heal it. Current systems fail to recognise or respond to these deep-rooted impacts.
- 3.5 Many systems including child protection and youth justice systems, primarily adopt punitive approaches and operate in conflict with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. As a result, experiences of disadvantage and marginalisation amongst children, families, and communities exposed to these systems, are exacerbated. Family dysfunction and school disengagement are common consequences of this unaddressed trauma, which is why communities consistently emphasise that meaningful change must follow the principle of 'nothing about us, without us'.

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<sup>51</sup> Victoria State Government. (2022). *Underlying Causes of Aboriginal Over-representation*. <https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/the-agreement/aboriginal-over-representation-in-the-justice-system/underlying-causes-of-aboriginal>.

<sup>52</sup> Diversity Council Australia. (2025). *From acknowledgement to action: How organisations can support truth telling*. [https://www.dca.org.au/news/blog/from-acknowledgment-to-action-how-organisations-can-support-truth-telling?at\\_context=1558](https://www.dca.org.au/news/blog/from-acknowledgment-to-action-how-organisations-can-support-truth-telling?at_context=1558).

- 3.6 In our experience, racism and discrimination directed toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is prevalent amongst communities, particularly within regional and rural NSW. This often results in feelings of separation and isolation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Closing the Gap

- 3.7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to be disproportionately overrepresented in child protection and youth justice systems; not just in NSW but across the nation. In 2022, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were 19 times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be under youth justice supervision,<sup>53</sup> and comprised 42.8 per cent of children aged 0-17 years in out-of-home care.<sup>54</sup> Across Australia, of the 80 per cent of children in detention who were unsentenced, more than half were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.<sup>55</sup>
- 3.8 The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap) set the intention to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in detention by at least 30 per cent, by 2031, in target eleven. This target remains off-track.<sup>56</sup> Closing the Gap also sets the intention to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent in target twelve.<sup>57</sup>
- 3.9 Culturally, the kinship system has always been a protective and stabilising structure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. When opportunities to practise kinship are restricted or disregarded, harm is compounded. Placing kinship at the centre of government systems and service delivery is essential. When systems genuinely engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and uphold kinship structures, they can support far better outcomes for children, families, and communities.

“

*“What we’re seeing is, young people coming off country to be locked up. Total disconnect from their family, so when they’re released...they’re going back to the unknown and then getting locked up again.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Transitional Support Service Coordinator**

<sup>53</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2023). *Youth Justice in Australia*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/3fe01ba6-3917-41fc-a908-39290f9f4b55/aihw-juv-140.pdf?v=20230605182448&inline=true>.

<sup>54</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2023). *Closing the Gap: Annual Data Compilation Report*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/report/snapshot-socioeconomic#seo11>.

<sup>55</sup> Hollonds, A. (2024). ‘Help way earlier!’ How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/25477/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_-\\_accessible\\_0-1-2.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0-1-2.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Closing the Gap. (Undated). *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

- 3.10 In line with views of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), and in respect of self-determination, we call for direct and targeted consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This will empower the development and delivery of holistic prevention, early intervention, and diversion responses in a manner which is culturally informed and safe, and which prioritises cultural connection.<sup>58</sup>
- 3.11 Consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations to ensure youth justice reform recognises their cultural and geographical needs, alongside culture and kinship systems, is essential. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be provided opportunity to lead and develop programs that impact their communities. Programs that are led by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should only be supported when they can demonstrate deep consultation and co-design processes that do not further marginalise or ‘other’ these voices.
- 3.12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders play a vital role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and are of critical importance in ensuring the wellbeing of the community. The NSW Government must take proactive steps and implement policies that prioritise genuine listening and truth-telling, ensuring the voices and expertise of Elders are meaningfully included and acted upon.
- 3.13 We also recommend the need for investment in building the cultural competency and capability of frontline justice, law enforcement, and community services to ensure culturally safe and responsive responses are available to young people who offend.

“

*“We make too many solutions for them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities]. We need to come back to Elders and let them be a part of this process with kids.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator**

## Recommendation 12

- 3.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensures that responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who offend are non-discriminatory, minimise compounding trauma and promote the wellbeing and safety of children, families and communities.**

<sup>58</sup> Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2021). *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*. <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SNAICC-ConsultationReport-successor-plan-Nov2021.pdf>.

## Recommendation 13

### **3.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government develops and implements youth justice responses that are grounded in kinship systems, cultural values, community expectations, and cultural law.**

#### Culturally grounded models within the justice system

- 3.16 The Salvation Army recognises the value of specialist courts designed to provide a more culturally responsive approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. Initiatives such as Marram-Ngala Ganbu in the Children’s Court of Victoria<sup>59</sup>, Winha-nga-nha in the NSW Children’s Court at Dubbo<sup>60</sup>, and Dandjoo Bidi-Ak in the Children’s Court of Western Australia<sup>61</sup> demonstrate how culturally informed processes can strengthen engagement, improve understanding, and create environments where families feel respected and heard.
- 3.17 The Salvation Army supports these perspectives and acknowledges the evidence that culturally grounded models such as the Koori Court draws on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and culture to divert young people from deeper contact with the legal system and reduce recidivism. These approaches contribute to better outcomes by ensuring that young people have meaningful support networks and pathways away from custodial settings.
- 3.18 In addition to specialist courts, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families need accessible and culturally appropriate legal support and representation to engage effectively with the legal system. Legal assistance is critical in reducing the number of children and young people in the criminal justice system and in detention. The significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the justice system requires a focus on culturally safe and specialised legal assistance. Equitable access to appropriate legal services is vital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to advocate for their rights and to navigate complex statutory systems including justice and child protection systems.

<sup>59</sup> Arabena, K., Bunston, W., Campbell, D., Eccles, K., Hume, D., & King, S. (2019), Evaluation of Marram-Ngala Ganbu, prepared for the Children’s Court of Victoria. <https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/Evaluation%20of%20Marram-Ngala%20Ganbu.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Children’s Court of New South Wales. (2023, September 12). *Winha-Nga-Nha List*. <https://childrenscourt.nsw.gov.au/care-and-protection/winha-nga-nha-list.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Brief Online. (2025, August 20). *Therapeutic court creating real change in justice system*. <https://briefonline.com.au/2025/08/20/therapeutic-court-creating-real-change-in-justice-system/>.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**3.20 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government significantly expand and adequately resource culturally responsive specialist courts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. This should include:**

- Investing in culturally grounded models; and
- Ensuring that community-led, culturally informed processes are embedded across jurisdictions to strengthen engagement, improve understanding, and reduce recidivism.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**3.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government expand access to culturally safe and appropriate, community-led legal assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families. This should ensure they can engage effectively with the legal system and navigate complex statutory processes.**

## 4 Evidence-based and community-led responses

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*“There’s certainly a link [between youth incarceration and adult incarceration]. Youth detention centres are broadly seen as a training ground to offend into adulthood.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Adult Homelessness State Development Manager**

- 4.1 Many experiences of the criminal justice system are traumatising, whether for victims of crime, alleged perpetrators or for those convicted of a crime. The Salvation Army urges the NSW Government to reconsider punishment-oriented approaches and policies, shifting the focus of interventions instead toward support and rehabilitation.
- 4.2 We recognise the damaging impact of offending behaviour on victims, survivors, families, and communities. We also acknowledge that hardline and punitive responses do not free communities from crime, and do not achieve the intended goal of community safety. They remain a reactionary response and fail to acknowledge and address the root causes of the young person’s behaviour.
- 4.3 Our services see instances where young people have been incarcerated, associated with more seasoned offenders and have found connection and belonging, and therefore continue to offend with these peers. Research conducted by the former Children’s Commissioner found that approximately 85 per cent of children released from detention, return to sentenced supervision within twelve months.<sup>62</sup>
- 4.4 Well-timed and high-value, prevention and early intervention programs are crucial to address the needs of young people who offend holistically, reduce recidivism and in turn, increase community safety. To be effective, responses must be focused on addressing the root causes, and risk factors for offending behaviour, prioritise safeguarding, and be tailored to the needs of the young person. There is also a need to support children who engage in harmful or offending behaviour to develop a better understanding about the impact of their behaviours on others, through education and diversionary responses.
- 4.5 In delivering responses, we identify they must be underpinned by strengths-based principles and grounded in trauma-informed frameworks, including:
  - Responsiveness to the impacts of trauma;
  - Safety and transparency;
  - Healthy relationships which prioritise choice, collaboration and mutuality; and
  - Empowerment and capacity building.

<sup>62</sup> Hollonds, A. (2024). ‘Help way earlier!’ How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/25477/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_-\\_accessible\\_0-1-2.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0-1-2.pdf).

“

*“Young people need someone who is here with them in the trenches. [Young people] need opportunities to grow, to be nurtured, encouraged, and believed in. We need to work with young people on a relational level”*

”

**- A Salvation Army Youth Program Coordinator**

### The cost of justice responses

- 4.6 The cost of youth justice responses on children and communities is significant. Investment to address children and youth offending primarily focused on statutory responses such as incarceration is costly and ineffective.<sup>63</sup> Not only does the justice system fail to reduce crime, but it also increases harm to young people.
- 4.7 Across Australia, spending on incarcerating children and young people has more than doubled over the past decade. Governments are now spending more than \$1.1 billion per year on youth detention with the daily cost of incarcerating a young person now totaling more than \$3600 per day.<sup>64</sup> New South Wales continues to incarcerate more children and young people than any other jurisdiction.<sup>65</sup>
- 4.8 Beyond the financial burden, personal and psychosocial costs of justice responses are substantial, long lasting and widespread. Our services have heard instances of sexual assault and maltreatment disclosed by young people and adults during their time in detention facilities. Youth detention centers are high risk environments for young people and can provide opportunities for abuse exacerbated by significant power imbalances between staff and young people, and pre-existing vulnerabilities experienced by the young person.<sup>66</sup>

“

*“We have adults who have come through the [drug] court who were sexually assaulted by different staff members in youth detention.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Adult Drug and Alcohol Program Team Leader**

<sup>63</sup> Hollonds, A. (2024). ‘Help way earlier!’ How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. *Australian Human Rights Commission*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0025/25477/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_-\\_accessible\\_0-1-2.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/25477/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0-1-2.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Productivity Commission. (2026). *Report on Government Services 2026*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/>; Justice Reform Initiative. (2026). ‘A costly and devastating policy failure’ – Australia now spends a record \$1.1 billion a year locking up children. [https://www.justicereforminitiative.org.au/media\\_release\\_a\\_costly\\_and\\_devastating\\_policy\\_failure\\_australia\\_now\\_spends\\_a\\_record\\_1\\_1\\_billion\\_a\\_year\\_locking\\_up\\_children](https://www.justicereforminitiative.org.au/media_release_a_costly_and_devastating_policy_failure_australia_now_spends_a_record_1_1_billion_a_year_locking_up_children).

