Research Report

Purpose

This report provides a comprehensive review of national and international evidence, policy, and practice relating to youth crime prevention, early intervention, and youth justice. Its purpose is to support PCYC Tasmania's strategic direction and inform the design and delivery of programs and future initiatives across the organisation.

Overview

PCYC Tasmania is committed to delivering evidence-informed approaches that enhance the wellbeing of young people and prevent involvement in the youth justice system. Grounded in research, data, and best practice, this approach ensures that programs are both effective and accountable. The focus is on delivering crime prevention services that are responsive to the needs of Tasmanian communities while maintaining alignment with proven models of youth engagement, early intervention, and coordinated support.

Structure of the Report

- **Section 1:** Reviews literature to establish a foundation for youth crime prevention, highlighting key theories, models, and evidence-based best practice approaches.
- **Section 2:** Examines national policies, frameworks, and evidence relevant to youth crime prevention and early intervention within the Australian context.
- **Section 3:** Analyses state and territory practices, including key strategies, investments, and service delivery models, with a focus on initiatives relevant to PCYC Tasmania's operating environment.
- **Section 4:** Presents a summary of findings and identifies clear opportunities for PCYC Tasmania to strengthen its role as a leader in community-based youth crime prevention, aligned with its vision, mission, and strategic goals.
- **Section 5:** Discusses opportunities to strengthen evidence-informed practice to further strengthen relevance, practical application, and strategic value for PCYC Tasmania.
- **Section 6:** Recognises the importance of understanding 'what doesn't work'. This section reviews ineffective or harmful practices with the intention of strengthening PCYC Tasmania program design to reduce the risk of unintended negative outcomes.

While not exhaustive, this report prioritises research and evidence most relevant to PCYC Tasmania's strategic direction and the ongoing development of programs and any future initiatives.

Key Insights

The evidence is clear that prevention and early intervention are the most effective approaches to reducing youth offending. Intervening at key developmental stages and addressing risk factors early can significantly reduce the likelihood of long-term engagement with the criminal justice system.

There is strong and consistent evidence that diversion from formal justice system processes leads to better outcomes. Young people who are diverted into community-based supports are less likely to reoffend compared to those who experience court processes or detention.

Effective approaches to youth crime prevention are holistic and multi-systemic, recognising that offending behaviour is shaped by a complex interaction of individual, family, school, and community factors. Programs that address these multiple influences through integrated, coordinated responses demonstrate the strongest outcomes.

Evidence also highlights the importance of trauma-informed and strengths-based practice. Many young people in the justice system have experienced trauma, disadvantage, and social exclusion. Approaches that build on strengths, foster connection, and promote a sense of belonging are more effective than deficit-focused models.

Across jurisdictions, collaboration is a critical success factor. Effective youth crime prevention requires coordinated responses across government, police, education, and community sectors, supported by shared frameworks and clear pathways for intervention and support.

National and State Context

A review of policies and initiatives across Australia demonstrates a strong and consistent shift towards:

- Early intervention and prevention-focused strategies
- Diversion and reduced reliance on detention
- Community-based and outreach service models
- Multi-agency collaboration and throughcare approaches
- Culturally responsive and trauma-informed service delivery.

Tasmania reflects these national trends through its Youth Justice Blueprint and Model of Care, which prioritise therapeutic, community-based responses and early intervention to reduce reoffending and improve wellbeing outcomes.

Implications for PCYC Tasmania

The findings strongly align with PCYC Tasmania's existing strengths and strategic direction. As a community-based organisation with established relationships across young people, families,

government and local services, PCYC is well positioned to deliver effective prevention and early intervention initiatives.

The evidence supports a clear role for PCYC in:

- Engaging at-risk young people early, particularly those not yet formally involved in the justice system
- Supporting diversion pathways through accessible, community-based programs
- Providing safe, inclusive environments that build connection, belonging, and pro-social engagement
- Working in partnership with police, youth justice, education, and community services.

Strategic Opportunities

Based on the evidence, there are key opportunities for PCYC Tasmania to strengthen its impact:

- Expanding youth outreach and early intervention programs targeting at-risk cohorts
- Strengthening diversion partnerships with police and youth justice
- Facilitating, participating in, or contributing to multi-agency coordination and response models
- Developing structured, evidence-informed program models incorporating therapeutic and skill-building components
- Exploring case management and throughcare capabilities to support young people with complex needs.

SECTION 1

BEST PRACTICE APPROACHES TO YOUTH CRIME PREVENTION

Section Overview

This section outlines key evidence-based approaches to youth crime prevention, drawing on national and international research. It identifies the core principles, models, and intervention strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing youth offending and improving long-term outcomes.

The evidence consistently demonstrates that youth offending is shaped by a complex interaction of individual, family, school, and community factors. As a result, effective responses are holistic, developmentally informed, and tailored to the needs of young people, rather than relying on single or isolated interventions *(Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], 2002; Hawkins et al., 2010)*.

