

Making Justice Work in the Northern Territory

The '**Making Justice Work**' campaign brings together a wide range of groups with a common interest in effective responses to crime in our community. Groups taking part in the campaign have agreed to work together to promote evidence-based approaches to 'law and order' and community safety.

The campaign has no political affiliations. Its members are prepared to work with the Northern Territory Government, Opposition and Independents to develop sound policy and proposals for law reform. The following principles set out the foundations upon which such policies and proposals should be based.

We are committed to making the justice system work to protect the community.

Principles

1. *Stronger measures are needed to prevent crime and deal with its causes*

We need innovative approaches to preventing crime and more resources for measures that reduce crime and deal with its underlying causes, such as:

- Early childhood intervention and school attendance programs
- Services for youth in crisis
- Improved public housing and transport programs
- Effective measures to reduce alcohol and drug-related harm
- 'Problem solving' courts like the SMART Court for offenders with alcohol and drug abuse issues
- Initiatives like Community Courts that engage Aboriginal Elders and community leaders in the justice process.

2. *Prison is not a solution*

We recognize that there are, and always will be, cases where jail is the only just sentence. But sending people to jail does not prevent crime. In fact, the evidence shows that it causes more crime.

And sending people to jail is very expensive: it costs over \$100,000 per adult prisoner per year and \$216,000 per young person per year. This is money that we should be spending elsewhere on things that prevent crime.

Any policy or proposal that would see more people going to jail must be fully costed and able to be justified against its opportunity cost (ie what preventative measures the money could have been spent on).

3. *Young people should be kept out of the criminal justice system where possible*

When young people are exposed to the criminal justice system they are much more likely to become adult offenders. This is particularly true if young people are sent into detention. The evidence shows that diverting young people away from courts reduces re-offending.

The Review of the Northern Territory Youth Justice System (2011) found that the emphasis for young people should be on supporting young people, diverting them from the criminal justice system and addressing the underlying causes of their offending.

4. *We should put offenders to work, not just lock them away*

Community work requires offenders to put back into the community. It can help develop skills and be a pathway to employment.

More community work options, particularly in remote communities, are needed to make this option available as an alternative to jail in appropriate cases. Examples include:

- Working on maintenance of community facilities;
- Working for community organisations providing important social services; or
- Working in community service roles like ranger programs.

Community work parties (subject to appropriate security clearances) should also be a priority for people sentenced to jail.

5. *We should work with offenders and set them up to succeed, not fail*

The Northern Territory has the highest re-offending rates in Australia. More must be done to stop the 'revolving door'.

This requires working intensively with prisoners to promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

Support and services should be provided from the time a person is taken into prison and continue past their release to support their return to the community.

Examples include:

- Culturally relevant and accessible alcohol and drug counselling, psychological and psychiatric counselling, anger management and family violence counselling services;
- Increasing resources for prison support and Throughcare projects, which provide intensive pre and post release case management;
- Community-driven initiatives, like the Strong Bala men's program in Katherine to support offenders when they leave prison; and
- Reducing the caseload and shifting the focus of the role of Community Corrections officers, so that they can work with people who are released on parole and under supervision to support their re-integration, rather than having only a policing/compliance role.

Members



North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency



Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service



Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission



Criminal Lawyers Association of the NT



Appropriate and Affordable Housing for ALL Territorians



Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programmes Unit



NT Council of Churches

domestic violence
LEGAL SERVICE



Darwin Community Legal Service



Central Australian Youth Justice



Justice, Rights and Respect for Aboriginal's First Peoples



Northern Territory Council of Social Service



Top End Womens Legal Service



Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services



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