<sup>65</sup> Justice Reform Initiative. (2026). ‘A costly and devastating policy failure’ – Australia now spends a record \$1.1 billion a year locking up children. [https://www.justicereforminitiative.org.au/media\\_release\\_a\\_costly\\_and\\_devastating\\_policy\\_failure\\_australia\\_now\\_spends\\_a\\_record\\_1\\_1\\_billion\\_a\\_year\\_locking\\_up\\_children](https://www.justicereforminitiative.org.au/media_release_a_costly_and_devastating_policy_failure_australia_now_spends_a_record_1_1_billion_a_year_locking_up_children).

<sup>66</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Attorney General’s Department. (2017). *Final Report: Contemporary detention environments*. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final\\_report\\_-\\_volume\\_15\\_contemporary\\_detention\\_environments.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_volume_15_contemporary_detention_environments.pdf).

- 4.9 When a young person is incarcerated, they lose important elements of their life which would otherwise promote stability. In our experience, moving in and out of institutional settings such as incarceration facilities, can be scary and overwhelming for children and young people. This lack of stability is disruptive and can have detrimental impacts on wellbeing. Whilst physical stability alone does not necessarily improve outcomes, how a young person experiences and interprets stability is critical in promoting positive development. This includes developing a strong sense of 'place' and identity. Preventing young people from settling in one place safely and securely, or removing them from their community (such as through incarceration), can inhibit the development of stable relationships and connections and the ability to foster a sense of trust with those supporting them.
- 4.10 In our experience, when young people cannot access stable support, they also have difficulty in understanding the opportunities, guidelines and expectations needed to thrive, rather than just survive. Wherever possible, responses to young people who encounter the justice system must prioritise physical and emotional safety, stability and consistency.

“

*“Listening to their [adults] cycles from childhood right through to now [adulthood]...it's just history repeating itself only now it's in an adult prison. There are no positive role models, no connection to culture and no safe pathways out [of offending].”*

”

**- A Salvation Army Adult Homelessness State Manager**

### **Recommendation 16**

**4.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensures that responses to young people who encounter the justice system prioritise physical and emotional safety, stability and consistency.**

### Prevention and early intervention strategies

- 4.12 Primary prevention, early intervention, and community education remains the most effective way to address the underlying risk factors surrounding young people who engage in offending. These approaches are preferable to ensure a reduction of the costs that more intensive and invasive approaches, such as youth justice supervision and incarceration, have on children and the community.<sup>67</sup> Strategies to prevent offending and intervene early can include those which focus on the early risk indicators, skills development programs, mentoring and leadership opportunities.

<sup>67</sup> Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC). (2007). Cost Effectiveness of Early Intervention. *AICrime Reduction Matters*. No. 54. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/crm054.pdf>.

- 4.13 Prevention and early intervention should not be limited to specialist services and programs. For primary prevention to be effective, governments must provide multifaceted, long-term funding to build and expand upon essential infrastructure and systems that work to support children, young people and families, in turn preventing offending.
- 4.14 Young people have differing needs and personal experiences, and as such, no single approach will work for everyone.<sup>68</sup> Prevention efforts have been suggested to work best when they include a combination of universal and targeted approaches, and multiple strategies and interventions.<sup>69</sup> Effective preventative action must be taken across a range of settings – including homes, schools, and workplaces – and a range of sectors – including emergency and criminal justice services, and healthcare systems. It requires enabling infrastructure including research, information sharing, monitoring and evaluation.

“

*“There always seems to be a cry of help from families requesting early interventions but it seems that it’s not until they’re actually down the road and engaged with youth justice, where those services are actually tapped into.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth Justice Client Services Coordinator**

### Recommendation 17

**4.15 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government direct attention and strategic investment into responses to youth offending that are holistic, community-led, and prioritise principles of prevention, early intervention, diversion, and education. Investment should be sustainable, by leverage existing, quality, youth service infrastructure to expand support capability.**

#### *Community centers and sporting clubs*

- 4.16 Opportunities that allow children and young people to develop skills, pursue interests and build positive relationships with peers and mentors are an important protective mechanism for young people, particularly those at risk of encountering youth justice responses. Across the range of The Salvation Army’s frontline services, staff identified the benefit of engaging community centres, sporting clubs and other structured activities in supporting young people who are at risk of justice responses, or who are experiencing disadvantage.

<sup>68</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2014). Prevention for a healthier future [Feature article]. [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6c8ffb4a-a0f6-49f8-9b05-01f2157b822c/8\\_1-health-prevention.pdf.aspx](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6c8ffb4a-a0f6-49f8-9b05-01f2157b822c/8_1-health-prevention.pdf.aspx).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

- 4.17 Local community networks and relationships established between young people, peers, and mentors in these settings are a vital support for young people. They ensure feelings of safety, fulfillment and connection to local community. When a young person's informal support networks within the community are strengthened, positive connections, role models become an avenue for support seeking. These informal networks are uniquely positioned to identify young people who are struggling early, especially if that young person has already become disengaged with education and family networks.
- 4.18 Quality relationships where the young person feels genuinely heard and cared for, and relationships that prioritise consistency and stability, achieve better outcomes.<sup>70</sup> Role models within sporting communities or recreational activities can play a prominent and protective role in influencing young people.
- 4.19 Local community centres and sporting clubs should be equipped with resources, education and training in how to engage and support young people at risk of encountering justice systems, with a key focus on building trusting relationships with young people. The Salvation Army is supportive of programs such as Game on for Change<sup>71</sup> and Local Sport Grant Program<sup>72</sup> which aim to increase participation in sport and recreation and foster supportive communities for young people.
- 4.20 We recommend investment in similar programs that purposefully link young people with supportive communities through sport or recreation, as a form of prevention and early intervention. Investment should extend to creative, performing arts or other recreational activities, and emphasis must be placed on ensuring these are financially and physically accessible. Investment must consider the opportunities available to young people within metropolitan areas and those available in regional and rural NSW, the latter experiencing a more limited number and diversity of opportunities for young people.

### Recommendation 18

- 4.21 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government increase investment in social, creative, sporting and recreational activities that will engage children and young people in a meaningful and prosocial way. Activities should be free or low cost, conveniently located and linked to support services.**

<sup>70</sup> Almqvist, A. & Lassinantti, K. (2017). Social Work Practices for Young People with Complex Needs: An Integrative Review. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 35(3), 207-219. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-017-0522-4>.

<sup>71</sup> NSW Government Office of Sport. (Undated). *Game on for change – preventing domestic, family and sexual violence through sport*. <http://sport.nsw.gov.au/grants/game-on-for-change#purpose-and-key-objectives>.

<sup>72</sup> NSW Government Office of Sport. (Undated). *Local sport grant program*. <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/grants/local-sport-grant-program>.

## Diversionary programs and alternatives to custodial sentencing

- 4.22 Diversion is an umbrella term and can include a variety of non-court responses to young people who engage in offending behaviour. These include diversionary conferences, formal (written) cautioning by police, restorative conferences, and other programs (for example, substance use assessment and treatment or mental health support). Effective diversion should aim to support the young person to explore both the causes and the consequences of their actions. It should promote a flexible approach to offending to promote positive behaviour change.
- 4.23 Stigma is commonly associated with those who are engaged with the criminal justice system and the effect is particularly pronounced in punitive environments.<sup>73</sup> Co-locating diversionary responses within criminal justice facilities will blur the separation between the two, thereby perpetuating unintended stigma and resulting in detrimental consequences for affected children.<sup>74</sup> Placing diversionary programs outside of justice infrastructure will ensure children understand that diversions are not punishments.

### *Police diversion*

- 4.24 In NSW, police carry responsibility for administering diversionary responses including warnings, formal cautions, infringement notices for young people who have committed (or allegedly committed) offences,<sup>75</sup> and youth justice conferencing. Police diversion is aimed at preventing further involvement with justice processes.
- 4.25 In NSW, police can divert young people away from court and detention for some eligible offences only if the young person has admitted to the offence and consented to a caution. Consideration is given as to the seriousness of the offence, the harm caused, and previous offence history,<sup>76</sup> leaving the application of diversions being inconsistent at times.
- 4.26 The police make up a critical part of our frontline system and due to the nature of offending behaviours and community safety priorities, police are likely to be first responders. It is crucial that police have a thorough understanding of trauma-informed practice to ensure that children who have experienced disadvantage and trauma are met with proportionate, compassionate, and supportive responses, and diverted when appropriate.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Australian Human Rights Commission. (2001). Human Rights Brief No. 5 – Best Practice Principles for the Diversion of Juvenile Offenders. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/publications/human-rights-brief-no5-best-practice-principles-diversion-juvenile-offenders>.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2026). *Report on Government Services 2026*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/community-services/youth-justice/>.

<sup>76</sup> New South Wales Government. (Undated). *Young people and youth issues*.

[https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/safety\\_and\\_prevention/your\\_community/young\\_people\\_and\\_youth\\_issues](https://www.police.nsw.gov.au/safety_and_prevention/your_community/young_people_and_youth_issues).

<sup>77</sup> Harris, A. (Undated). Trauma, Young People and Juvenile Justice. *Australian Child & Adolescent Trauma, Loss & Grief Network*. <http://earlytraumagriev.anu.edu.au/files/Trauma%20and%20juvenile%20justice%20in%20Australia.pdf>.