Key Principles of Effective Practice

Across the literature, several consistent principles underpin successful youth crime prevention:

- **Early intervention is critical**: Addressing risk factors early in a young person's development significantly reduces the likelihood of future offending *(Homel et al., 1999)*.
- **Diversion is more effective than punitive responses**: Minimising contact with the formal justice system leads to better outcomes and reduced recidivism *(Petrosino et al., 2010)*.
- **Interventions must be tailored to risk and need**: Programs are most effective when matched to a young person's level of risk, needs, and responsivity factors *(Andrews & Bonta, 2010)*.
- **Holistic approaches are essential:** Addressing multiple influences - family, education, peers, and community - produces stronger and more sustainable outcomes *(AIC, 2002)*.
- **Trauma-informed and strengths-based practice improves engagement:** Recognising trauma and building on strengths enhances participation and behavioural change *(Orygen, 2018; Lerner et al., 2014)*.
- **Collaboration is critical**: Coordinated responses across systems are necessary to effectively support young people with complex needs *(Noetic Group, 2010)*.

These principles form the foundation for the approaches outlined below.

Key Models and Approaches

1. Developmental and Early Intervention Approaches

Developmental crime prevention focuses on identifying and addressing risk and protective factors across childhood and adolescence. These approaches recognise that offending behaviour often develops over time and is influenced by early life experiences.

Interventions delivered at key developmental stages, such as early childhood and transitions into school and adolescence, are particularly effective in reducing later offending *(Homel et al., 1999)*.

These programs commonly include:

- Parenting and family support
- Early childhood development and education
- School engagement and literacy programs
- Social and emotional skill development
- Access to structured community and recreational activities.

Early intervention works by both reducing risk factors, such as family conflict and disengagement from education, and strengthening protective factors, including positive relationships and social competence *(Farrington, 2007)*.

2. Diversion and Restorative Approaches

Diversion strategies aim to redirect young people away from formal justice system processes and into community-based supports that address the underlying causes of their behaviour.

Evidence shows that formal justice system involvement can increase the likelihood of reoffending, while diversion leads to improved behavioural and social outcomes *(Petrosino et al., 2010; AIC, 2006)*. Diversion enables earlier access to support services and reduces the long-term impacts associated with criminalisation.

Restorative approaches complement diversion by focusing on repairing harm and strengthening relationships. These approaches involve young people, victims, and communities in processes that promote accountability, empathy, and problem-solving. Evidence indicates positive outcomes in participant satisfaction, behavioural change, and reductions in reoffending *(AIC, 2000)*.

3. Therapeutic and Behavioural Approaches

Therapeutic approaches address the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors associated with offending.

Key evidence-based models include:

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**, which targets thinking patterns linked to offending behaviour *(Friedberg & Thordarson, 2018)*
- **Family-based interventions**, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), which improve family functioning and supervision *(van der Stouwe et al., 2014)*
- **Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model**, which ensures interventions are matched to a young person's risk level and criminogenic needs *(Andrews & Bonta, 2010)*.

These approaches are among the most well-established in reducing recidivism, particularly when implemented with fidelity and targeted toward higher-risk young people.

4. Strengths-Based and Positive Youth Development Approaches

Strengths-based approaches focus on building the assets, capabilities, and potential of young people, rather than solely addressing deficits.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks emphasise:

- Building competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring qualities *(Lerner et al., 2014)*
- Strengthening relationships and community participation
- Supporting identity, belonging, and positive life pathways.

Evidence shows that these approaches contribute to improved wellbeing, reduced risk behaviours, and increased engagement in education and community life *(Catalano et al., 2004)*.

5. School and Community-Based Approaches

Schools and community settings play a central role in preventing youth crime and supporting early intervention.

Effective school-based programs:

- Improve engagement, attendance, and achievement
- Develop social and emotional competencies
- Reduce behavioural issues and antisocial behaviour *(AIC, 2002; OJJDP, 2000)*.

Community-based programs are equally important, as they:

- Provide accessible and localised support
- Engage young people in pro-social activities such as sport, recreation, and mentoring
- Build positive peer networks and community connection.

Programs that integrate education, skill-building, and community engagement demonstrate strong outcomes in reducing offending and improving long-term prospects.

6. Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Practice

A significant proportion of young people involved in the justice system have experienced trauma, including abuse, neglect, and exposure to violence.

Trauma-informed approaches recognise the impact of these experiences and prioritise:

- Safety, trust, and consistency
- Relationship-based engagement
- Avoidance of re-traumatisation
- Support for emotional regulation and resilience *(Orygen, 2018)*.

Culturally responsive practice is also essential, particularly in addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Effective approaches:

- Respect cultural identity and knowledge
- Involve community in program design and delivery
- Promote connection to culture, family, and community *(Australian Government, 2020)*.

