

# The views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Queensland's youth detention centres

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Australian Institute of Criminology Conference:  
*Indigenous young people, crime and justice*

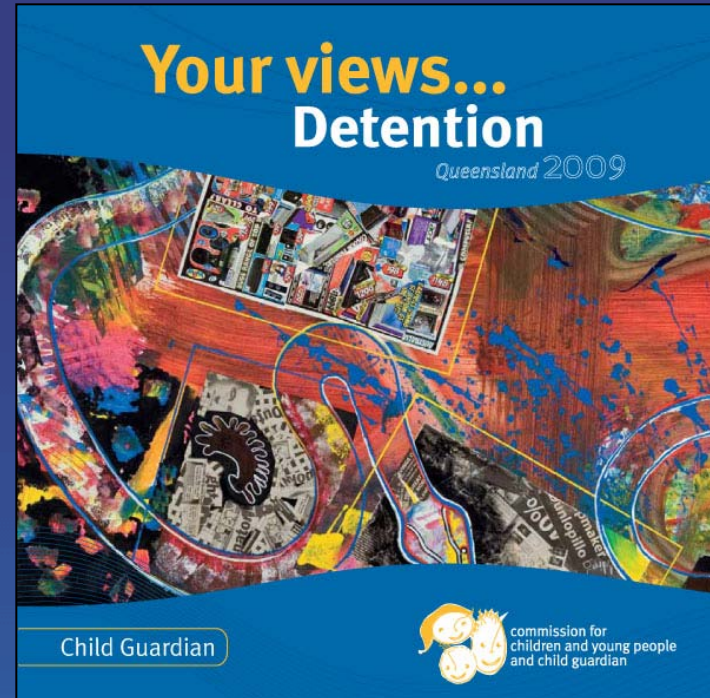
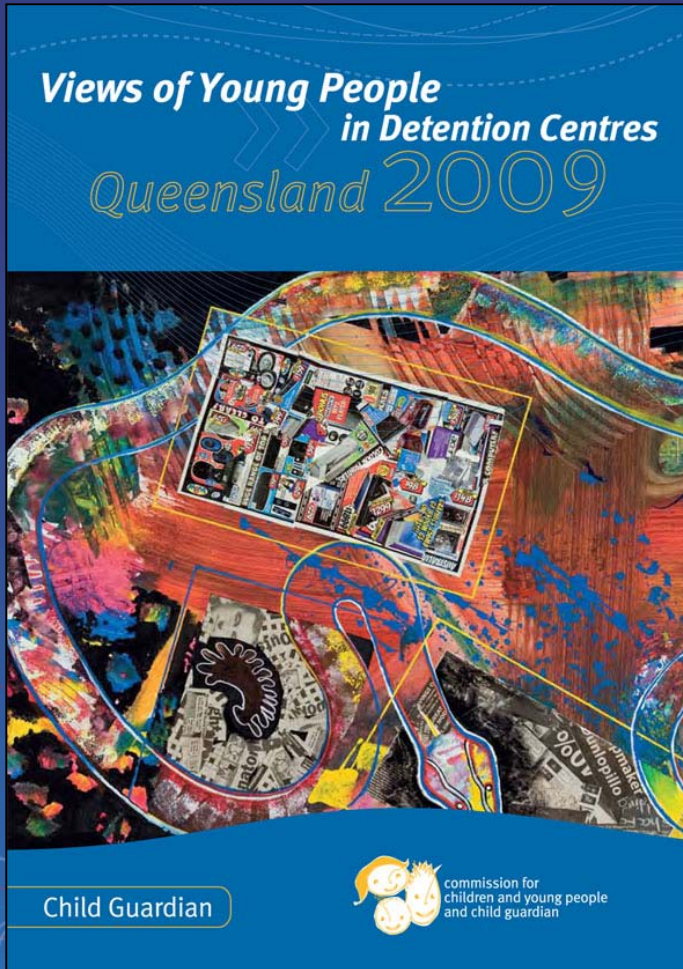
1 September 2009