4.27 Frontline youth justice and law enforcement systems must be appropriately resourced and provide adequate training to ensure young people are treated equitably and appropriately. All justice responses, including those of the police and court systems, must uphold the physical, cultural, and emotional safety of children and young people.<sup>78</sup>

#### *Restorative justice conferencing*

4.28 Restorative justice conferencing offers a structured response for children and young people who have engaged in harmful and offending behaviour to develop a better understanding of the impact of their behaviours on others, including victims of crime and the wider community. Conferencing allows a process of shared decision making to effectively meet the needs of the victims, young people themselves and others impacted by the offending; to come together to discuss the offence, its impact, and agree on how to make amends.

4.29 Our frontline services highlight the importance of supporting young people to identify the consequences of their harmful behaviours to promote future behaviour change, in mechanisms such as restorative justice conferencing. In considering how these may be delivered practically, The Salvation Army highlights the success of the Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle, and Youth Justice Group Conferencing, detailed in **Appendix A**.

#### *Work Development Orders*

4.30 The Work Development Order (WDO) Scheme plays a vital role in supporting young people experiencing hardship to reduce their unpaid fines balance and ease the burden of debt, by participating in meaningful activities. Activities can include mental health treatment, vocational or life skills courses, financial counselling, volunteer work or drug and alcohol treatment.<sup>79</sup> Our frontline services identify the benefit of the WDO scheme for the young people we support

4.31 Paying down fines provides an initial incentive for young people to engage in services and can act as a soft entry. Having supportive and consistent connection through the scheme enables further conversations about wellbeing, choices and future goals. Importantly, the scheme is not a deterrent or preventative measure; rather it eases the financial burden for young people associated with fines and creates a meaningful opportunity for young people to seek support.

### **Recommendation 19**

**4.32 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government draw on learnings from successful diversionary responses and invest in those which promote capacity building and positive behaviour change. These should include police diversion, restorative justice conferencing and work development orders.**

<sup>78</sup> Standing Council of Attorneys-General. (2023). *Age of Criminal Responsibility Working Group Report*.

<https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-12/age-of-criminal-responsibility-working-group-report-2023-scag.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> New South Wales Government. Refreshed fines relief scheme creates more opportunities for participants to give back to their communities. *Department of Communities and Justice*. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/news-and-media/media-releases/2025/refreshed-fines-relief-scheme-creates-more-opportunities-for-par.html#:~:text=Legal%20Aid%20NSW%20will%20provide,perpetuate%20the%20cycle%20of%20disadvantage>.

## Vocational, training, employment and mentoring initiatives

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*“We need [employment] programs that aren’t just programs for the sake of it, but programs that are meaningful and help support the child onto the right path.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Employment Plus Manager**

- 4.33 Meaningful employment can be a protective factor for young people, preventing encounters with the justice system, and can facilitate positive behaviour change among young people who have encountered justice responses. Young people who have been incarcerated or who have had contact with the law may face barriers to employment. A lack of supports or positive peer and social role models, unsafe home life, and a lack of connectedness to education or prosocial activities, can leave young people without the scaffolding they need to engage with employment.
- 4.34 Many young people genuinely want to work. Some strive to support their parents or families who are experiencing hardship, others want to make their families proud, and many work exceptionally hard to secure employment despite the odds against them. In our experience, adult employment services rarely work if generalised for young people. Adult services are incentivised to place people in jobs quickly rather than adopt relational approaches that adapt to the changing needs of the young person and prioritise trust and rapport. Young people require specialised support, with case workers resourced to invest in the long-term effort needed to address the barriers faced by young people, and to build their employment related skills, confidence and readiness.
- 4.35 It is the Salvation Army’s experience that providing young people with opportunities to develop skills, pursue interests, and build positive relationships with mentors can redirect their energy towards constructive activities, and away from offending behaviour through vocational and non-vocational training. Programs which focus on skill development and mentoring also support young people to build their independence so they can pursue goals which may have previously seemed unachievable. Such programs include The Salvation Army’s Deadly Diamonds Leadership Program and Drive for Life, detailed in **Appendix A**.

## Positive relationship building

- 4.36 Services engaging with young people must prioritise authenticity, consistency, and relational connection. In our experience, support works best when support people show up consistently and demonstrate accountability in their support. Many young people who have encountered justice system responses have been repeatedly let down or had their trust broken by significant adults in their life. Recognising that building trust with young people takes time, and prioritising young people feeling safe, heard and valued is therefore critical in any service provision.

4.37 Current system barriers and funding criteria make this difficult. This includes time-limited support periods, a focus on outputs rather than outcomes, strict eligibility criteria or services that are unable to maintain support during or post release. The Salvation Army recognises the need for increased flexibility when supporting at-risk young people, ensuring services have adequate time and are resourced such that they can build stable, supportive relationships with young people.

“

*“Many times, young people have been let down by people in their life who never should have let them down. Even if a young person is not ready to engage, just keep showing up and be ready to build a relationship.”*

”

**- A Salvation Army Employment Plus Manager**

#### **Recommendation 20**

**4.38 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in and deliver programs which encourage building sustainable connections and model healthy relationships for young people who offend, or who are at risk of offending.**

#### *Relationships with law enforcement*

4.39 In our experience, where young people, families and communities have positive relationships with police, interactions become less confrontational and traumatic, and outcomes are improved. Strained relationships between frontline justice responses, young people, and families, perpetuates mistrust and promotes antisocial perceptions. This mistrust exacerbates feelings of ‘us and ‘them’ and creates a perceived barrier preventing young people or families from accessing support early.<sup>80</sup>

4.40 We also highlight that services and community-based programs which have strong relationships with local police, such as youth liaison officers, see better outcomes. A positive relationship with the local police might see community-based organisations being able to attend an interview or provide support to a young person who has been detained or assist in supporting a young person after release from arrest.

<sup>80</sup> Ravulo, J. (2023). The Role of Holistic Approaches in Reducing the Rate of Recidivism for Young Offenders. Judicial Commission of New South Wales. [https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/publications/benchbks/children/CM\\_Holistic\\_approaches\\_reducing\\_recidivism.html](https://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/publications/benchbks/children/CM_Holistic_approaches_reducing_recidivism.html).

4.41 Focussed, intentional and meaningful relationship building between police, young people, families, and organisations, is critical. Our services see that relationship building activities could take place in formal settings, such as police attending schools to talk about their legal rights or in an exercise program which partners police officers with at-risk youth, or informal settings such as drop-in youth centres where a police officer may be available onsite. We recognise that a critical part of this requires frontline justice responses and community organisations to be adequately resourced.

4.42 Examples of The Salvation Army's youth services intentional relationship building with NSW police is detailed below.

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*“If we [services] have a strong relationship with our youth liaison [police] officer, we get better outcomes. If there needs to be a conversation we [services] can negotiate [with police] to make it less traumatic.”*

”

**- A Salvation Army Youth Services Regional Manager**

### **The Salvation Army's Central Coast and Hunter Services Working in Partnership with New South Wales Police**

The Salvation Army's services have a strong relationship with local NSW Police. Our relationship with the NSW Police includes:

- Youth Liaison Officers and Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers who provide referrals for casework support and attend the local drop-in program hosted at Oasis;
- LGBTQIA+ Liaison Officers who attend local youth events hosted at Oasis;
- The Crime Manager who attends the local drop-in program at Oasis;
- Police Citizens Youth Club who have previously run the Fit for Life program in Oasis Auditorium with young people from local schools; and
- The Monthly Youth Action Meeting at a local police station to discuss the needs of young people at risk.

The benefits of these relationships and programs include a positive connection for young people with NSW Police, new referrals for support, and early intervention opportunities for young people to engage in positive social programs.

## Recommendation 21

**4.43 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure law enforcement prioritise building strong, positive, and meaningful relationships with young people, families and community-based organisations.**

### Prioritising choice and autonomy

- 4.44 Choice is fundamental to providing trauma informed support. When children and young people are offered genuine opportunities to make decisions about their care, they are more likely to feel respected, build trust and engage in a way that promotes better outcomes. Our frontline experience shows that case management and support models work best when they place the young person at the centre, empower them to set goals, and create opportunities for meaningful change. We hold the view that promoting choice and autonomy is not an optional enhancement, but a fundamental element to enhance person-centred care.
- 4.45 The realities of mandated engagement often sit in tension with these principles. From a therapeutic perspective, mandated participation can feel formulaic, rarely reaching the depth required for real therapeutic work. In our experience, mandated engagement with services is often shorter and less meaningful than when young people choose to engage voluntarily.
- 4.46 When engaging in therapeutic support, young people may fear information being reported back to youth justice to facilitate repercussions or breaches. This results in therapeutic programs or staff attached to mandated orders, for example psychologists, being viewed as an extension of the justice system and impacting meaningful engagement. Whilst for some young people, if the timing aligns with internal motivation, mandated engagement can offer a chance for the young person to connect with support, these experiences remain inconsistent.

## Recommendation 22

**4.47 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure responses to young people who offend prioritises choice and autonomy for best outcomes.**

## 5 Transition pathways post-incarceration

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“What we find is, young people have been left in remand due to lack of placement [accommodation] options. It’s all about communication... when they [young people] are coming out [of custody], there’s no records, there’s no continuation [of support].”

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- A Salvation Army Supported Independent Living Service Program Manager

### Risks experienced by young people leaving incarceration

- 5.1 In our experience young people who offend are driven into further disadvantage by incarceration responses. This occurs due to losing supportive elements such as Centrelink payments, accommodation, education, community connection, and relationships with support services. Upon release, many young people are left with no money, no food, no accommodation, and no supportive adult due to inadequate transition planning and pre-release preparation.
- 5.2 Children and young people require strong support systems as they navigate the natural, normal and important changes and challenges found in childhood and adolescence. Having strong social and tangible support systems in place, especially at home and within family is essential for the wellbeing and future-building of young people.<sup>81</sup> Yet young people who have experienced incarceration often lack the adequate support systems to support their needs.<sup>82</sup>
- 5.3 Children and young people leaving incarceration experience high rates of struggles including health concerns, mental ill health and disability,<sup>83</sup> debt, limited access and success in education and in acquiring employment.<sup>84</sup> Housing insecurity and homelessness are also common for young people leaving prison. Our experience and research evidence shows that in some cases, young people are directly released into homelessness.<sup>85</sup> This is demonstrated in the case study “Annie’s Story” in **Appendix B**.

<sup>81</sup> Mowen, T. & Fisher, B. (2019). Youth reentry from prison and family violence perpetration: the salience of family dynamics. *National Library of Medicine* 36(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-019-00098-4>.