Summary of Section One

The evidence demonstrates that there is no single solution to youth crime prevention. However, there are clear and consistent features of effective practice.

Successful approaches:

- Intervene early and at key developmental stages
- Divert young people from formal justice system processes
- Address underlying causes through holistic, multi-systemic responses
- Incorporate therapeutic and strengths-based approaches
- Are delivered in accessible, community-based settings
- Are supported by strong collaboration across agencies and services.

These findings provide a strong evidence base for the design and delivery of programs that support positive youth outcomes and reduce involvement in the youth justice system.

Implications for PCYC Tasmania

The evidence outlined in this section strongly aligns with PCYC Tasmania's vision to be a leading organisation supporting young people at risk of justice system involvement through coordinated, evidence-based approaches. It reinforces the importance of PCYC's role not only as a service provider, but as a system leader that connects and strengthens community responses to youth crime prevention.

Consistent with best practice, PCYC is well positioned to lead early intervention and prevention efforts by engaging young people before involvement in the formal justice system. Through its network of community facilities, PCYC can provide safe, accessible environments that promote participation in positive activities, strengthen protective factors, and reduce exposure to risk.

The evidence also highlights the importance of integrated, multi-agency systems of support, which directly aligns with PCYC Tasmania's mission to leverage partnerships across government, police, education, and community sectors. There is a clear opportunity for PCYC to strengthen its role as a connector and coordinator within these systems, supporting more seamless pathways between early intervention, diversion, and ongoing support.

In line with PCYC Tasmania's Strategic Goal 4, there is a strong imperative to ensure programs are structured, evidence-based, and consistently delivered across regions. This includes embedding therapeutic and skill-building components, applying risk and needs-based approaches, and maintaining fidelity to models that are proven to reduce youth offending.

The evidence further supports the expansion of place-based and regionally responsive delivery models, enabling PCYC to respond to local needs while maintaining alignment with best practice. This aligns with broader goals relating to infrastructure, partnerships, and sustainable service delivery.

SECTION TWO

NATIONAL POLICY, FRAMEWORKS AND EVIDENCE

Section Overview

This section examines key national policies, frameworks, and evidence that shape youth crime prevention and youth justice approaches in Australia. It highlights the strategic direction of governments and institutions, with a focus on early intervention, diversion, and coordinated, evidence-informed responses to youth offending.

The national context demonstrates a clear and consistent shift towards preventative, therapeutic, and community-based approaches, supported by policy frameworks that prioritise the rights, wellbeing, and long-term outcomes of young people *(Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], 2020)*.

National Policy Direction

At a national level, youth policy emphasises the importance of supporting young people to achieve positive life outcomes through access to education, employment, health services, and social participation.

The *Australian Youth Policy Framework (2019)* highlights key priorities including:

- Improving education and employment outcomes
- Supporting mental health and wellbeing
- Promoting social inclusion and participation
- Strengthening collaboration across sectors.

This framework reinforces the importance of whole-of-government and community approaches, recognising that youth outcomes are shaped by broader social and economic conditions *(Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2021)*.

Similarly, contemporary policy discussions emphasise the need for inclusive, evidence-based approaches that actively involve young people in decision-making and reflect their diverse needs and experiences *(Monash University, 2023)*.

Rights-Based Approaches to Youth Justice

National and international frameworks increasingly emphasise a rights-based approach to youth justice, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child *(United Nations, 1989)*.

Key principles include:

- The best interests of the child as a primary consideration

- The right to participation and having a voice in decisions
- Protection from harm and unnecessary justice system involvement
- Access to education, health, and support services.

In the Australian context, there is growing recognition that youth justice systems should prioritise rehabilitation, early intervention, and diversion, rather than punitive responses *(Save the Children, 2023)*.

This approach also highlights systemic challenges, including the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and the need for more culturally appropriate and therapeutic responses.

National Standards and Good Practice Frameworks

The National Standards for Youth Justice in Australia (2023) provide a comprehensive framework for delivering effective, child-centred youth justice services.

These standards emphasise:

- Prevention, early support, and diversion
- Family and community involvement
- Cultural responsiveness and safety
- Therapeutic, strengths-based approaches
- Collaboration across systems
- Accountability and continuous improvement.

The standards reinforce that effective youth justice responses must address criminogenic needs, while also recognising the broader social and developmental factors influencing behaviour *(Australasian Youth Justice Administrators, 2023)*.

In addition, national guidance on evidence-informed practice highlights the importance of integrating research evidence, practitioner expertise, and lived experience to design and deliver effective services *(Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2018)*.

Evidence on What Works in Youth Crime Prevention

A substantial body of national research identifies the types of interventions that are most effective in reducing youth offending.

