

STATEMENT

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“The longer I am away from Country, the more I worry”

Part 2 of the Inquiry into the Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre (ASYDC) Reduced Capacity Plan (the Inquiry) was published today by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. This follows Part One of the Inquiry that was published in October 2024.

Part Two focused on examining the experiences of Central Australian young people transferred from ASYDC to Don Dale Youth Detention Centre (DDYDC). While the Inquiry was initially focused on temporary transition, its relevance has shifted significantly due to the decision to centralise youth detention in Darwin.

This inquiry highlights that while some improvements were made since the first report, the overall trajectory of youth detention in the NT has worsened for Central Australian young people.

“Central Australian young people have been seriously impacted by the decision to cease operating ASYDC as a youth detention centre. Transferring children thousands of kilometres away from family, Country, community and localised specialist supports, without adequate throughcare planning and implementation, directly contradicts best practice for reducing risks linked to re-offending. This decision is at loggerheads with community safety objectives the Government seeks to achieve” she said.

During the reduced capacity period from July 2023 to May 2024, 60 children and young people were transferred from Central Australia to Darwin, all were Aboriginal. 20 were from remote regions of Central Australia. 27% of these young people had a diagnosed disability. The Inquiry examined the circumstances of 8 young people in depth, all of whom were living with a disability.

It found that Department of Corrections operations, policies, and practices do not align with international or national standards, nor with its own Youth Detention Model of Care. “It is incredibly disappointing that the Department of Corrections has not accepted any recommendations made by the Inquiry, including simply following their own existing policies and procedures, and committing to ensuring young people have access to interpreters for key decisions” she said.

“This reflects a missed opportunity to ensure young people are not further disadvantaged by the decision to repurpose ASYDC and to ensure all young people receive the support they need to transition safely back to the community. Young people in detention have the right to be involved in decisions about their care and to be included as active participants in assessments, case management and throughcare planning” said Commissioner Musk.



Protecting the best interests of Territory children

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Serious deficiencies in throughcare were identified during the Inquiry, reflecting systemic weaknesses across the NT youth justice system and disproportionately affecting Central Australian young people. It is essential that young people are supported to address factors linked to their offending and have an individualised and coordinated throughcare plan and process to return to society.

“This Inquiry revealed significant challenges and shortcomings that have real implications for the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of young people who were transferred to Darwin, which is known to directly impact the likelihood of reoffending. These findings are particularly pertinent given that ASYDC is no longer operating as youth detention centre” said Commissioner Musk.

“The concentration of youth detention in the one facility in Darwin undermines rehabilitation, family, community and cultural connection, and reintegration outcomes for Central Australian young people. It is completely unacceptable that in many cases families of young people are not contacted prior to their transfer. This cannot not continue and must be addressed immediately” said Commissioner Musk.

With rising numbers of young people being routinely housed in the one facility in Darwin, more must be done to strengthen family connection, cultural safety, disability support, and through-care, and to realign youth justice operations with best practice standards.

“If we want to achieve positive outcomes for young people and the broader community, then we need to address the underlying factors linked to offending, through adequate assessments, throughcare planning and coordination of appropriate supports and services that involve family, community and culture. This is essential to making our communities safer and improving outcomes for our citizens” Commissioner Musk concluded.

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