

Disadvantaged youth should not be a political plaything

Alderman Brendan Blomeley completely misses the mark and panders to irrational fear of 'the other' when he claims, without more than anecdotes, anti-social and youth criminal activity around the Rosny Bus Small and Eastlands Shopping Centre Precinct is at Crisis Point: Mercury 12 February 2022 "Let's Crack Down on Young Thugs". Other than making the nebulous demand that punishment should fit the crime, Mr Blomeley offers no solutions to the problem of youth crime or anti-social behaviour in Clarence.

It does not help the people of Clarence to whip up community fear around the existence of crime within the Clarence local and business community. If it is apparently 'risking the ire of left-wing intelligentsia to demand that punishment be in line with the crime', then no doubt it is risking upsetting right-wing anti-intellectualism to point out that installing more CCTV cameras and asking police to stand around Eastlands and the Bus Mall will not reduce crime; especially if the causes of crime are not tackled first.

Unlike Mr Blomeley, I have represented youths in the Youth Court, and I am acutely aware of the dysfunction in their lives that precipitates offending behaviour. Poverty, dysfunction within the family unit, lack of opportunity, disengagement from schooling, drugs, alcohol, and mental illness remain key factors in the risk of youths becoming involved in crime. Governments of all levels have a role in reducing crime, but this involves more than merely throwing a few glib self-serving slogans around, it involves commitment to investment in programs, and a commitment to spending public resources in the public good, despite ignorant nay-sayers demanding that children be locked up.

I support calls for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised. This movement is supported by all State and Territory Attorneys-General including our own Attorney-General Elise Archer. It recognises that incarceration of children and young people does not reduce crime, but perpetuates it. This position is supported by peak bodies within the Legal Profession. On 16 November 2021, the Law Council of Australia said in a media release "A low minimum age of criminal responsibility is not in the public interest and does not make communities safer. Putting children in prison begins a cycle of criminalisation. Evidence shows children remain in cycles of disadvantage and imprisonment due to a lack of early critical support services including health, disability, rehabilitation and family supports." Mr Blomeley's commentary around youth crime and anti-social behaviour in Clarence and the need for 'fitting' punishment is therefore unhelpful and uninformed.

As for the suggestion that the Courts are often hamstrung, I have not once seen Mr Blomeley attend the Youth Court studying its important work. If Mr Blomeley attended, he would see that these youth are far from entitled, they are overwhelmingly disadvantaged and disconnected from their respective communities. These youth are struggling to cope with life events and stresses that no youth should have to suffer. The Youth Court is working diligently to break a complex cycle and to engage these youth with programs or services that will assist in this task and divert them away from crime and incarceration.

Mr Blomeley wants to portray himself as the 'Lord Protector' of Clarence, but in reality, all he does is drive fear and division, while pushing a line which would see an increase in crime in the municipality of Clarence. The people of Clarence should demand meaningful action from the Clarence City Council to tackle youth crime; better investment in resources and programs for at risk youth and their families would be a start. Mr Blomeley should be using

his position as Alderman to partner the Clarence City Council with the State and Federal Governments to seek funding for local projects to reduce youth crime, rather than playing petty politics with disadvantaged youth.

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