

## Justice reinvestment

Therese Catanzariti interviewed Sarah Hopkins, Aboriginal Legal Service, one of the developers of the Justice Reinvestment for Aboriginal Young People campaign.

The government's budget for custodial services is significant – it costs around \$237,980 per year to imprison one juvenile offender. At the same time, effective community programs, and drug and alcohol residential treatment centres often wither through lack of consistent reasonable funding, and limited co-ordination with other support services. Magistrates are frustrated by the limited available non-custodial options, and drug and alcohol addiction is reinforced rather than addressed.

For example, Weave/Kool Kids in La Perouse operates on a shoestring budget and provides after school/ holiday activities including taking young people surfing and to training sessions with Souths Juniors. The program has had phenomenal results, but struggles to get funding.

Similarly, 'Clean Slate without prejudice' in Redfern offers/requires boxing training three mornings a week starting at 6.30am with an aboriginal mentor from Tribal Warrior. The project is co-ordinated by the local Redfern police superintendant and Shane Phillips from Tribal Warriors. The court can order an offender to attend the program as part of bail.

The Justice Reinvestment campaign aims to divert government funds from custodial services to effective local community programs, education and services - smarter spending rather than more spending. The twist is that the campaign aims to influence government funding through financial cost-benefit analysis rather than feel-good anecdotes. Justice Reinvestment is methodical number-crunching – evaluating programs to determine which programs are most effective in reducing recidivism and crime generally, and demographic mapping to determine which suburbs and regions have a high concentration of young offenders, and will benefit the most from investment in early intervention and prevention programs. It provides a framework for justice policy and fiscal policy, allowing treasury to find opportunities for savings.

The campaign draws on justice reinvestment programs in the US and UK. For example, a US justice reinvestment project analysed offenders who were subject to community orders such as remand, probation or community service orders. The project analysed the effect of reducing the order by five days for every month the person the offender performed well. The result was the offender performed better, and the costs were reduced because of the shorter period

under active supervision.

The focus on data has parallels with evidence-based medicine, and effective giving / high impact philanthropy. The campaign contemplates an independent centralised body for ongoing data mining and research. For example, the data mapping identifies high risk communities by analysing the offenders – where do they come from, where are they going back to, who has most contact with criminal justice system. The campaign contemplates that any savings should be ploughed back into the relevant community rather than forming part of consolidated revenue, in the same way that road tolls are invested back into roads. The data mapping can determine the costs of incarceration attributable to the particular suburb or region, as well as what costs were 'saved' by effective local programs.

The focus on local has parallels with the NSW Department of Education 'Connected Communities' project that aims to co-ordinate education, health, welfare, early childhood education and care, and vocational education and training in vulnerable communities, and the European Union subsidiarity principle.

The campaign contemplates a local co-ordinating group that would include representatives from the courts, the police, health, juvenile justice / probation and parole, as well as community leaders from the local aboriginal community. The local team will identify what the problems are, where the problems are, what is working, and what is not working. The centralised body can assist and offer suggestions, but the local community has to step up.

The campaign has an impressive group of champions including NSW Governor Marie Bashir, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda, Dr Tom Calma, former NSW director of public prosecutions, Nick Cowdery, former prime minister, Malcolm Fraser, and chair of La Perouse Local Aboriginal Lands Council Marcia Ella Duncan.

On 17 October 2012, Mick Gooda, Tom Calma, and Marcia Ella-Duncan met with the NSW Attorney-General Greg Smith SC MP and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Victor Dominello MP to discuss the policy. Watch this space.

Further information is available at <http://justicereinvestmentnow.net.au/>