

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd and Tablelands Community Justice Group .

Atherton, Far North Queensland – November 22, 2024 – The CEO and Executive members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd (ATSILS) recently met with the Tablelands Community Justice Group (TCJG) Elders in Atherton to discuss the systemic justice issues driving youth offending, incarceration, and affecting community safety in the region and to hear about some of the community-led responses making a real difference.

Indigenous youth in Queensland are 26 times more likely to be incarcerated than their non-Indigenous peers and it is a sad state of play that this rate continues to spiral year after year. Factors such as childhood trauma, socioeconomic disadvantage, mental health and substance abuse are the main drivers of offending behaviour.

Youth detention centres in Queensland are often operating at over-capacity which leads to children being detained in adult watch houses and prisons. These facilities are ill-equipped to ensure their safety, compromise their human rights and can exacerbate trauma and mental health issues, increasing the likelihood of reoffending and more serious offending.

Addressing these issues requires respectful, culturally informed approaches, increased resources for rehabilitation and diversion programs, and systemic changes to reduce reliance on detention for young people. Developing stronger relationships with police to foster community-engaged policing, rather than over-policing communities, is a crucial element to this.

Local communities must be involved in the solutions, and we call on the new State Government to engage more effectively with local Elders and grassroots and community-controlled organisations in the development of therapeutic justice responses. Organisations such as the TCJG, which is comprised of local Elders, are uniquely positioned to understand and address cultural and social dynamics within their communities, leading to more effective interventions such as 'On Country' Elder led camps. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth have access to community-led rehabilitation and diversion services, such as 'On Country' Elders camps, is vital to breaking the cycle of offending. Cultural camps provide opportunities for young people to learn respect, connect with their heritage and understand their cultural identity. This connection fosters a sense of pride and belonging and sets the foundation for them to engage more effectively with further education and rehabilitation services and ultimately, successful reintegration into the community.

Quotes:

- "ATSILS and TCJG call for more culturally informed justice reinvestment practices to address youth offending and increase community safety," said Mr. Shane Duffy, CEO of ATSILS. "By engaging the community at the local level, we can better understand the challenges to tailor our service delivery to community need and develop more effective solutions that engage youth in rehabilitation."
- "Our Elders network plays a crucial role in helping to set our youth on as path to rehabilitation to break the cycle of offending," said Julie Go Sam, TCJG Justice Coordinator. "Our united presence, support in community and involvement in 'On Country' cultural camps are an invaluable foundation for teaching youth respect for self and others and guiding them away from the justice."
For an insight into 'On Country' camps and aspirations to develop a Youth Centre to address offending please view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tINli7WDeI>

About the Tablelands Community Justice Group:

The Tablelands Community Justice Group is dedicated to restorative justice practices and community/justice sector engagement, aiming to create a safer, more cohesive community.

About the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (QLD) Ltd:

ATSILS provides innovative and professional legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Queensland. [For more information: www.atsils.org.au]

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