Key findings include:

- Programs that focus on social and cognitive skill development are effective in reducing antisocial behaviour
- Diversion and community-based interventions lead to better outcomes than formal justice processing
- Education and employment pathways are critical protective factors

- Family-focused interventions significantly improve outcomes for at-risk youth
- Multi-component programs that address multiple risk factors simultaneously are the most effective *(AIC, 2002)*.

These findings reinforce the importance of holistic, coordinated approaches that target both individual behaviour and broader environmental factors.

Diversion and Early Intervention in Australia

Diversion and early intervention are core components of youth justice policy across Australia.

National reviews highlight that:

- Diversion reduces reoffending and improves long-term outcomes
- Early intervention programs improve social, educational, and behavioural outcomes
- These approaches are more cost-effective than traditional justice responses *(Cunneen & White, 2011)*.

Common diversion strategies include:

- Police cautioning
- Youth justice conferencing
- Community-based support programs.

There is also increasing emphasis on ensuring diversion pathways are accessible, appropriate, and culturally responsive, particularly for Aboriginal young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth

National policy strongly recognises the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the youth justice system and the need for targeted, culturally safe responses.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020) prioritises:

- Shared decision-making with Aboriginal communities
- Strengthening Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Improving access to culturally appropriate services
- Reducing youth detention and incarceration rates.

Evidence indicates that effective programs:

- Are designed and delivered in partnership with communities
- Incorporate cultural knowledge and practices
- Address broader social and economic disadvantage *(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019)*.

Sport and Community Engagement as Prevention

National evidence highlights the role of sport, recreation, and community engagement in preventing youth offending.

Programs that incorporate structured activities in supportive environments can:

- Reduce engagement in antisocial behaviour
- Improve social skills and relationships
- Strengthen connection to community
- Provide pathways to education and employment *(AIC, 2000)*.

These approaches are most effective when integrated within broader support systems and linked to mentoring, education, and health services.

Summary of Section Two

National policy and evidence demonstrate a clear and consistent direction for youth crime prevention in Australia, characterised by:

- A strong focus on early intervention and prevention
- Expansion of diversionary and community-based responses
- Increasing emphasis on rights-based and therapeutic approaches
- The importance of culturally responsive practice, particularly for First Nations young people
- A growing focus on collaboration and integrated service delivery.

These frameworks provide a clear policy foundation for implementing evidence-informed, coordinated approaches that improve outcomes for young people and reduce involvement in the youth justice system.

Implications for PCYC Tasmania

The national policy and evidence outlined in this section strongly reinforce PCYC Tasmania's strategic direction and its vision to lead coordinated, evidence-based systems of support for young people at risk of justice system involvement.

The consistent national shift toward early intervention, diversion, and community-based responses aligns directly with PCYC's role as an accessible, place-based organisation. This positions PCYC to play a key role in engaging young people early, particularly those at risk of disengagement from education, family, and community systems.

National frameworks also highlight the importance of integrated, multi-agency collaboration. This supports PCYC Tasmania's mission to leverage partnerships across government, police, education, and the community sector. There is a clear opportunity for PCYC to strengthen its role as a connector within these systems, contributing to coordinated pathways that move

young people away from formal justice system involvement and into supportive, community-based interventions.

The emphasis on rights-based, therapeutic, and culturally responsive approaches further highlights the need for programs that prioritise wellbeing, participation, and inclusion. For PCYC, this reinforces the importance of ensuring services are trauma-informed, culturally safe, and designed in partnership with communities, particularly in supporting Aboriginal young people.

Consistent with PCYC's strategic goals, national policy also highlights the need for evidence-informed program design, consistency of delivery, and ongoing evaluation. This presents an opportunity to strengthen statewide alignment in program models, improve quality and outcomes, and support long-term sustainability.

Finally, the growing focus on community-based engagement, sport, and pro-social participation reinforces PCYC's unique value. Its network of facilities and partnerships provides a strong platform to deliver programs that build connection, belonging, and positive pathways for young people.

Overall, the national policy environment positions PCYC Tasmania as a key partner in delivering integrated, preventative responses to youth crime, with a significant opportunity to strengthen its leadership role in connecting systems, delivering evidence-informed programs, and supporting young people to remain engaged in their communities.

SECTION THREE

STATE PRACTICE: STRATEGIES, INVESTMENTS AND SERVICE MODELS ACROSS AUSTRALIA

Section Overview

This section examines youth justice policy, service models, and investments across Australian states and territories. It identifies common strategies and emerging practice trends, with a focus on approaches relevant to youth crime prevention, early intervention, and diversion.

Across jurisdictions, there is a clear and consistent shift toward evidence-informed, community-based, and collaborative approaches. While implementation varies, all states emphasise the importance of early engagement, diversion from the justice system, and coordinated, multi-agency responses *(Australasian Youth Justice Administrators, 2023)*.