<sup>82</sup> Kvamme, L., Waaler, P., Helland, S. & Kjobli, J. (2021). Striving for happily ever after: supportive interventions for youth leaving residential placement. A systematic review of reviews. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 27(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12507>.

<sup>83</sup> Kinner, S., Calais-Ferreira, L., Young, J., Borschmann, R., Clough, A., Heffernan, E., Harden, S., Spittal, M. & Sawyer, S. (2025). Rates, causes and risk factors among justice-involved young people in Australia: a retrospective, population-based data linkage study. *The Lancet Public Health* 10(4). [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(25\)00042-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(25)00042-8/fulltext).

<sup>84</sup> Kvamme, L., Waaler, P., Helland, S. & Kjobli, J. (2021). Striving for happily ever after: supportive interventions for youth leaving residential placement. A systematic review of reviews. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 27(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12507>.

<sup>85</sup> Department of Communities and Justice. (2023). Evidence Brief: Pathways to homelessness for people exiting custody in NSW. *Families and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research*. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/about-us/facsiar/facsiar-publications-and-resources/Pathways-to-homelessness-for-people-exiting-custody-in-NSW-January-2023-Evidence-Brief.pdf>.

- 5.4 The transition out of incarceration can be particularly unsafe for children and young people, who experience sexual, family and domestic violence whose risk of housing insecurity is further exacerbated when released into unsafe homes.<sup>86</sup>
- 5.5 Stable and affordable accommodation can be nearly impossible to access for young people who cannot return home after incarceration. Private rental is unaffordable and prejudice against those who have been incarcerated, often preclude them from accessing the private rental market. Social housing options are limited and waiting lists are long.
- 5.6 Access to sustainable housing is a significant protective factor against recidivism. Research into the relationship between recidivism and accommodation found that people were most likely to return to prison if they were experiencing homelessness.<sup>87</sup> When home is unsafe or there is no stable home for the young person and services are fragmented, custody can feel like the only stable roof and routine. Some young people will offend or reoffend to return to what feels safe or predictable.

#### Exit planning and support post incarceration

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*“The exit planning needs to occur when they first enter [justice systems] to be successful... there needs to be some really firm plans at the outset if we want to change people’s trajectories.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth Services Regional Manager**

- 5.7 The Salvation Army has supported people leaving incarceration for over 140 years in Australia. To reduce recidivism, young people require safe and affordable places to live and provide the support they need to stabilise their lives, address the reasons for offending and work towards a better future.
- 5.8 More work is needed to ensure that young people are connected to appropriate support networks prior to release, including a supportive adult such as a local caseworker, to ensure there is time to build rapport and develop a plan for the young person to reintegrate back into the community. Focus should be placed on facilitating programs which allow for pre-release support, conferencing and consistent support from community-based workers whilst a young person is in custody.
- 5.9 We suggest investment in programs such as those detailed below, to prevent recidivism among those leaving incarceration, and to promote a seamless transition back into the community. Further information about these programs is contained in **Appendix A**.

<sup>86</sup> Holt, S. & Humphreys, C. (2025). Causes, consequences, and recovery for children with experiences of domestic and family violence. *Journal of Family Violence*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-025-00960-8>.

<sup>87</sup> Willis, M. (2018). Supported housing for prisoners returning to the community: A review of the literature. *Research Report no. 7*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/rr/rr7>.

- **Youth Justice Community Support Service.** This program creates pathways which enhance positive connection with community-based organisations for the duration a young person is incarcerated and prior to release, providing a more supported transition back into community.
- **The Salvation Army's Beyond the Wire Program.** Although adult-focused, the program demonstrates a holistic case management program that supports men and women pre- and post-release. There is potential for programs such as this to be adapted to the unique needs and risk factors of young people to support effective reintegration back into the community.
- **The Salvation Army's Workforce Australia Steps of Freedom Initiative (SOFI) Program.** The program engages both young people and adults six months prior to release and then on an ongoing basis after release. Individualised support provides practical and employment-related assistance to transition back into the community.
- **The Salvation Army's Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA) Youth Detention Program.** This program provides targeted practical, employment focused support and material aid to young people prior to and upon release from custodial sentences. Case workers aim to build trusting, supportive relationships with young people prior to their release, and support them with the transition back into the community.

### **Recommendation 23**

**5.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in transition planning processes and programs that promote a seamless and supported transition back into the community upon release for young people. Programs should include practical and psychosocial, accommodation-related and living skills support.**

## 6 Workforce and sector considerations

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### Ensuring programs are properly resourced

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*“The funding for frontline service hasn’t kept up with the real world expenses.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth State Manager**

- 6.1 With any diversionary justice reform or prevention and early intervention focus, there becomes an inevitable increase in demand for specialist child and youth support services. The complexities experienced by children and young people who offend, means that it is likely that several support services and community programs will be required to meet their needs. The service system is currently overstretched and must be bolstered to meet this demand. Where funding and resourcing for services is insufficient, it can inhibit services’ ability to provide the support needed to help a child, young person, or family to the extent that they need.
- 6.2 For interventions to be effective – including prevention, early intervention and diversion – the NSW Government must provide multifaceted, long-term funding that is reflective of the cost and nature of service delivery. This should include funding interconnected systems that provide both general and specialist coordinated responses for children, young people and their families. These include specialist youth services, homelessness services, alcohol and other drug programs, mental health support services and community centres.
- 6.3 Our experience is that funding across the broad range of social services and programs has not kept pace with evolving expenses and service delivery costs. Insurance costs have increased at a rate of approximately ten per cent per annum, but service contracts have typically only increased three per cent, leaving frontline service providers in shortfall. We call on the NSW Government to increase funding to frontline services to ensure a well-funded and resourced sector. Funding should account for increasing costs of delivering quality support for children, young people and families in need.
- 6.4 Short-term funding agreements also limit frontline service delivery. In our experience the restrictive nature of short-term funding contracts hinders the ability to implement successful initiatives that meet the needs of target populations. This in turn impacts program effectiveness, outcomes and impact. Longer-term funding cycles allow for appropriate development, implementation and evaluation of programs. Whilst we recognise the recent increase in NSW Department of Communities and Justice contract length to five years as a positive step, we hold the view that service contracts should extend to ten years. Funding must be allocated to scale-up initiatives that have proven successful, to expand their reach to more people and communities.

## Recommendation 24

- 6.5 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government commit to adequate funding for community-based services. Funding cycles should be long-term, be reflective of year-on-year increasing service delivery and administration costs, include scaling-up opportunities for successful initiatives and account for program evaluation.**

### *Funding flexible service delivery*

- 6.6 In our experience, a lack of flexibility in how a frontline program is delivered to community members complicates access to support. For example, many parents and carers work during standard business hours making it difficult to access some support services. Our services also report that families may be unable to access services due to public transport limitations, financial hardship, or other caring responsibilities.
- 6.7 To ensure all families have access to the benefits that support services provide, we call for NSW Government funding to permit the delivery of flexible service options. This should include:
- Increased operational funding to allow programs – such as those for families – to be facilitated outside of standard business hours;
  - Funding to make information, education and support available and accessible in a range of different formats including online, face-to-face, and over the phone; and
  - Funding be provided to mobile outreach programs which can offer specialist support in the home, or which can move between locations. This could include programs that offer home visits for parents or carers by health professionals and caseworkers (prenatal and from birth) or travelling community centres that provide support around childhood development, offer cultural groups and opportunities for community connection.

## Recommendation 25

- 6.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure funding models allow for flexibility in service delivery to remove barriers to access services for children, young people and families.**

## Preventing burnout and fatigue

- 6.9 Supporting children, young people and families in a frontline role can be emotionally taxing. Exposure to trauma, combined with high workloads, time pressure and limited resources can result in distress, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and burnout among frontline workers. Burnout is a critical concern with significant implications for both the workforce's wellbeing and the ability of the workforce to continue to provide quality care and support.<sup>88</sup>
- 6.10 Counteracting fatigue and burnout in the frontline workforce will promote staff retention, job satisfaction and wellbeing. This will preserve the workforce, the sustainability of services and the provision of quality support. This can take the form of organisational interventions – such as providing workers with autonomy and control in the way they conduct their work – or individual interventions – such as supervision, professional coaching or education.<sup>89</sup>
- 6.11 In our experience, the following components are critical to support the frontline workforce and prevent burnout and fatigue, all of which require services and organisations to be properly resourced:
- **Succession planning.** Employees across the frontline should have access to opportunities that can cultivate skills and build their experience in a meaningful way. Not only will this ensure that critical roles are not left vacant or filled by someone who does not have the knowledge or skills to perform the role, it will enhance opportunities for employee growth.
  - **Competitive wages.** Frontline organisations must be properly resourced to ensure they are able to remunerate staff at a level that reflects their experience and the nature of the work. By being able to offer competitive wages, programs can attract and retain quality staff, reduce turnover, boost employee morale and satisfaction, and enhance operational stability.
  - **Variety and innovation.** To foster a motivated and satisfied workforce, frontline staff should have the opportunity to innovate and engage in a variety of tasks within their role. This should include opportunities to be heard, contribute ideas, offer up solutions and work on different projects. A key part of this is to ensure that services are resourced to allow for this in employee workloads.

