



# “Lonely and scary and traumatising”

Young people’s experiences  
of adult custodial facilities

*A Voices of Young People in the Youth Justice System Project Report*



## CONTENT WARNING:

This project is about the experiences of young people in Tasmania’s youth justice system. Some of their experiences include references to family violence, drug use and abuse. Some young people used strong language to describe these experiences. Readers might find the content of this report distressing. The services listed below can be contacted for support:

- **1800 RESPECT:** 1800 737 732
- **Family Violence Counselling Support Service:** 1800 608 122
- **Blue Knot (childhood and complex trauma support):** 1300 657 380
- **Tell Someone:** [www.tellsomeone.tas.gov.au](http://www.tellsomeone.tas.gov.au)
- **13YARN for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** 13 92 76
- **A Tasmanian Lifeline:** 1800 984 434
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800

# Acknowledgment of Country

The Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People acknowledges and pays respect to all Palawa of Lutruwita as the original and ongoing custodians of this land and for the more than 40,000 years they have cared for their Country and their children. The Interim Commissioner recognises that Aboriginal people are best placed to determine and deliver services to meet the needs of their children.

## Other Acknowledgments

The Interim Commissioner thanks the young Tasmanians with experience of the youth justice system who have bravely shared their stories for this report. Their unique insights and views inform the advocacy of the Office of the Commissioner on behalf of all children and young people in the state. The Interim Commissioner would also like to thank the staff of the Department for Education, Children and Young People (and the former Department of Communities) for supporting young people to participate. Many thanks to the external reviewer for providing helpful feedback during planning for this work, and to the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management and the Department of Justice for providing the data used in this report.

## Adverse Comment Process

Section 21 of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016* (Tas) provides that the Commissioner is not to include any comment in a report that is adverse to a person, unless that person has had at least 15 working days to make representations to the Commissioner before the report is finalised.

The Interim Commissioner provided this report to the Department for Education, Children and Young People, the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management and Department of Justice on 24 December 2025.

The Secretary, Department for Education, Children and Young People responded on 27 January 2026 advising that no representations would be made. The Assistant Commissioner – Operations of Tasmania Police responded on 16 January 2026 and the Secretary, Department of Justice responded on 27 January 2026 with feedback on the report. Their feedback is respectfully acknowledged and has been incorporated or responded to where appropriate.

Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas) 2026. *“Lonely and scary and traumatising”*: Young people’s experiences of adult custodial facilities

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Any questions regarding this report, or the work of Tasmania’s Commissioner for Children and Young People more generally, may be directed to the Interim Commissioner by emailing [childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au](mailto:childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au) or by telephoning +61 3 6166 1366.

For more information, visit [www.childcomm.tas.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au)



“Lonely and scary and traumatising”: Young people’s experiences of adult custodial facilities is part of the *Voices of Young People in the Youth Justice System (Voices Project)* report series.

## Introduction

The *Voices Project* promotes and empowers young people with recent lived experience of the Tasmanian youth justice system to share their views on this system.<sup>1</sup> By hearing directly from young people about what contact with the youth justice system can be like, this project provides critical insights into the system’s impact on children and young people.

The *Voices Project* informs the Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People’s ongoing systemic advocacy about the changes needed to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights and wellbeing of children and young people in Tasmania.

“*Lonely and scary and traumatising*” is a special supplementary report in the *Voices Project* series. It builds on previous reports by focussing specifically on the experiences of children and young people in Tasmania’s reception prison watch-houses, police watch-houses, police cells and court cells. This report is informed by a new round of interviews<sup>2</sup> with young people,<sup>3</sup> providing contemporary, firsthand accounts that deepen our understanding of these environments and how children and young people experience them.



To access other reports in the *Voices Project* series, together with information on how and why we did this work, visit the Commissioner for Children and Young People website:

<https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/everyone/major-programs/youth-justice/the-voices-project>

1. Section s 8(1)(e) of the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016* (Tas) provides that one of the Commissioner’s functions is: “promoting and empowering the participation of children and young people in the making of decisions, or the expressing of opinions on matters, that may affect their lives”.

2. The four previous reports in the *Voices Project* series use interviews with 12 young people conducted between November 2022 and February 2023 (see *How did we do this work* below for more information).

3. Consistent with previous reports in this series, we use the term ‘young people’ when referring to interview participants.