Key National Trends in State Practice

A review of state and territory strategies highlights several consistent trends:

- **Early intervention and prevention are prioritised**: Programs increasingly target young people before offending escalates, focusing on risk reduction and protective factors.
- **Diversion is a central strategy**: Jurisdictions are expanding police, court, and community-based diversion options to reduce formal system involvement.
- **Community-based and outreach models are expanding**: Services are increasingly delivered in community settings, with a focus on accessibility and engagement.
- **Multi-agency collaboration is a core feature**: Coordinated responses across youth justice, police, education, health, and community services are widely adopted.
- **Culturally responsive approaches are prioritised**: There is a consistent focus on addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal young people through culturally safe, community-led models.
- **Therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches are embedded**: Services increasingly focus on addressing underlying drivers of behaviour rather than punitive responses.

These trends reflect a broader national alignment with evidence-based youth justice practice focused on prevention, rehabilitation, and community safety.

Tasmania: Policy and Service Context

Tasmania's youth justice system reflects national reform trends, with a strong emphasis on early intervention, therapeutic responses, and system coordination.

The *Youth Justice Blueprint 2024–2034* outlines a long-term reform agenda focused on:

- Preventing youth offending through early intervention
- Expanding diversion pathways
- Embedding therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches
- Strengthening collaboration across agencies
- Improving outcomes for Aboriginal young people.

The *Youth Justice Model of Care (2024)* further reinforces this direction, with a focus on:

- Child and family-centred approaches
- Strengths-based and trauma-informed practice
- Early identification of risk and need
- Integrated, multi-agency service delivery.

These frameworks emphasise a continuum of support, spanning prevention, diversion, community supervision, and transition from custody *(Tasmanian Government, 2024)*.

Tasmania has invested in initiatives such as:

- Community-based youth programs and outreach services
- Education and wellbeing supports, including school social workers
- Remand reduction strategies.

While these developments align with best practice, there remain challenges relating to service coordination, consistency, and access across regions, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Interstate Approaches

Other jurisdictions provide insight into a range of service models and system responses.

Victoria

Victoria places a strong emphasis on diversion, early intervention, and integrated service delivery. Programs such as the Children's Court Youth Diversion Service and Youth Crime Prevention Program demonstrate:

- Strong diversion outcomes
- Place-based service delivery
- Multi-agency collaboration.

Victoria's approach has contributed to lower rates of youth justice supervision and increased use of community-based alternatives *(Victorian Government, 2022)*.

New South Wales

New South Wales adopts a multi-tiered approach, combining prevention, early intervention, and targeted responses to offending.

Key features include:

- Police and community partnerships
- Court-based education and diversion initiatives
- Targeted early intervention programs for at-risk youth.

Programs such as Youth on Track and Youth Frontiers demonstrate the effectiveness of integrated service delivery and tailored case management approaches *(NSW Government, 2023)*.

Queensland

Queensland has invested heavily in multi-agency responses and police–community partnerships, supported by a whole-of-government strategy.

Key initiatives include:

- Youth Co-Responder Teams (police and youth workers)
- Intensive case management and diversion programs
- Community-based programs delivered through PCYC.

The strategy emphasises prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation, alongside coordinated responses to youth recidivism *(Queensland Government, 2024)*.

Other Jurisdictions

Across other jurisdictions (ACT, NT, WA, SA), consistent approaches include:

- Outreach and engagement services targeting high-risk youth
- Night patrols, drop-in centres, and safe spaces
- Justice reinvestment and community-led initiatives
- Increasing focus on early childhood and family support.

These models reinforce the importance of place-based, flexible responses that are tailored to local community needs.

Common Service Models

Across jurisdictions, several service models are consistently used and supported by evidence:

- **Youth outreach programs**: Engaging young people in community settings and providing early support
- **Police-community partnerships**: Building relationships and supporting diversion and early intervention
- **Multi-agency panels and coordinated responses**: Bringing services together to support high-risk young people
- **Education–justice initiatives**: Supporting school engagement and re-engagement
- **Intensive case management and throughcare**: Providing tailored, long-term support across the justice continuum
- **Community-based programs and hubs**: Offering accessible, pro-social activities and safe environments

These models demonstrate the importance of integration, accessibility, and continuity of support.

Key Challenges and Gaps

Despite strong alignment in policy and practice, several challenges are consistently identified across jurisdictions:

- Fragmentation of services and gaps in coordination
- Inconsistent access to services across regions
- Limited evaluation of program outcomes in some areas
- Workforce capability and training needs
- Ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the justice system.

Addressing these challenges requires strong leadership, coordination, and investment in system-wide approaches.

Summary of Section Three

State and territory practice across Australia demonstrates a high level of consistency in policy direction and service delivery approaches.

Key features include:

- A strong focus on **early intervention and prevention**
- Expansion of **diversion and community-based responses**
- Increased use of **multi-agency and coordinated service models**
- Emphasis on **trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice**
- Growing investment in **place-based and outreach initiatives.**

While implementation varies, the overall direction aligns closely with evidence-based best practice and provides a strong foundation for developing effective youth crime prevention responses.

