

Executive Summary

This is a joint report of quarterly statutory inspections of the Cleveland, West Moreton, and Brisbane Youth Detention Centres (CYDC, WMYDC, and BYDC) undertaken in June 2022.

Statutory detention centre inspections are conducted by delegated Inspectors, located within Learning and Development, Department of Children, Youth Justice, and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA). This report aims to contribute to improving youth detention centre operations across all centres.

The focus areas for inspection in this quarter were emergency response equipment, relationship between staff and young people, and confidential information. The key observations, findings, and recommendations in relation to the focus areas are summarised below. These observations were discussed with relevant Executive Directors (ED) at the conclusion of the inspection and with the Senior Executive Director (SED), Youth Detention Operations and Reform (YDOR) during a post-inspection briefing.

Other issues raised during and immediately following the site visits are monitored in an Issues Register and will continue to be examined during future inspections. The status of active recommendations from previous Inspectorate reports are detailed in a Recommendations Register which is reviewed during the December inspection each year and published online. A copy of the Recommendations Register can be obtained by making a request through the Office of the Assistant Chief Operating Officer ACOO_YJSWS@cyjma.qld.gov.au.

Focus Area 1 – Emergency response equipment

Detention centres have an array of emergency response equipment available to support safe responses to incident and emergency management and minimise the risk of harm to young people and staff. Each centre had processes in place for the monitoring and auditing of emergency response equipment, including registers which recorded the use of the equipment, cleaning procedures, and processes for checking for damage and replacement of equipment.

Operational staff indicated an overall awareness of emergency management response procedures however, limitations were identified in BYDC and WMYDC in relation to staff's understanding of roles or their individual responsibilities should an incident involving the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) arise. Staff in CYDC were very clear on the processes involved when PPE is required as part of an incident management response and well-defined processes have been developed to support contingency testing, maintenance, and auditing of equipment. Issues were raised at CYDC in relation to staff being unable to wear radio earpieces while wearing the PPE helmets, while all centres identified the inability to wear Body Worn Cameras while in PPE. Alternate local processes have been developed to address these issues.

The Inspectorate noted a reliance on desktop contingency practices within the centres due to the operational challenges of completing physical drills. In addition, feedback from operational and management staff across all three centres indicated that while the Queensland Police Service ICENRIRE framework supports emergency responses, there is also a need for staff to participate in specialised practical incident response training.

The potential emotional and psychological impact on staff who respond to emergency situations, including the need to use PPE, rescue knives, and administer first aid as first responders, was acknowledged. The emotional and wellbeing impacts on staff when managing these incidents and the importance of having a supportive workgroup to engage in formal and informal debriefs to support staff wellbeing and ensuring Section Supervisors and Shift Supervisors are equipped with the skills required to engage in incident debriefing as part of their roles is imperative.

Focus Area 2 – Relationship between staff and young people

Detention centre staff have the potential to constructively influence young people, provide positive role modelling, and develop respectful relationships to enable the development of positive change and challenge inappropriate behaviours.

Staff employed across workgroups within each of the centres primarily chose to work in youth detention centres as they possess a genuine interest in supporting young people to make positive change. Staff across all centres consistently spoke of the need to adhere to consistent practice guidelines to ensure young people are aware of the rules, boundaries, and expectations while in custody, however also identified that inconsistent practice and employees not adhering to professional boundaries were often observed. This has the potential to create problematic working relationships between staff and young people with inconsistency in practice identified as the biggest challenge to establishing positive and respectful relationships.

The difference between developing respectful relationships versus friendships with young people was also highlighted. Centres provided examples of situations whereby staff have developed mutually respectful relationships with young people which have resulted in positive behavioural changes.

Inappropriate use of social media as a means for establishing relationships and rapport with young people was reported across all three detention centres, however, was identified to a greater extent in BYDC and WMYDC. In response to these issues, management have implemented several proactive approaches to address the concerns.

The potential for staff fatigue was identified, given the increasing complexities of young people, coupled with a challenging workforce environment which includes staff shortages and workplace dynamics. Inspectors reviewed the level of training operational staff receive in comparison to other Australian jurisdictions to prepare them for their roles. There are currently no minimum education requirements or qualifications needed to obtain a position as a Detention Youth Worker in Queensland however, a Certificate IV in Youth Justice or a Diploma of Youth Justice are considered highly desirable. It is understood by the Inspectorate a broader approach to workforce development is a priority identified in the Youth Detention Reform Action Group (YDRAG) agenda.

