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MEDIA RELEASE

12 November 2020

Calls for youths in detention to receive better trauma-informed support to address complex needs

A year of reforms and achievements has seen more humane and respectful experiences for children and young people detained in SA's only youth detention centre yet concerns for their wellbeing remain.

The latest annual report for the Training Centre Visitor Program has highlighted the positive changes that have occurred in the Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre based on ongoing advocacy from the Training Centre Visitor Unit.

"2019-2020 has been the biggest year yet for the program and my staff," Training Centre Visitor Penny Wright said.

"We have seen spit hoods prohibited, the end of almost all semi-naked searches and greater privacy in bedrooms and toilets.

"The first formal inspection of the centre was also carried out, obtaining the voices of detainees, and delving into whether the rights and needs of the detained children and young people are being met," Ms Wright said.

Despite the improved conditions of the centre, many concerns raised in the inspection report have been highlighted again in this year's annual report, primarily the need for supportive rehabilitation and care that is trauma focussed. The current detention system struggles within its current resources and structures to consistently promote rehabilitation and reintegration.

"There needs to be more recognition that some detainees have care needs that are exceptional and complex and require diverse, trauma informed and intensive responses," Ms Wright said.

"The practices and prevalence around the use of isolation, segregation and force only intensifies trauma and is not helpful to detainees' current and ongoing wellbeing. These practices must only be used as an absolute last resort.

"The current system adopts a security model which prioritises risk mitigation over addressing complex trauma. This is a major ongoing concern considering many, if not all, children and young people detained have trauma, disabilities and mental health conditions," she said.

“Greater resources, and more training and diversity of expertise amongst centre staff should improve the centre’s ability to rehabilitate and give detainees the brighter future they and the community deserve.”

Ms Wright has also expressed her concern over her lack of powers under legislation to provide oversight and advocacy for children and young people who are outside the centre but still detained within the criminal justice system.

“In accordance with the Act, my team and I are unable to support the children and young people detained in custody in police cells or in the Youth Court, secure medical facilities and when under the control of private security firms while in transit.” Ms Wright said.

“We should be concerned that such places of detention are not subject to independent statutory oversight, especially if they are locations in which adults may also be detained.”

“Children and young people who are overrepresented in the system, including those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, under guardianship of the Department for Child Protection and those who may have a physical, psychological or intellectual disability have told us about their concerns regarding the care they receive in these environments.”