## How did we do this work?

During 2022 and 2023, the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People facilitated in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 young people aged 15-17 with lived experience of Tasmania's youth justice system.<sup>4</sup> In these initial consultations, several young people shared accounts of their experiences in adult custodial facilities<sup>5</sup> in Tasmania.

During 2024 and 2025, we conducted a second round of interviews with nine young people aged 14-17,<sup>6</sup> focusing specifically on adult custodial facilities.<sup>7</sup> These consultations aimed to:

1. Take a deeper dive into the views and experiences shared by young people in the initial interviews.
2. Consider whether young people's experiences had changed, particularly following changes to search procedures<sup>8</sup> and the introduction of Tasmania's Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework.<sup>9</sup>
3. Address an identified gap in both the youth justice reform agenda and the findings of the *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings*<sup>10</sup> (the *Commission of Inquiry*), by highlighting the views and experiences of young people held in adult custodial settings.

The ethical and methodological approach used in the interviews conducted in 2024 and 2025 was the same as earlier interviews, with questions focused on young people's experiences of adult custodial facilities across Tasmania.<sup>11</sup> Thematic analysis was carried out by two analysts from the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and an independent reviewer.

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4. Young people were given the option of talking about the experiences of 'Harley', as a way of keeping their personal feelings and experiences anonymous, and so they would feel more comfortable sharing information. For more information on how and why the original consultations were conducted, see the *Voices Project Methodology*: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Youth-Voices-Methodology.pdf>.

5. See 'What are adult custodial facilities?' on the next page.

6. Including five young people who identified as Aboriginal.

7. While this report mainly draws on a second round of interviews held in 2024 and 2025, some direct quotes from the original interviews are included.

8. While some young people did mention that strip searching is an experience that a child or young person might have in an adult custodial facility, this wasn't widely raised by participants during interviews. The law regarding searches of children in custody in custodial settings was amended in December 2022 through changes to the *Youth Justice Act 1997*. The amendments adopt a rights-based approach to personal searches of children in custody in custodial settings (including adult custodial facilities), limiting the use of strip searches through a least intrusive search framework.

9. For more information, see Office of the Independent Regulator, 'The Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework' (Web Page, 8 December 2025); and the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023* (Tas).

10. Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, *Who was looking after me? Prioritising the safety of Tasmanian children* (Volume 1, August 2023).

11. For more information, see the *Voices Project Methodology*: <https://childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Youth-Voices-Methodology.pdf>

## What are adult custodial facilities?

In Tasmania, children and young people who are detained following arrest by police are routinely held in non-child specific custodial settings,<sup>12</sup> including police watch-houses, reception prison watch-houses, police cells and court cells. This report uses the collective term ‘adult custodial facilities’ to refer to these facilities.

A **reception prison watch-house** (a prison watch-house) is part of a prison where people are held after they have been processed by the police. Children and young people can be held in a prison watch-house to wait for interview, a court appearance, or for a transfer to Ashley Youth Detention Centre (Ashley) if bail has been refused by a court. A child or young person may also be held in a prison watch-house if bail is granted on conditions, and they are kept in custody until those conditions are met.<sup>13</sup> In Tasmania, there are two reception prisons, the Hobart Reception Prison and the Launceston Reception Prison.<sup>14</sup>

There are two **police watch-houses** in Tasmania. They are attached to the Hobart and Launceston Police Stations and are managed jointly with the Tasmania Prison Service, through designated cells in the prison watch-houses.<sup>15</sup> A **police cell** is a place within a police station used for people who have been arrested or otherwise lawfully detained. Children and young people can be held in police watch-houses and cells while waiting for interviews, bail or court appearances.<sup>16</sup>

**Court cells** are secure areas within court buildings where people are held before or after their court appearances. Children and young people may be held in court cells while waiting for their matter to be heard or for transport to another custodial facility. The court cells at the Devonport and Burnie Courts are used in a similar manner to the prison watch-houses and are managed by the Department of Justice.<sup>17</sup>

The young people interviewed for this project had been held in a range of adult custodial facilities across Tasmania. They used different terms to describe the adult custodial facilities, including ‘on remand’, ‘remand centre’, ‘holding cells’ and ‘the watch-house’. This terminology has been retained in the quotes throughout this report.