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# Views of Young People in Detention Centres



# The Commission's roles

- Review laws, policies and practices relating to the rights, interests and wellbeing of children
- Administer the blue card screening program
- Investigate and resolve complaints about services provided to children
- Maintain a child death register
- Monitor the child safety and youth justice systems
- Administer Community Visitor Program
- Conduct research and advocate on issues impacting on the safety and wellbeing of children and young people



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# The Community Visitor Program

- In 2008-2009, Community Visitors made monthly visits to approximately 6,800 young people in state care
  - building trusting relationships
  - assessing quality of care
  - seeking resolution to problems
  - assessing living conditions
- In 2008-2009, Community Visitors identify over 1,000 matters requiring urgent attention



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# Views of children & young people in care

**Views of Children in Foster Care 2009**  
Please return by Friday 26 June 2009

**2**

**What is this survey about?**  
The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian is trying to find out what children and young people in care think about:

- **living in foster care** – what you like and don't like
- **general things**, like contact with your family, school, health issues, and any problems that you have that no one is listening to you about
- **the child safety system.**

**Why should I complete it?**  
The information you give the Commission is very important. What you tell us will help us to work out what needs to be done to improve the situation for children and young people in foster care. We will write up what we find out into a report for young people so that you know what we found out and how we are working to make things better for you.

**Can I say what I really think?**  
YES. Your name won't be written on this form, so no one will know who said what... There are no right or wrong answers. You can say whatever you want.

**Who can help me fill it in?**  
Your Community Visitor (CV for short) can help you. They can ask you the questions and write down what you say, not what they think.

**Your privacy**  
Your CV is not allowed to show, or talk about your answers to anyone. What you tell us in the survey is private. The only time that your or someone else's safety or well-being is at risk. When this happens we may have to try and find out from your answers who you are so we can make sure that you're OK. If we do not have enough information to work out who you are we might not be able to help you.

This survey also has space on the last page for the contact details if you would like someone from the Commission to get in touch with you.

**What if I don't know the answer?**  
If you're not sure of an answer, tell us your best guess or leave the question and move to the next one.

Survey 2

**Views of Young People in Detention Centres 2008**

**7**

**What is this survey about?**  
The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian is doing this survey to find out what young people in detention centres think about:

- how they came to be in detention
- what their time in detention has been like, and
- what help they would like when they leave.

**Why should I complete it?**  
This is your chance to share your opinions with the Commission, which is a special agency with powers to make things better for them. What you tell us will help us work out what can be done to improve the lives of young people in detention.

The Commission would very much like to hear what you have to say.

**Do I have to complete the survey?**  
No. You don't have to do the survey if you don't want to. You don't have to answer any questions that you don't want to. You can stop at any time.

**Is what I say private?**  
Yes. You do not have to show your survey to anyone unless you want to. Your survey will be returned directly to the Commission and won't be seen by the detention centre staff. Also, your name is not on the survey so it would be almost impossible to work out who said what.

**What happens to the information in the survey?**  
The Commission will use the information from all the surveys to write a report for the Queensland Government so it will know what things need to be done better. We will also write a report for young people so that you know what we found out and how we are working to make things better for young people in detention.

**Can I get help to do my survey?**  
Yes. There will be a Community Visitor or teacher close by when you fill out the survey. They are there to help you if you want help.

**They can help in a few different ways:**

- reading questions to you
- explaining what a question means
- helping you work out an answer, or
- writing down your answer for you.

These people are not allowed to show or talk about your answers to any staff or other young people without your permission. The only time they can break this rule is if you tell them you or someone else is at risk of being hurt in some way. Then they may have to tell someone to make sure you, or the other person, are safe.