The Inspectorate is also aware of an increased focus on learning and development proposed as part of the YDRAG agenda. Opportunities worthy of inclusion in that agenda relate to staff working in BSUs, to support them to better understand young people's behaviour and develop strategies for engaging and responding to young people. In addition, the need to develop the skillset of Section Supervisors to ensure they possess the necessary leadership skills to support and mentor detention youth workers is a priority for detention centres.

To date, restorative practice (RP) in the YDCs has primarily focused on the repairing of relationships through formal and informal mediation processes when conflicts arise between young people or young people and staff. Further embedding processes to support the philosophy of RP, including a holistic focus on RP to build and maintain relationships was recognised as an important strategy to support staff to further develop positive and respectful relationships with young people and vice versa.

Focus Area 3 – Confidentiality and privacy

One recommendation has been made in relation to this focus area pertaining to the confidentiality of the current intel process. Staff in BYDC and WMYDC identified concerns with intel information being recorded in DCOIS due to the lack of confidentiality afforded to the staff member reporting the intel. Operational staff advised the Inspectors that this information has reportedly been shared with young people, resulting in conflicts between staff, and between young people and the informant. As a result, the Inspectorate recommends the option to make informant details confidential in DCOIS intel reports be explored to protect the personal information of reporting staff, with only specific roles being able to access the name of the person providing the information.

Staff across all occupational groups within each of the YDCs acknowledged an understanding of the importance of maintaining confidentiality, however, did not believe it was being maintained to the level it should, both for young people and for staff. The exception to this was for employees involved in matters referred to the Professional Standards Unit (PSU), with all staff believing their confidentiality would be maintained in these circumstances. Examples of confidential information relating to staff and young people being shared either intentionally or unintentionally (through lack of staff situational awareness when having conversations with one another) with young people were provided to the inspectors. In addition, professional staff identified an apprehension to share young people's information with operational staff out of concern it may be misused, and confidentiality not being maintained.

Bullying and unreasonable behaviour between staff was also identified as a systemic issue within the YDCs by multiple staff. This included examples of staff cliques and sharing staff information with young people and other employees to intimidate other employees or gain favour with the young people.

Obtaining young people's informed consent to share information was raised as a concern across all centres with Gillick competency being used as the standard criteria for assessment. YDC staff work hard to assist the young people to understand legal and case work requirements and obtain informed consent, however when there is a suspected or known intellectual or cognitive impairment, this can be difficult. In relation to young people assessed as requiring a multi-agency collaborative response to reduce offending behaviour, consent from young people or their families to have their information shared with stakeholders as part of multi-agency panels was not routinely sought. Further to this, young people and their families are not being advised that information can still be shared, even if consent is not given.

Other observations and issues

The Inspectorate raises issues on-site during the inspection, directly with staff throughout the inspections, with the Executive Directors at the exit interviews and with the Senior Executive

Director, Youth Detention and Operations and Reform as required. Issues are monitored through the Issues Register, which outline the response action taken by centre management and/or Youth Detention and Operations and Reform. Issues and observations during the June 2022 inspection include:

Dangerous Goods

Unit Managers in BYDC identified the completion of cutlery counts as an opportunity for improvement in their centre given the number of new staff and lack of experience across accommodation units. The Inspectorate was advised dangerous goods are kept in safes in the unit offices and checked each shift with staff completing a dangerous goods log and a cutlery count in DCOIS as part of the auditing process, however staff are not always completing these checks as required and items are at times found to be missing. Concerns were raised specifically about plastic cutlery not consistently being accounted for following mealtimes. It was acknowledged by Unit Managers that, regardless of what the cutlery is made of it should always be accounted for, as plastic can be just as dangerous as metal when used as a weapon. This issue was raised directly in discussions with the ED, who advised cutlery counts and alternative types of cutlery are being looked at as an area for improvement for BYDC. This will be monitored by the Inspectorate.

List of Recommendations

Focus Area 3 – Confidential information

Recommendation 1

It is recommended the option to make informant details confidential in DCOIS intel reports be explored.