Implications for PCYC Tasmania

The review of state and territory practice highlights a strong and consistent shift toward integrated, community-based, and multi-agency responses to youth crime. This reinforces PCYC Tasmania's strategic positioning as a system connector within Tasmania's youth justice and community support landscape.

Across jurisdictions, effective models are characterised by early engagement, outreach, and accessible service delivery in community settings. This aligns directly with PCYC's existing infrastructure and network of facilities, supporting its role in engaging young people who may not otherwise access traditional services. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen PCYC's contribution as a frontline entry point into systems of support, particularly for young people at risk of escalation.

The consistent use of multi-agency panels, coordinated responses, and throughcare models highlights the importance of seamless service pathways. For PCYC Tasmania, this presents an opportunity to expand its role within local and state-level coordination mechanisms, contributing to shared case planning, information sharing, and integrated responses for higher-risk young people.

State-based models also demonstrate the effectiveness of police–community partnerships and co-responder approaches, which align strongly with the PCYC model. Strengthening partnerships with Tasmania Police and justice services will support the development of more structured diversion pathways and early intervention responses, positioning PCYC as a key referral and engagement partner.

The expansion of place-based and regionally responsive models across jurisdictions reinforces the need for delivery approaches that are both locally tailored and consistent in quality. For

PCYC Tasmania, this supports continued development of regional delivery models that respond to local needs while maintaining alignment with evidence-based practice and organisational standards.

At a systems level, the challenges identified across jurisdictions, particularly around service fragmentation, access, and coordination, highlight an opportunity for PCYC to contribute to stronger community-led systems of support. This aligns with PCYC's role in building partnerships and strengthening connections between services, rather than operating in isolation.

Overall, state practice across Australia positions PCYC Tasmania to strengthen its role as a connector, collaborator, and delivery partner within integrated youth crime prevention systems. By leveraging its infrastructure, partnerships, and community presence, PCYC can play a critical role in improving access, enhancing coordination, and supporting consistent, evidence-informed responses for young people across the state.

SECTION FOUR

SUMMARY AND OPPORTUNITIES

Summary of Findings

This report has examined national and international evidence, policy frameworks, and state-level practice relating to youth crime prevention, early intervention, and youth justice. Across all sections, there is a high level of consistency in both the evidence base and the direction of policy and service delivery.

The findings confirm that effective youth crime prevention requires an integrated, evidence-informed, and community-based approach. No single intervention is sufficient; rather, successful outcomes are achieved through a combination of strategies that address the complex and interconnected factors influencing youth offending.

Key themes consistently identified throughout this report include:

- A strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention, particularly at key developmental stages
- The effectiveness of diversionary approaches in reducing reoffending and limiting formal justice system involvement
- The importance of holistic and multi-systemic responses, addressing family, education, peer, and community influences
- The need for trauma-informed, strengths-based, and culturally responsive practice
- The critical role of community-based and place-based service delivery, improving accessibility and engagement
- The value of collaboration and coordinated, multi-agency systems of support

- The importance of ongoing evaluation, consistency, and quality in program delivery.

These themes are consistently reflected across jurisdictions and reinforced through national policy frameworks, highlighting a shared understanding of "what works" in reducing youth crime and improving outcomes for young people.

Strategic Opportunities for PCYC Tasmania

The findings of this report identify clear opportunities for PCYC Tasmania to strengthen its role as a leader in community-based youth crime prevention, aligned with its vision, mission, and strategic goals.

1. Strengthen Early Intervention and Outreach

There is a clear opportunity to expand early identification and engagement of at-risk young people, particularly those not yet in contact with the justice system.

- Enhance outreach models and engagement strategies
- Increase presence in schools and community settings
- Prioritise cohorts experiencing disengagement or emerging risk.

2. Enhance Diversion and Justice System Partnerships

Evidence strongly supports diversion as a core strategy for reducing reoffending.

- Strengthen partnerships with Tasmania Police and youth justice services
- Position PCYC programs and services as referral pathways for diversion
- Expand involvement in pre-court, bail, and post-court support options.

3. Embed Structured, Evidence-Based Program Models

To align with best practice and support consistency, programs should be:

- Designed using established frameworks (e.g. CBT, strengths-based, RNR-informed approaches)
- Structured and replicable across regions
- Supported by clear program logic, outcomes, and evaluation measures.

4. Strengthen Role in Integrated Systems of Support

Across jurisdictions, effective responses rely on strong coordination between services.

- Increase coordinated response models and participation in multi-agency panels
- Strengthen pathways between PCYC, education, health, police, and community services
- Position PCYC as a connector within local systems of care.

5. Expand Community-Based and Place-Based Delivery

PCYC's infrastructure provides a strong platform for accessible, community-based services.