### **Recommendation 26**

**6.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government ensure frontline services and programs are properly funded to provide interventions and opportunities among the workforce that address employee burnout and fatigue, and promote job satisfaction.**

<sup>88</sup> SafeWork NSW. (2024). *Evidence check: Burnout in the health care and social assistance sector*. NSW Government. [https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/1379414/Evidence-check-burnout-in-the-health-care-and-social-assistance-sector.pdf](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1379414/Evidence-check-burnout-in-the-health-care-and-social-assistance-sector.pdf).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

## Sector partnership and collaboration

- 6.13 We identify the benefit of fostering multiagency collaboration across the community service and youth justice sector in promoting better outcomes for young people who offend, or who are at-risk of offending. Improving the efficacy of non-criminalising responses necessitates holistic, multi-agency approaches and an integrated service system. In our experience, disconnected and siloed service systems, where therapists, programs and services take different approaches and have little or no communication with each other, significantly reduces the quality of care. Individuals and families can become overwhelmed and disengage, especially those who face additional barriers to support.
- 6.14 Community support services are often under-resourced and work in silos due to limited capacity. In our experience, limited capacity means that inter-service relationship building occurs ad-hoc. Effective collaboration between service practitioners and wraparound support for children and young people is therefore restricted.<sup>90</sup>
- 6.15 Collaborative practice requires that individuals and organisations work in partnership to address problems and achieve shared goals. Collaborative relationships allow the combination of expertise, effort, and professional networks, which often produces greater benefits for clients.<sup>91</sup> Collaboration and partnership may occur between different specialist frontline community services, for example youth services and family, domestic and sexual violence programs, or between non-government and government entities. It may include streamlined information sharing opportunities such as within forum or panel settings. For example, our frontline services identify the benefit of high-risk panels in identifying risks of harm to the young person and in turn, improving outcomes for young people.
- 6.16 Collaboration could also extend to co-locating specialist services. In our experience the co-location of support services can ensure integrated wraparound support at dedicated sites. For example, we have seen great outcomes in models where integrated support facilitated by several agencies in a co-located space, acts as a single-entry point for families who are experiencing disadvantage. We suggest that co-location could also include diversifying services by funding specialist roles within existing services
- 6.17 Enhancing sector partnerships and collaboration between and within services and practitioners allows more seamless navigability of supports for the young person and strengthens their access to specialist supports which suit their diverse needs. Collaborative practice improves referral pathways for children and families by minimising the access points a young person or family encounter to engage in meaningful and holistic support.

<sup>90</sup> UNSW Centre for Crime, Law and Justice (CCLJ). (2021). *Replacing the Youth Justice System for Children Aged 10-13 Years in NSW: A 'Best Interests' Response*. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-coop/CCLJ%20Best%20Interests%20Response%20Report%20September%202021.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Community Door. (Undated). *Collaboration*. <https://communitydoor.org.au/resources/collaboration>.

### *Collaboration within the Children's Court and other justice stakeholders*

- 6.18 We are aware of some Children's Courts where youth workers from local services attend on the days that matters are heard. With a physical presence within the court, Magistrates can refer to youth workers if they are not aware of the local services available. This provides an initial entry point for a young person to engage with support. The absence of a permanent or long-term magistrate can create challenges in building solid and consistent relationships with service providers. Where collaboration occurs ad hoc there may be a loss of local knowledge of services, support networks and referral processes, and can create inconsistency in case outcomes.
- 6.19 Collaboration with stakeholders including Youth Justice NSW, Legal Aid and other frontline community services results in strong partnerships and referral pathways for young people to access community and legal support. Where there is no long-term magistrate in local children's courts this collaboration is even more critical.

#### **Recommendation 27**

**6.20 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in funding models that promote cross-service communication, collaboration, partnership and relationship building. This should also include co-locating services and specialists and should extend to collaboration with courts and justice services.**

### The impact of the housing crisis on recruiting and retaining quality staff

- 6.21 Our frontline services see that local, affordable housing options can be a barrier in the recruitment and retention of quality staff across the frontline. We identify that this is an issue in metropolitan, regional and remote areas. In our experience, it is common for employees to live outside of metropolitan centres where housing prices are more affordable and many staff eventually choose to move employment locations to minimise associated time and commute costs. Our services also identify that attracting and retaining skilled staff in regional areas can be challenging where relocation costs are high, and housing availability is limited.
- 6.22 There is a risk that essential workers choose to leave the frontline workforce due to competing pressures. Frontline workers are generally not able to work from home and being forced to commute long distances due to housing unaffordability has a negative impact on lifestyle outside of work. Our frontline reports that there have been instances where staff choose to leave the frontline service sector because of these competing pressures.
- 6.23 The Salvation Army's experience is that increasing access to affordable housing options for essential workers, which are appropriate and consider the whole person, will reduce barriers to attracting, recruiting, retaining skilled essential workers to the workforce.

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*“We have lost some very good people [staff] due to housing affordability. [They] tried to do the commute, and it just got too much.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Youth State Manager**

### **Recommendation 28**

**6.24 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government consider the significant social and economic benefits that affordable housing for essential workers can offer individuals and the community, and prioritise the development and delivery of affordable housing initiatives and reforms.**

#### Workforce confidence and capability

- 6.25 Achieving a trauma-informed and rehabilitative approach is dependent on staff, organisations and other responders having a common understanding of the causes and impacts of trauma and how this affects children’s behaviour.<sup>92</sup> Quality leadership and staff recruitment is crucial, as is ongoing workforce training and education to increase the confidence and capability of workers engaging compassionately with children and young people.<sup>93</sup>
- 6.26 The Salvation Army observes the need for increased levels of effective, tailored education, training and workforce capacity building across the youth justice, frontline law enforcement and broader community services workforce. This should include police and other emergency service workers, frontline service staff (including housing, family and domestic violence, health, and education), judicial system staff (including judges and prosecutors), security guards, youth workers, and cultural and faith leaders.

### **Recommendation 29**

**6.27 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government mandate specialist training for frontline workers across the youth sector. This training should be regular, and cover the impacts of trauma, child-centred practice, and de-escalation techniques.**

<sup>92</sup> Children and Family Intensive Support. (2017). *Child-Centred, Family-Focused Support*.

[https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04\\_2022/cafis\\_1b\\_-\\_child\\_centred\\_family\\_focused\\_support.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/04_2022/cafis_1b_-_child_centred_family_focused_support.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> Australian Children’s Commissioners and Guardians. (2017). *Statement on Conditions and Treatment in Youth Justice Detention*. [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ACCG\\_YouthJusticePositionStatement\\_2-Nov2017.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ACCG_YouthJusticePositionStatement_2-Nov2017.pdf).

## 7 Data collection and outcomes measurement

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*“Outcomes measurement helps us understand how well our services are supporting young people, whether that support is creating meaningful change in their lives and how we can respond to their experiences with more effective support.”*

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**- A Salvation Army Research Analyst**

- 7.1 Data collection and outcomes measurement are crucial to understanding what works well and how services can be improved, while providing funding body accountability, evidence for sector advocacy, and a means to augment young people’s voices and experiences. It fosters the opportunity for continuous improvements to programs, and opportunities for practitioner professional development.
- 7.2 Measuring outcomes shifts the focus from the service delivered to the impact it has had upon the individual. Instead of counting outputs such as sessions attended or number of workshops delivered, it highlights the real-world changes that matter such as a young person’s sense of safety, their personal relationships, and overall wellbeing during and after their time with a service.
- 7.3 The Salvation Army has significant experience in collecting, analysing and reporting on data through our own Research and Outcomes Measurement team. This has allowed our services to better understand how our support contributes to meaningful and sustainable improvements in community members’ lives. It allows us to improve the quality of our services by innovating, adapting based on what is working well, and supporting continuous learning. It ensures our programs are based on real-world evidence.
- 7.4 In The Salvation Army, data is collected using validated and evidence-based tools to gather feedback from young people at the point of entry to our services and at regular intervals thereafter. We use a variety of age and developmentally appropriate methods, often framed visually and delivered through short, conversational interactions which do no further harm. Not only does this foster continuous improvement to our programs, but it can be used as a tool for frontline practitioners to guide meaningful conversations, tailor support plans, and track progress with young people in ways that are relevant and empowering.
- 7.5 Effective data collection and outcomes measurement is critical for all programs that support young people at risk of, or who have encountered justice system responses. It strengthens service quality, system accountability and demonstrates where resources can be allocated to best support need. Outcomes measures should inform all reform, including policy decisions, funding, legislative change and administrative processes.

## **Recommendation 30**

### **7.6 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government:**

- **Support organisations to develop outcomes measurement frameworks that can ensure program accountability and impact, whilst also fostering innovation and continuous improvement; and**
- **Ensure policy decisions, funding, investment and system reform is based on research and outcomes measurement.**

## 8 Governance and oversight

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- 8.1 The Salvation Army highlights the need for a holistic approach which emphasises that the responsibility to support young people at risk does not solely rest with parents or the specialist youth services workforce. All practitioners and staff across the social services, education frontline justice sectors should have a clear understanding of their role in identifying young people at risk, and the tools to respond appropriately. This should include both government and non-government programs. As discussed in Chapter 6 of this submission, the frontline sector must be resourced appropriately to be able to collaborate, ensuring that the system is well equipped to offer effective, integrated responses.
- 8.2 We acknowledge the benefit of initiatives such as the Youth Action Meetings (YAMs) which take place across the Central Coast, Hunter and Sydney regions as an oversight mechanism for managing risk and addressing the support needs of young people. YAMs bring together agencies such as child protection, law enforcement, health and education, youth justice and non-government organisations to share information and plan responses for young people who are at high risk of harm or risk of offending. Whilst these facilitate effective information sharing and coordinated planning, in our experience they remain largely reactive and are implemented inconsistently. Such approaches could be strengthened by adopting an earlier intervention approach, increasing community involvement and ensuring cultural leaders are included.

### Recommendation 31

- 8.3 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in oversight mechanisms that are equipped to respond to the needs of young people across both government and non-government programs. This should include avenues for information sharing between frontline services, justice responses, health and education programs, cultural leaders and informal community-based programs.**

### Valuing community-led, place-based responses

- 8.4 Whilst a whole of government response is needed to ensure consistency of support, specific reforms are required to ensure services are accessible and appropriate from a local level. We see in some communities a distrust of government services. In implementing services for parents, families and carers, resourcing existing local services such as those provided by the not-for-profit sector and leveraging existing community leaders and Elders is critical.
- 8.5 To ensure responses are truly inclusive to all community members, including those from priority cohorts – such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and LGBTIQ+ communities – investment is needed in community-led responses and initiatives.

- 8.6 Communities across NSW are not homogenous and have different strengths and challenges to work with. Community-led, place-based programs are effective at building on local leadership and empowering locally led solutions to local problems.<sup>94</sup>
- 8.7 The Salvation Army is embedded in local communities, and we are locally focused. In our experience, when external organisations, including government organisations, come in with new programs there can be resistance to change, a lack of trust and concern that programs do not properly address community needs. Instead, place-based solutions to youth justice issues can involve valuing local knowledge and lived experience as well as community-defined priorities to develop responses.<sup>95</sup> Effective place-based solutions include sharing decision-making powers with the community and investing time to build genuine trust.

