

MEDIA RELEASE

Training Centre Visitor Annual Report 2022-23

Shona Reid, Training Centre Visitor

2 November 2023

In the *Training Centre Visitor's Annual Report 2022-23*, tabled in SA parliament on 2 November 2023, Shona Reid raises significant concerns about the situation of children and young people detained at the Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre (the Centre).

Shona said: ***In this report, I emphasise the very real experiences of detained young people. I use their words throughout so they can tell their own story and truth about their time at the Centre. I seek to elevate their voices and bring to light their experiences.***

Shona said: ***I question whether the Centre's operations are consistent with its obligation to create a rehabilitative, trauma informed, environment that is good for both the young people and the broader community. The fact that some 90% are held only on remand, not sentenced, weighs heavily on me, especially when I think about the oppressive nature of the isolation they often suffer.***

Shona has been especially vocal this year about limitations on the time young people could spend 'out of their rooms' without adequate access to services, meaningful programs and, at times, simple human interaction. While showing some improvement, the Centre's staffing shortages and rostering problems remain serious. The Centre still cannot provide readily accessible records in key areas, for example, to enable accountability by meaningfully recording time spent out of rooms.


Shona said that: ***My capacity to perform my functions fully is constrained by unclear or missing centre records, creating blind spots that result in health and wellbeing risks to young people.***

The Report draws on 50 2022-23 'visits' to the Centre (and countless discussions with young people), systematic review of over 300 incident files, 180 detainee Feedback Forms and other Centre records (all facilitated by various Centre staff to whom Shona extends gratitude) as well as learning from the 110 individual advocacy matters pursued this financial year.

Consideration of these sources led Shona to the conclusion that the Centre did not meet reasonable community expectations in several areas, including because of:

- the cumulative impact of isolation, and the Centre's reliance on 'modified routines'
- continuing prevalence of suicidal ideation and/or self-harm (47.3% of all Incidents reviewed involved self-harming behaviour or ideation, and 71.0% of incidents where ambulances were called related to self-inflicted injuries)

Shona said: ***Every time we hear self-harm ideation or see self-harm behaviours, we are seeing a young person in crisis. But we are not the only witnesses – when young people self-harm, the young people around them in the Centre also probably see and hear.***



- ongoing deficiencies with respect to cultural support and safety for seriously overrepresented Aboriginal young people and those from various culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- risks to health, mental health and wellbeing, especially for those with diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities (about three in five detained young people on any given day have a diagnosed disability)
- specific concerns relating to the experiences of girls and young women in youth detention (in 2022-23, nearly one in five young people in the Centre on any given day were female).
- a simple example is that program cancellations this financial year impacted more on young women and girls (84% of all program cancellations)
- more seriously, there were more self-harm behaviours during incidents involving young women (66.9%, compared to 36.9%) and young women and girls were more likely to be restrained to 'prone' during an incident (68.2% compared to 42.1% for males), usually by male staff
- the continuing substantial overrepresentation of children and young people from the child protection system with more than one in three detained young people on any given day being under guardianship, particularly from residential care (the 'dual involved')
- constraints on access to education and rehabilitative opportunities.

Shona said: ***If we don't dedicate the resources necessary to ensure the Centre can operate as a place of rehabilitation, there will be individual costs down the track for these young people and our community.***

- compromised access to adequate medical support

Shona said: ***There are some dedicated health and mental health services at the Centre, but not 24/7. What happens to a young person outside of business hours?***

- access to justice for those with active court matters, especially due to the increasing reliance on 'virtual' court attendance for systemic convenience, not child-focussed reasons.
- The impact of detention on very young people, particularly those under the age of 14 (noting 39 young people in this age group were admitted over 2022-23, two of whom were 10 years old)

All of these are concerning in the abstract but devastating for individual young people. To that end, throughout the Annual Report Shona has provided *stories*, which (although not an account of an individual's specific experience) do reflect what she has seen or learned.

The Annual Report also draws attention to some fundamental ongoing needs for:

- appropriate legislation and resourcing to undertake work in relation to Youth Treatment Orders, so long as this legislation remains, and with respect to National Preventive Mechanism responsibilities under the Optional Protocol for the Prevention of Torture (OPCAT)
- reasonable funding, including for specialist positions to respond to my statutory obligation to pay particular attention to Aboriginal children and young people, those who have disabilities, and those who also are in the child protection system (the dual-involved)
- legislative impediments to me advocating for a young person if they are outside the Centre's walls (but still 'in custody').

Please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions or wish to discuss this report. Alternatively, your staff are welcome to contact my Principal Policy Officer, Alan Fairley, at alan.fairley@sa.gov.au or 8226 8570.