**How do I fill in the survey?**  
The questions usually need you to tick a box or write an answer.

**Tick a box, like this:**  
Are you...?  Male  Female

**Write an answer, like this:**  
How old are you? 16 years and 10 months

**Write a comment on the lines provided to tell us more about your views.**

**Is there something no one is listening to you about?**

You can write more information next to any question, question, just tell us your **best guess**.

**Thank you for your help in answering these questions. We will really try to use what you tell us to make things better.**

*Elizabeth Fraser*  
Elizabeth Fraser  
Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

Views of Young People in Detention Centres 2008 1

**Views of young people in residential care 2008**

**6**

Please return by Friday 31 October 2008

More you tell us, though, the more information we have to understand your situation and work out what can be done better for you.

**How do I fill in the survey?**  
Filling in the survey is easy. Usually, all you have to do is one of the following:

1. Tick the box with your answer, eg:  
Are you...?  Male  Female
2. Circle the number that gives your answer, eg:  
How happy are you?  
Very unhappy 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very happy
3. Write an answer on the line provided, eg:  
How old are you? 16 years 10 months
4. Write a comment to tell us more about your views. Most questions have a box with lines for you to write what you think.
5. When you see an instruction to skip some questions, follow it. For example, those who answer 'no' should go straight to question 28:  
Are there any other young people living here?  
Yes   
No  → GO TO Q28

**What do I do with the survey when I've finished it?**  
Your CV will give you an envelope to put the survey in and post it for you. You can also post it yourself, it doesn't need a stamp. The CV will not open it if you give it to them to post.

**Thank you for your help in answering these questions. We will try to use what you tell us to make things better for you.**

*Elizabeth Fraser*  
Elizabeth Fraser  
Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian

Views of young people in residential care 2008 1

# Views of young people in detention centres

## *Brisbane Youth Detention Centre*

- Females and males mostly south of Rockhampton
- 102 bed capacity

## *Cleveland Youth Detention Centre*

- Males only, mostly north of Rockhampton
- 60 bed capacity



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# Self-report questionnaire

Self-report questionnaire covering:

- circumstances surrounding offending & supports
- diversion and non-custodial sentences
- safety
- wellbeing and development
- experience with the legal system
- transition back to the community



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# Survey procedures

- In classrooms with 4-6 young people
- Support team that includes teaching staff and Commission staff
- Participation is voluntary and responses aren't seen by detention centre staff
- Support team gives encouragement and help
- 15 to 45 minutes to complete questionnaire
- Young people who are absent are followed up



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# Respondent profile in latest survey

110 young people, 87% response rate

	Survey sample	Population*
Male	84%	85%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	62%	56%
Median age	16 yr	15 yr
Detained less than 1 week	10%	33%

\* All young people detained in 2007-08 financial year



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# Do you feel safe?

89% of young people detention report feeling safe:

- 85% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders
- 96% of other young people

99% of young people in foster care feel safe



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# What makes you feel safe?

## Supportive staff

*“I can talk to staff, they look after me, they listen to me” (17yrs, male, Townsville)*

*“Good teachers and some youth workers” (16yrs, male, Townsville)*

*“There’s people around me and I get a lot of help in detention” (13yrs, female, Brisbane)*



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# What makes you feel safe?

## Contact with other young people and family

*“I share a room with a mate”* (17yrs, male, Brisbane)

*“Time with family and friends”* (16yrs, male, Townsville)

*“Knowing other young people and I have relations in the centre”* (15yrs, male, Brisbane)



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# Would you be taken seriously if you told staff you felt unsafe or worried about something?

- 50% feel confident they would be taken seriously if they raised concerns
- Need for greater transparency in complaints handling



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# Considerations for future surveys

- Add focus groups or one-on-one interviews to increase depth of information
- Extend data collection over several weeks to improve sample size and representativeness
- Refine questionnaire content – possibly greater focus on detention experiences and transition from detention



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# Contact details

- All Commission reports and functions are available on our website: [www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au](http://www.ccypcg.qld.gov.au)

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