### **Recommendation 32**

- 8.8 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in governance and funding models that support community-led, place-based approaches to youth services within the youth justice system.**

## The role of the Commonwealth Government

- 8.9 Any response to youth justice must involve strong collaboration and coordination across states, territories, and Commonwealth frameworks to ensure responses are consistent and in line with the most up to date evidence. The Salvation Army points to the former National Children's Commissioner's *Help Way Earlier!* report, detailing the benefits of a national approach to youth justice.<sup>96</sup> Whilst youth justice remains largely the jurisdiction of states and territories, The Salvation Army sees the benefit for the children and young people of Australia in having the NSW Government (and other jurisdictions), working with the Commonwealth to develop a nationally consistent approach to youth justice. The development of a nationally consistent approach, including consistent legislative frameworks, provides opportunity to enhance outcomes and ensure the best interests of children and young people are protected.

### **Recommendation 33**

- 8.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government work with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions, to develop a nationally consistent framework for young people who offend across Australia.**

<sup>94</sup> Department of Social Services. (2023). National Centre for Place-Based Collaboration Discussion Paper.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/supporting-community-change/resource/national-centre-place-based-collaboration-discussion-paper>.

<sup>95</sup> Alderton, A. Villanueva, K., Davern, M., Reddel, T., Lata, L.N., Moloney, S., Gooder, H., Hewitt, T., DeSilva, A., Coffey, B., McShane, I. & Cigdem-Bayram, M (2022). What Works for Place-Based Approaches in Victoria Part 1: A Review of the Literature.

<https://www.aracy.org.au/documents/item/733>.

<sup>96</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). 'Help way earlier!': How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission.

[https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/1807\\_help\\_way\\_earlier\\_-\\_accessible\\_0.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/1807_help_way_earlier_-_accessible_0.pdf).

## Rights-focused approach to youth justice

- 8.11 All levels of Australian government are responsible for ensuring legislative and administrative processes are actively upheld to protect and promote the rights of children and young people.<sup>97</sup> This includes embedding children’s voices into decision making (discussed in the next chapter), ensuring accountability for breaches to children’s rights, and guaranteeing that justice system responses operate in a manner consistent with Australia’s human rights obligations.
- 8.12 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) creates broad international obligations surrounding the treatment of children, including in the justice system, and directs that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in any action affecting them.<sup>98</sup> The CRC directs that special consideration be taken to ensure adequate safeguards, care, and legal protections are afforded to children to account for “*physical and mental ‘immaturity.’*”<sup>99</sup> The implications of developmental immaturity is discussed in Chapter 1 of this submission. These protections are essential to ensuring that children can access protection and care necessary for their wellbeing.
- 8.13 A rights-based approach recognises the intersecting needs and vulnerabilities of children and young people. It rejects, and we continue to advocate against, policies that stipulate penalties analogous to those administered to adults. Adult interventions disregard children’s unique needs and their need for individualised and developmentally appropriate responses. Such measures undermine and erode youth justice rehabilitation efforts, contradict the principles of safeguarding children and will not work to reduce crime.<sup>100</sup>

### **Recommendation 34**

**8.14 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government prioritise the rights and best interests of children in designing, developing and delivering responses to youth justice in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.**

<sup>97</sup> Fernando, M. (2013). Express Recognition of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the Family Law Act: What Impact for Children’s Rights to be Heard? *UNSW Law Journal*, 36(1), 88-106.  
<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJl/2013/4.html>

<sup>98</sup> Article 3, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990).

<sup>99</sup> *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990).

<sup>100</sup> Walsh, T., Fitzgerald, R., Cornwell, L., & Scarpato, C. (2021). Raise the Age – And Then What? Exploring the Alternatives of Criminalising Children Under 14 years of Age. *James Cook University Law Review* 27, 37-56.  
<https://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/JCULawRw/2021/3.html#Heading53>.

## 9 Embedding children and youth voices in policy and practice reform

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- 9.1 Lived experience is critical in shaping all youth justice policy, legislative or program reform. The concept of “*nothing about us, without us*” underscores the importance of centring the voices of lived experience in guiding solutions. Engagement with children and young people will create safer, more effective and efficient policies, programs and legislation. It will increase program effectiveness and improve outcomes. There is a significant risk of missing out on valuable information and perspectives if lived experience expertise is excluded.
- 9.2 Any youth justice system which adopts a rights-focused approach, must ensure that children’s participation is at the centre. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the right of children to be provided the opportunity to express and have their views heard and be given due weight in all matters that affect them.<sup>101</sup>
- 9.3 Wherever able, children and young people must be empowered and supported to participate in discussions and decisions surrounding systems, policies and programs that impact them, through forums that are tailored according to age and development. Opportunities for children’s voices to be heard respects their knowledge and agency, leading to more effective and empathetic outcomes. To be meaningful, this approach must:
- Embed the voices of children and young people in all reform and oversight mechanisms throughout the entire duration of a consultation;
  - Move beyond tokenism and proactively seek the feedback of children and young people;
  - Establish both formal and informal participation pathways;
  - Equip and empower children and young people to be able to engage in a way that feels accessible and meaningful to them; and
  - Ensure diverse perspectives are actively sought, with adequate representation from marginalised communities.
- 9.4 In our experience, there are many personal benefits to young people participating, including:
- A sense of satisfaction when they are provided with the opportunity to share their views and experiences in an environment that feels safe;
  - Protective participation where children and young people are included in decision making regarding their own safety and wellbeing, empowering them to be active and equal participants in their own protection;
  - Contributing to the design of programs that more precisely meet their needs;
  - Personal and social development opportunities including increased peer support, social connections, self-advocacy skills, confidence and knowledge; and
  - Feeling valued and hopeful that their story can have an impact on bringing about change.

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<sup>101</sup> *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990).

- 9.5 The Salvation Army aims to support young people to engage meaningfully in matters that impact them through several avenues. These include ensuring that there is a variety of youth-friendly feedback mechanisms available to young people accessing our services and providing young people with the choice in how they can provide feedback. For example, sitting around a table may not be an effective environment to engage a child. A simple way to encourage engagement is to ask the young person how and where they wish for consultation to occur.
- 9.6 We suggest that consideration is also given to creative outlets, providing children and young people with tools for expression and fostering emotion. Other mechanisms to engage the child or young person could include written, face-to-face, anonymous, case plans, opportunities to sit on interview panels and program design opportunities.
- 9.7 The Salvation Army aims to remove or reduce the barriers for young people to participate, which could include IT literacy training, opportunities for flexible participation, language and translation services, and ongoing staff support to increase participation, confidence and ability.
- 9.8 The Salvation Army has established several formal pathways to engage with young people:
- **Focus groups.** Comprising a small group of young people, where discussions are structured, interactive and meaningful, and seek input on matters that affect young people.
  - **Regional youth advisory groups.** We have established groups in various locations that meet regularly, providing opportunities for young people to provide feedback and engage with issues that impact them. Their ideas and input are trusted and embedded into projects and programs. Reflections are also valuable to understand systemic or structural issues that impact them.
  - **State youth advisory groups.** We are currently trialing a statewide youth advisory group with the aim to evaluate and roll the mechanism out nationally. Whilst regional advisory groups are useful for localised issues and perspectives, a mechanism to hear from a spread of young people across a jurisdiction, or from different jurisdictions will enhance our ability to provide consistent and cohesive support for young people across Australia.

### Recommendation 35

- 9.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the NSW Government invest in the development of formal mechanisms that empower children and young people with lived experience of the justice system to provide advice to government regarding service delivery, policy and legislative reform.**

## 10 Conclusion

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- 10.1 The Salvation Army thanks New South Wales Select Committee on Youth Justice for the opportunity to provide a written submission.
- 10.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from [government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au).

**The Salvation Army Australia**

**March 2026**

## Appendix A The Salvation Army's services

### The Salvation Army's Youth Services National Model of Care

The Salvation Army Youth Services' National Model of Care informs and structures our approach to service delivery with young people, families and communities. The model is underpinned by evidence-based frameworks, including:

- **Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE)** - A psychosocial model which places young people's experiences, their surrounding social environments and systems, and psychological, emotional, social, physical and spiritual needs, and, at the heart of support responses. The model consists of two fundamental components: Relationships and Reflective Practice.
- **Trauma Informed Care (TIC)** - A strengths-based framework grounded in responsiveness to the impacts of trauma. The model incorporates principles of safety, transparency and trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and mutuality, and empowerment to achieve safety for providers and young people.

Our Model of Care also applies four core frameworks into service delivery, including Attachment Theory, Developmental Theory, Social Learning Theory and Systems Theory.

### The Salvation Army's Youth Services in Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and Hunter Regions

#### ***Oasis Crisis Refuge, Sydney***

Located in metropolitan Sydney, The Salvation Army's Oasis service is a twelve-bed crisis accommodation refuge for 16–21-year-olds who are experiencing homelessness. The refuge provides 24-hr emergency accommodation, supporting young people to develop living skills, link to other services and source long term appropriate, safe and stable accommodation. Young people can stay in the refuge for up to 3 months.

#### ***Oasis Link in Youth (OLIY) Program, Sydney***

Oasis Link in Youth is an early intervention case management program supporting young people between the ages of 12 and 24 years old. OLIY provides individualised support for young people and family capacity building to enhance wellbeing and safety. Additionally, OLIY provides education and skill building programs to promote strengthen connection to community.

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## **The Salvation Army's Youth Services in Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and Hunter Regions**

### ***Oasis Drug and Alcohol Youth Support, Sydney, Central Coast and Hunter***

The drug and alcohol support service for young people at Oasis Sydney offers counselling, case management, and targeted group programs to young people between 12 to 24 years old who are engaging in harmful substance use. The program uses harm reduction strategies to support young people to address their substance use, alongside supporting other needs and goals related to housing, employment, mental health or relationships.

### ***Oasis Choices Program, Sydney, Central Coast and Hunter***

Located onsite at The Salvation Army's Oasis service, Choices is designed to empower young people to make informed and healthy choices. The program offers free one-to-one counselling for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years who present with experiences of disadvantage, substance use, and mental ill-health. The program is staffed by psychologists.