- Expand delivery of programs in PCYC facilities and community hubs
- Strengthen regionally responsive delivery models
- Ensure consistency in service quality across locations.

6. Enhance Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusion

Consistent with national priorities, there is a need to strengthen culturally safe approaches.

- Partner with Aboriginal organisations and communities
- Embed culturally responsive practices across all programs
- Support connection to culture, identity, and community.

7. Explore Expanded Support and Case Management Models

For young people with higher or more complex needs, there is an opportunity to:

- Develop or partner in case management and throughcare models
- Provide more intensive, coordinated support across multiple systems
- Strengthen continuity of care across the youth justice continuum.

8. Strengthen Evaluation, Outcomes and Sustainability

To support long-term impact and funding sustainability:

- Embed monitoring and evaluation frameworks across programs
- Strengthen data collection and outcome measurement
- Demonstrate impact aligned to prevention, engagement, and reduced offending.

SECTION 5

ENHANCEMENTS TO STRENGTHEN EVIDENCE-INFORMED PRACTICE

Section Summary:

The evidence presented in this report provides a strong foundation for understanding what works in youth crime prevention. However, there is a critical opportunity to strengthen its application within the Tasmanian context. This section builds on the evidence by integrating local data and system insights to identify key patterns, emerging risks, and structural gaps that influence youth offending.

Importantly, this analysis moves beyond describing the problem to identifying where current approaches are insufficient. It highlights the need for more targeted, coordinated, and sustained responses to address the underlying drivers of offending and reduce recidivism.

Tasmanian Context

While national and international evidence establishes clear principles for effective youth crime prevention, applying these principles requires a strong understanding of the local context. Integrating Tasmanian-specific data enables more precise targeting of interventions, ensuring that responses are proportionate to risk and responsive to the needs of young people, families, and communities.

In Tasmania, youth offending is not characterised by high overall rates, but by concentrated and repeat offending among a smaller cohort of high-risk young people. This distinction is critical. It shifts the focus from broad population-level responses towards targeted, intensive, and coordinated interventions for those most at risk.

Tasmanian Youth Offending Patterns: Key Insights

1. Rates of Youth Offending and Recidivism

Available data indicates that youth offending in Tasmania remains relatively low in overall numbers. On an average day in 2024–25, 163 young people were under youth justice supervision, equating to a rate of 20 per 10,000 young people aged 10–17 *(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2026)*. The majority (approximately 90%) are supervised in the community rather than detention, reflecting a strong emphasis on diversion and community-based responses *(AIHW, 2026)*.

However, this data masks a critical pattern:

- Youth offending is highly concentrated, with a relatively small cohort responsible for a significant proportion of repeat offending
- Recidivism remains a key system challenge, with ongoing involvement driven by complex and compounding needs.

This reflects broader national trends, where youth justice systems are increasingly characterised by fewer first-time entrants and a higher proportion of entrenched repeat offenders *(AIHW, 2025)*.

Implications:

- Youth offending in Tasmania is best understood as a low-volume, high-concentration issue
- Recidivism, rather than first-time offending, is the primary driver of system demand

- Responses must include both early intervention and intensive, sustained support for high-risk cohorts.

2. Age of First Contact with the Justice System

Tasmanian evidence shows that while most young people come into contact with the youth justice system during mid-to-late adolescence, a smaller cohort enters much earlier, and this early onset is strongly associated with more persistent offending pathways.

Youth justice supervision applies from age 10, with the largest proportion of young people under supervision aged 16–17 *(AIHW, 2026)*. However, children under 14 who come into contact with the justice system are more likely to experience repeat involvement and escalating system contact *(Tasmania Legal Aid, 2021)*.

Early entrants are more likely to:

- experience overlapping vulnerabilities, including family instability and trauma
- have involvement with child safety systems
- become entrenched in patterns of offending over time.

Implications:

- Early contact (particularly under 14) is a strong predictor of persistent offending
- Intervention must occur earlier, before formal system involvement
- High-risk young people require sustained and coordinated responses across developmental stages.

3. Educational Disengagement

Educational disengagement is a critical factor underpinning youth offending in Tasmania and represents one of the clearest early indicators of risk. State data shows average school attendance is approximately 84.5%, indicating a substantial cohort of young people are partially or persistently disengaged from education *(Department for Education, Children and Young People [DECYP], 2026)*.

Disengagement is often concentrated among young people experiencing disadvantage, including poverty, housing instability, and intergenerational disengagement from education *(te Riele et al., 2025)*.

Research consistently demonstrates a strong relationship between school disengagement and youth offending. Poor attendance, exclusion, and low engagement are associated with increased likelihood of later justice system *involvement (Farrington, 2005; Hemphill et al., 2010)*.

In the Tasmanian context, disengagement:

- often precedes behavioural escalation and system contact
- reduces access to pro-social environments and support systems
- increases risk of association with antisocial peer groups.