### ***HeadFyrst Program, Youthlink Western and South Western Sydney***

Headfyrst is an innovative and free service for young people in Western and South Western Sydney aged 12 to 25 years. The program provides specialist counselling for young people who experience co-existing substance use concerns and mental ill-health. Headfyrst is an integrated service, situated within several Headspace sites, and Headspace teams are cooperatively involved in care coordination to support the recovery of the young person.

### ***Fyrst Program, Youthlink South Western Sydney***

Fyrst is a support service for young people between the ages of 12 to 25 years. The program is a free and flexible service that offers case management and psychological support for young people with more complex mental health and substance use presentations. The program provides mobile support, including to those who are completing, or have completed detox, rehabilitation or are transitioning out of detention.

### ***Reconnect Program, Miranda and Blacktown***

Reconnect is an early intervention program working with young people between the ages of 12 and 18 years, and their families to prevent family breakdown and youth homelessness. The program focuses on improving family relationships and strengthening ties to training, work and the community. Reconnect offers individualised counselling within schools and in Reconnect offices in Miranda and Blackdown. Participants can access family mediation, case work support, group work targeted to a group's specific needs.

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## **The Salvation Army's Youth Services in Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and Hunter Regions**

### ***Oasis Casework Support, Central Coast and Newcastle***

Oasis youth workers provide individual casework support to young people aged 12-25. Youth workers help young people to identify short term goals to help their journey to independence and assist them to achieve these goals. Goals might include, obtaining identification, getting a job, enrolling in a training course, assistance with a driver's license, or connecting to other services to get help with physical or mental health needs.

### ***Oasis School and Group Programs, Central Coast and Newcastle***

The Oasis team facilitate a range of school programs designed to be delivered in one-hour sessions across 6 weeks, to groups of 6 to 8 young people. The programs are flexible and can be modified to suit the needs of the group. Programs include:

- **Choice.** An early intervention group program designed to increase awareness of the effects of drug and alcohol use, and empower students to make informed and healthy choices in order to delay, reduce, and prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs.
- **Rage.** Designed for young people who have difficulty regulating their emotions. This program helps students to identify feelings of anger, along with triggers, and explore alternate strategies to coping with frustration. The program focuses on building resilience and respectful relationships, demonstrating self-management skills to reflect and respond positively to challenges.
- **Feeling Fantastic.** This course aims to assist young people to develop a better understanding of their feelings and emotions as well as the changes that are occurring in their lives. The program equips young people with knowledge and skills to cope with emotions such as anxiety and depression.

### ***Social Programs, Central Coast***

The Oasis team facilitate a range of thoughtfully designed on-site programs supporting young people aged 12–25 to thrive. These include:

- Drop-in support for young people to interact with others, make friends and engage in a safe space.
- Free school holiday programs are open to young people between 12-25 years old.
- Spark Collective. A youth advocacy group for young people between 16 and 24 years old that empowers young people, providing a space for young leaders to grow. The program offers practical mentorship for young people to build their capacity, self-confidence and important professional life skills, understand meeting management and develop collaborative skills to have their voices heard within their community.

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## **The Salvation Army's Youth Services in Greater Sydney, Central Coast, Newcastle and Hunter Regions**

### ***Vocational Training, Oasis Central Coast and Hunter***

Oasis youth services partners with The Salvation Army's Eva Burrows College to deliver accredited vocational training on the Central Coast and Hunter regions, offering a range of vocational training programs suitable to a range participants for all walks of life. Whether you are a recent school leaver, have been out of the workforce for some time, Oasis understands that learning looks different for everyone. Our vocational training takes a person-centred approach, offering flexible support, wrap-around services, and a community that walks alongside each learner as they work toward their goals. Programs include:

- Certificate III in Hospitality
- Certificate IV in Community Services
- Certificate III in Business

### ***Equip Workshop, Oasis Newcastle***

The Equip Workshop is a Salvation Army initiative run through Oasis Newcastle which targets at-risk young people between 12 to 25 years, who are actively engaging in alcohol and other drug use. The psychoeducation workshop is designed to teach young people about substance use, its consequences, and support young people at-risk of offending.

The workshop includes group and one-on-one engagement with a mentor who has lived experience of substance use. Mentors prioritise relationship building to encourage and empower young people to make positive changes to their life, in a supportive environment.

## **The Salvation Army's Deadly Diamond Leadership Program, Moree**

The Deadly Diamonds Youth Leadership Program is a Salvation Army initiative in Moree which promotes age-appropriate development of leadership skills amongst local children and young people.

The program is targeted at 12- to 18-year-olds and its aim is to nurture community young people to become community leaders through peer-to-peer, faith-based mentorship.

Deadly Diamonds aims to develop skills and independence to empower young people to become positive role models for their community, boost their confidence and teach them how to support others. By offering a place of family, community and connection, The Salvation Army initiative hopes to give young people who are at-risk, hope for a better future.

### **The Salvation Army's Partnership with Government Services**

The Salvation Army operates initiatives in partnership with government services to ensure wraparound support for at-risk young people.

#### ***Shifting Gears Program, Central Coast and Hunter***

The Shifting Gears Program is an initiative which operates in partnership with The Salvation Army and Youth Justice.

Shifting Gears originated out of a significant need for driver education programs which target the overwhelming number of car theft and related offences amongst young people in rural and regional NSW.

The education program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people and provides support surrounding driving, awareness, and making positive choices.

### **The Salvation Army's Youth Justice Group Conferencing, Multiple locations**

The Salvation Army works alongside Government's Department of Justice to deliver Group Conferencing. The program is based on restorative principles and offers a problem-solving approach to offending. Group conferencing occurs between a young person who has offended and the victim, balancing the needs of young people and the community through dialogue.

The program provides a community-based rehabilitation intervention within the Children's Court during pre-sentencing. It aims to:

1. Divert the young person from intensive court-imposed sentences by raising the young person's understanding of the impact of their offending and engaging with the young person's support network;
2. Reduce the frequency and seriousness of reoffending;
3. Increase voluntary victim engagement and satisfaction with justice systems; and
4. Integrate young people back into the community following the Group Conference.

The program requires the young person's and victim's consent to engage in the process and allows both parties the opportunity to tell their story and be heard. At the conclusion of the conference, a negotiated outcome plan is agreed upon which contains fair and reasonable steps to promote the support and rehabilitation of the young person.

### **The Salvation Army's Drive for Life, Multiple locations**

The Drive for Life program is a Salvation Army initiative, designed to support young people aged between 16-25 years, to obtain their driver's license.

Drive for Life believes all young people should have the opportunity to achieve their goals and reach their full potential. Having a driver's license is a key milestone in a young person's life and helps them move towards independence. Being able to drive gives young people the choice and control necessary to realise their education, employment, and housing goals.

The program partners with a variety of youth services and works closely with local public schools to provide a welcoming and accessible environment which is safe and supportive for at-risk young people to build a safe driving skillset.

### **Workforce Australia, Steps of Freedom Initiative (SOFI) Program, Queensland and Australian Capital Territory**

The Salvation Army's SOFI Program engages both young people and adults. Eligible community members are referred to the program via the parole board where they are connected to a Salvation Army case worker who can offer consistent support in preparation to release and assistance in navigating life after release. This includes coordinating support people, organising practical needs such as clothing and shoes, and support with accessing appropriate housing and employment.

### **Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA), Youth Detention Program**

The Salvation Army's IEA Youth Detention Program, separate to SOFI, provides support for young people whilst incarcerated. The program aims to build rapport and a positive relationship with the young person prior to release, supporting them and connecting them with community to better support them upon release.

The program is holistic and provides a range of supports prior to and upon release. This includes:

- Employment focused practical support such as, resume and cover letter writing, application submission and where possible, pre-organised employment and training prior to release.
- Care packages, clothing, toiletries, food vouchers, and additional support as needed by the young person once in the community.
- Assistance with accessing transitional housing.
- Transport from detention to parents or guardians.
- Living skills development and support to build independence such as, driving lessons, setting up bank accounts and budgeting.

### **The Salvation Army's Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS), Victoria**

The Salvation Army works alongside Victoria's Department of Justice to deliver YJCSS. The program provides intensive support and services for young people who are already involved with youth justice. YJCSS sees youth justice workers and community service workers operate in partnership to holistically support the young person.

YJCSS recognises that young people in the justice system represent those experiencing the greatest disadvantage and aims to support them to:

1. Reduce the severity, frequency, and rates of reoffending and prevent them from becoming entrenched in the justice system;
2. Facilitate the transition of young people in justice systems back into community;
3. Prepare young people for adulthood by developing independence, resilience, and social connectedness; and
4. Develop young people's capacity for meaningful educational and economic participation.

YJCSS also delivers integrated transitional housing support via the Youth Justice Housing Pathways Initiative. This initiative is an extension of the wraparound support available under YJCSS which offers transitional housing properties and housing outreach support to young people.

### **Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle, Victoria**

The Children's Court Youth Diversion Circle (CCYD) initiative is an educational opportunity which assists young people to develop insight and emotional understanding into their behaviour and its consequences. Born out of our success in delivering restorative group conferencing,<sup>102</sup> this Salvation Army program provides space for children to identify the impacts of offending and take responsibility for this behaviour.

Informed consent must be provided by the child or young person to engage, and they must be afforded appropriate legal representation. The process is overseen and delivered via an independent Salvation Army convenor and during the conference, a collaborative diversion plan is discussed amongst the parties and collectively agreed upon. Reoffending is less frequent and less serious amongst children who have participated in the program.

<sup>102</sup> Victoria State Government. (2022). *Diversion: Keeping Young People Out of Youth Justice to Lead Successful Lives*. <https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2022-03/Youth-diversion-statement.pdf>.

### **The Salvation Army's Tools for the Trade Plus, Victoria**

The Tools for the Trade Plus program is a Salvation Army initiative in Victoria which targets people experiencing disadvantage.

The education and work readiness program is designed to address criminogenic risk factors for young people disconnected from education and work, and at risk of offending.

The program collaborates with local police who engage in positive and meaningful ways throughout the 10-week course, developing positive healthy relationships with young people, families and communities.

### **The Salvation Army's Independent Schools, Queensland**

The Salvation Army's Independent Schools are located in the North Brisbane and Ipswich areas in Queensland. The schools currently operate for students in years 10 to 12 with young people aged between 14 and 18 years, that have disengaged from mainstream education due to individual, relational, or social factors, to help them re-commence their education.