Implications:

- Educational disengagement is a key early warning indicator of youth justice risk
- Intervention is most effective when it occurs at the onset of disengagement, particularly in late primary and early secondary years
- Strengthening engagement in education is both an educational objective and a core crime prevention strategy
- Effective responses require coordinated, multi-agency approaches, rather than relying solely on schools.

System Gaps Identified

Analysis of Tasmanian evidence highlights several critical gaps that limit the effectiveness of current responses:

1. **Fragmentation of Services**

Young people with complex needs often interact with multiple systems (education, child safety, health, justice) without coordinated planning. This leads to duplication, gaps, and inconsistent support.

2. **Limited Continuity of Support**

While diversionary approaches are effective for many young people, there is a lack of sustained, long-term support for those with ongoing needs. This contributes to repeat offending and system re-entry.

3. **Insufficient Intensity for High-Risk Cohorts**

High-risk young people often require intensive, multi-system interventions. Current responses are not always proportionate to risk, particularly for early-onset and repeat offenders.

4. **Delayed Intervention**

Intervention frequently occurs after disengagement or offending behaviour has escalated, rather than at the earliest signs of risk.

5. **Weak System Coordination**

There is no consistent mechanism for:

- shared planning

- clear accountability
- coordinated service delivery.

This limits the effectiveness of otherwise evidence-based interventions.

Implications for Practice

These findings highlight the need to strengthen youth crime prevention practice in Tasmania through:

- Earlier identification and intervention, particularly in relation to school disengagement
- Tiered responses, matched to the level of risk and need
- Stronger coordination across systems, ensuring shared accountability and continuity of care
- Expanded capacity for intensive support, particularly for high-risk and repeat cohorts
- Structured pathways from diversion to ongoing support, reducing recidivism.

Section Summary

This analysis demonstrates that youth crime in Tasmania is not driven by widespread offending, but by a small cohort of young people with complex, compounding needs. While early intervention and diversion are stablished, gaps in coordination, continuity, and intervention intensity limit their effectiveness in reducing recidivism.

Addressing these gaps requires a shift towards more structured, coordinated, and system-level approaches, ensuring that young people receive the right support at the right time, and that interventions are sustained across developmental stages.

SECTION 6

UNDERSTANDING ‘WHAT DOESN’T WORK’

While the evidence clearly identifies effective approaches, it is equally important to recognise ineffective or harmful practices. This strengthens program design and reduces the risk of unintended negative outcomes.

Ineffective Punitive Approaches

Evidence consistently shows that punitive responses, particularly those involving early or unnecessary justice system contact, are less effective and can increase the likelihood of reoffending. These approaches:

- Fail to address underlying causes of behaviour
- Can reinforce negative identity and system involvement
- Disrupt education, family, and social connections.

Over-reliance on punitive responses may:

- Escalate rather than reduce offending behaviour
- Reduce engagement with support services.

Risks of Poorly Implemented Programs

Even evidence-based models can be ineffective if poorly implemented. Key risks include:

- Lack of fidelity to program design
- Inadequate workforce training or capability
- Mismatch between intervention intensity and level of risk
- Fragmented or inconsistent delivery across regions.

Poor implementation can result in:

- Limited or no measurable impact
- Reduced confidence from stakeholders and funders
- Potential harm through inappropriate or ineffective intervention.

Recognising these risks reinforces the importance of structured models, training, and quality assurance.

Workforce Capability and Skills

Effective youth crime prevention requires a skilled and supported workforce. Core capabilities include:

- Trauma-informed and strengths-based practice
- Youth engagement and relationship-building
- Understanding of developmental pathways and risk factors
- Delivery of evidence-based interventions (e.g. CBT-informed approaches)
- Ability to work collaboratively across systems.

There is also a need for:

- Ongoing professional development
- Supervision and reflective practice
- Consistent practice models across regions.

Indicative Service Delivery Models

To support consistency and scalability, programs should be supported by clearly defined service models. These may include:

- **Universal engagement programs** (e.g. sport, recreation, drop-in services)
- **Targeted early intervention programs** (e.g. skill-building, mentoring)

- **Intensive coordinated support models** (e.g. case coordination, multi-agency responses).

Each model should clearly articulate:

- Target cohort
- Level of intensity
- Expected outcomes
- Delivery setting (school, community, PCYC facility).

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this report confirms that youth crime prevention is most effective when it is early, coordinated, evidence-informed, and community-based.

PCYC Tasmania is strongly positioned to contribute to this approach, with established infrastructure, partnerships, and a clear organisational focus on youth engagement and prevention. By strengthening its role across early intervention, diversion, and integrated systems of support, PCYC can continue to deliver meaningful outcomes for young people and communities across the state.

This report provides a clear foundation to guide future planning, ensuring that PCYC Tasmania's programs and services remain aligned with best practice and responsive to the needs of young people at risk of justice system involvement.

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