Our team of teachers, teacher aides and youth workers support young people who are struggling with adversities, such as mental and physical health, legal matters, and other educational barriers. Every opportunity for extra assistance needed to overcome individual adversities and build independence is made available to each young person.

The staff at The Salvation Army's Independent Schools advocate tirelessly for those who may not be aware of their rights in education, or the resources that are available to them. Young people who have missed large portions of school find it difficult to navigate through systems such as the job market, Centrelink services, and the legal system. The staff at our schools provide education, training, and employment pathways as well as advocating for young people, especially those who do not have the support of an adult in their lives at home.

The Salvation Army distributes 100% of all Commonwealth and State education funding to the schools for the benefit of our students and the communities we serve. The funding is worked out for each school at a Commonwealth level in accordance with the Australian Education Act 2013.

### **The Salvation Army's Youth Supportive Independent Living Service (SILS), South Australia**

The Salvation Army's SILS is a Department for Child Protection Service in South Australia that supports young people from the age of 16 years, under current statutory care and protection orders, until the age of 18 years.

The program provides intensive case management and non-family-based housing support for young people under guardianship of the Chief Executive. Young people live independently in individual or shared accommodation within the community and are provided support based on their level of need.

A team of Salvation Army case managers work to provide these young people the opportunity to develop essential life and living skills, to ensure they are adequately prepared for transitioning into independent living upon completion of their care orders.

### **Beyond the Wire Program, Tasmania**

The Beyond the Wire program is a holistic, adult-focused case management program that supports men and women in pre- and post-release from incarceration. Our work of walking alongside community members starts before they are released, working to develop relationships and structures to support their needs before the end of their period in custody, so that they are supported from the moment of release.

The needs of community members in custody are often high due to complex mental health needs and traumatic experiences which make the level and complexity of casework highly demanding. Our critical indicator of success is in supporting community members to reconnect and return to society and to remain out of the prison system.

There is opportunity for programs such as this to be adapted to meet the needs of young people leaving incarceration.

## Appendix B The Salvation Army's case studies

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### Zoe's\* Story

Two 14-year-old females in residential care were involved in stealing a car. Zoe\* was referred to a CCYD Diversion Conference, and was the passenger. In the 12 months after the offending Zoe experienced considerable trauma. She was assaulted by the co-offender and has sustained permanent injury to her eye. Zoe's co-offender continued to steal vehicles and was killed in a collision.

Upon referral, considerable care was taken to assess the suitability for the CCYD to proceed. The convener consulted with Zoe, her current care team, and her mother. Zoe chose to proceed and indicated that she would like to have the chance to tell her story. Alongside the CCYD, Zoe sought support through Victims of Crime following the assault.

Preparation sessions commenced, integrating some calming art therapy approaches. Zoe is very creative, and valued a chance to work clay as she spoke. The tactile nature of the material was soothing, and she was able to speak candidly and open up to a professional for the first time about her experience as a victim of assault. She was supported by her most trusted residential care worker and continued to engage in art therapy in the remaining sessions.

A CCYD Diversion Conference was set up to include Zoe and her mother, her residential care worker, her specialist care team, her diversion co-ordinator, her solicitor and the youth resource officer. Art therapy was integrated into the conference. Here, Zoe reflected on her role in the theft of the vehicle, she took responsibility for her actions and explored the impact on the vehicle's owner. The conference acknowledged her experience as a victim of crime and a plan was made to support her with a referral to Victims of Crime for further specialist support.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Annie's\* Story**

Annie was referred to The Salvation Army's Employment Plus while serving a custodial sentence at a youth detention centre. Living with anxiety and facing homelessness post-release, she had been refused bail multiple times due to having no fixed address. Despite repeated referrals, Annie was unable to secure private accommodation due to her young age, and services were at capacity. With no identification and her birth certificate needing to be sourced from overseas, Annie faced significant barriers to rebuilding her life.

Throughout her time in detention, The Salvation Army maintained consistent contact with Annie and her support network, ensuring she had a trusted advocate, persisting with attempts to support housing and specialist support referrals. Annie's Salvation Army case worker also arranged essential items in preparation for her release, including clothing and a mobile phone for use in the community.

When Annie was released without warning a few months later, she was discharged directly into homelessness since she had still not been able to access housing. Annie had no identification documents which acted as a further barrier to support, leaving her at high risk of reoffending. The Salvation Army intervened, securing Annie a safe place to sleep, providing financial assistance to purchase for essential items and connecting her with additional support.

Annie remains safely housed and supported by The Salvation Army to obtain identification, access Centrelink, and secure long-term accommodation. Once these foundational needs are met, The Salvation Army will support Annie pursue study or employment opportunities.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Hannah's\* Story**

Hannah was referred to The Salvation Army's Employment Plus during her custodial sentence at a youth detention centre. A Salvation Army case worker met with Hannah fortnightly in the detention centre, developing a trusting relationship, offering professional guidance, and supporting her in preparing for reintegration into the community, including creating a résumé.

Following her release, having experienced significant trauma, Hannah faced challenges compounded by her rural location, where support and employment opportunities were limited. Her Salvation Army case worker provided assistance, including clothing and financial assistance, maintaining regular check-ins, offering emotional support and job application guidance. Additionally, Hannah received continued mentorship helping her explore training opportunities.

With this support, Hannah successfully secured employment. She was able to move into housing with a family member, that provided a sense of safety and stability.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Daniel's\* Story**

Daniel is a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man whose offending behaviour started at approximately age 14. Growing up, Daniel did not have a relationship with his father, and he was not engaged in education or training. Daniel had a diagnosis of ADHD, Conduct Disorder, an intellectual disability and a history of childhood trauma, drug induced psychosis and substance use disorder. Daniel has been known to child protection since childhood, with numerous risk of significant harm reports and assessments having been conducted.

Daniel's offending behaviours were linked with having experienced grooming and exploitation at the hands of older gang members involved in a sophisticated car theft ring. As a result, Daniel was incarcerated in youth detention on several occasions and subject to covert police surveillance. Daniel has been physically assaulted by police in the past, with the officer later being charged, dismissed and sentenced. At times, Daniel has spent months on remand awaiting bail and as a result, he has experienced significant breakdowns in relationships with his immediate family and wider kin.

*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Alex's\* Story**

While residing in The Salvation Army's Oasis youth crisis refuge for more than twelve months and struggling with cannabis use, depression, and anxiety, Alex expressed interest in seeing an Oasis psychologist.

Although Alex struggled to engage initially, over time and with encouragement from his caseworker he became more confident engaging. Alex initially identified that low motivation was his main concern related in struggling to complete basic daily tasks such as getting out of bed, showering, and eating regularly.

Although initially reluctant to explore his cannabis use, Alex was supported to explore this and engage in psychoeducation with the psychologist who provided alternative strategies to manage his anxiety. Alex was also supported to explore his values, goals, and frustrations with the Oasis psychologist, with the support resulting in Alex reducing his cannabis use.

Throughout the time Alex was supported by the psychologist, he trialled strategies to build structure and routine into his daily life, changing his sleep-wake cycle, and engaging with people and activities he had previously enjoyed.

Alex was recently supported by The Salvation Army to move into community housing, achieving his long-term goal of independent living. Alex is now involved in a range of activities and small business ventures. He continues to attend regular sessions with his psychologist at Oasis.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Darren's\* Story**

A CCYD conference convener received a referral for a young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man, Darren\*, to participate in a conference. The referral related to serious assaults involving weapons. Darren was linked in with a cultural support worker who attended the conference, alongside his CCYD coordinator, solicitor, and the convenor. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth liaison police officer was unable to attend, however they were able to engage with the young person to catch up for a coffee and build a positive relationship after the conference.

During preparation sessions, Darren was able to reflect on what contributed to his offending, explaining that he often feels very angry and needs an outlet for this. On further exploration, Darren was able to identify that the anger he feels is a result of childhood trauma following the loss of his father. Darren was also able to share that he experiences visual perception disturbances. He agreed to get support to obtain a mental health plan, with a view to attending counselling for his mental health, previous trauma, and to develop anger management strategies.

During the conference, Darren was able to identify the serious and possible further consequences of the assault. He was given space to reflect on the choices he could have made to prevent the assault, including the fact that he had used substances which had likely impacted on his decision making. During the conference, Darren struggled to empathise with the victim, expressing that they were there to hurt him and his friend, however he did acknowledge that the victim had turned up not expecting the fight would involve weapons, which would have been frightening for them.

Prior to the offence, Darren had been disengaged from education for more than 12 months, though afterwards was supported to enrol in education on a part-time basis and to gradually work towards attending full-time.

Throughout the CCYD conference process, Darren demonstrated many strengths including honesty, respect, courage, taking responsibility, resilience, care for others, and determination. Since the offence, Darren has demonstrated he can change his behaviour and learn from it, evidenced by his re-engagement in education and effort to stay out of trouble.

Darren has also expressed a keen desire to obtain employment with a goal to save money for a car, buy a unit to live in and eventually rent it out to others, and help support his nan who has cared for him for most of his life.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*

### **Jake's\* Story**

Jake was referred to The Salvation Army's Choices program through our Oasis case management service to access drug and alcohol and psychological support following family breakdown and involvement with youth justice.

Jake presented with heroin, ICE and cannabis use; extensive history of offending behaviours; pending legal matters; and symptoms consistent with ADHD. Jake reported had been diagnosed as a child with ADHD and had previously been prescribed medication though was no longer taking this.

Jake was supported to increase time spent at support sessions through the Choices program. Initially he engaged in short 15–20-minute appointments, supported by his case worker to slowly build up to attend on his own for the full 45-to minute sessions.

Unfortunately, due to a series of challenging events, Jake left the area and resumed high level substance use. After another eight months, Jake was referred back to The Salvation Army following a court order. Caseworkers noticed that Jake presented as motivated to change and he was eager to pick up where he had left off. Following Jake's self-managed difficult substance withdrawals, he was focused on accessing support from The Salvation Army to improve impulse control and emotional regulation.

Clinical sessions with Jake have focused on cessation of substance use and managing ADHD symptoms. Jake continues to engage in well Choices support sessions, and he is currently accessing a psychiatrist for ADHD-related support.

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality.*