<sup>12</sup>. Data from the Custodial Inspector demonstrates that that children are routinely held in prison watch-houses. Between December 2022 and August 2024, there were 642 receptions of 222 children. In Hobart Reception Prison, almost two thirds of the children were held for over eight hours and 40 per cent for over 16 hours. In Launceston Reception Prison, 57 per cent were held for over eight hours and almost a third for over 16 hours. Some were held for well over 24 hours.

<sup>13</sup>. Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania's prisons* (Review Report, June 2025).

<sup>14</sup>. There are no reception prisons in the North-West/West Coast regions. In these areas, children and young people who have been arrested and taken into custody are held in the Burnie or Devonport Police Station cells and, if denied bail, are transferred to and from the Burnie or Devonport Court cells for court appearances. They are also detained in either the Burnie or Devonport Court cells if remanded for transfer to Ashley.

<sup>15</sup>. Tasmania Police provided feedback on 16 January 2026 that the term ‘reception centres’ more accurately reflects the current terminology for prison watch-houses, however, for ease of reading, we have chosen to collectively refer to the Hobart Reception Prison and Launceston Reception Prison as ‘prison watch-houses’.

<sup>16</sup>. For more information on when a child or young person might be held in a police or reception prison watch-house, refer to Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania's prisons* (Review Report, June 2025), Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup>. If a child or young person is being held at the Devonport or Burnie Court, they will be transferred to the Devonport or Burnie Police Station for overnight detention (after 8pm). In Hobart or Launceston, a child or young person will go directly to court from the prison watch-house, rather than via the court cells, because they are connected to the Magistrates Courts.



## The role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People advocates for all Tasmanian children and young people and has a special function to advocate for individual children and young people detained under the *Youth Justice Act 1997*.<sup>18</sup>

The Commissioner promotes good practice, policy, and legislation by influencing decision-making, undertaking research and monitoring, publishing reports, providing advice to ministers and government agencies, undertaking investigations, and making submissions to inquiries and reviews.

In exercising these functions and powers, the Commissioner considers the rights of the child under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* to ensure the wellbeing and best interests of children and young people are paramount.<sup>19</sup>

The Interim Commissioner, along with previous Commissioners, has consistently advocated for significant reforms to the youth justice system,<sup>20</sup> including calling on the Tasmanian Government to expand and more strongly invest in child-centred and community-based supports and initiatives to ensure that the detention of children and young people is only ever a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup>. Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016 (Tas) s 8(1)(b).

<sup>19</sup>. Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016 (Tas) s 3(1).

<sup>20</sup>. Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Feedback on the New Tasmanian Youth Justice Facility Masterplan* (Submission, May 2025); Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Adult prison is no place for children' (Opinion piece, 8 February 2024); Commissioner for Children and Young People, *The Age of Criminal Responsibility in Tasmania* (Memorandum of Advice, July 2023); Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Submission to the Reforming Tasmania's Youth Justice System Discussion Paper* (Submission, March 2022); Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Submission on the Draft Bail Bill 2024* (Submission, March 2025).

<sup>21</sup>. In June 2025, the Interim Commissioner welcomed the release of the Custodial Inspector's report, *Children in Tasmania's Prisons*, and advocated for the Tasmanian Government to promptly and fully implement all recommendations from the report. In doing so, the Interim Commissioner endorsed the Custodial Inspector's call for watch-houses to be included in the Tasmanian Government's current youth justice reform measures.



## Rights Insight

All children are entitled to the rights set out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.<sup>22</sup> Articles relevant to the detention of children and young people in adult custodial facilities include:<sup>23</sup>

**Article 3**, which says that when adults make decisions, they must consider how the decision affects children. The wellbeing of children should be a primary consideration, and governments must ensure they are properly cared for.

**Article 19**, which requires governments to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect by those responsible for their care.

**Article 37 (b)**, which states that children must be detained only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.

**Article 37(c)**, which requires children in detention to be separated from adults, unless it is not in the child's best interests.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>. *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child*, opened for signature 20 November 1989, (entered into force 2 September 1990) art 40(4). Note, several other international human rights treaties and declarations are relevant here including the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*; the *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*; the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*; the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*; and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

<sup>23</sup>. Children in detention also have additional rights as outlined in Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians, 'Statement on Conditions and Treatment in Youth Justice Detention' (Statement, November 2017).

<sup>24</sup>. The Australian Government has a reservation to Article 37(c), on the basis that Australia's geography and demography make it difficult to always detain children in juvenile facilities, while also allowing them to maintain contact with their families. However, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has highlighted that Australia's reservation is "unnecessary" because the Article specifically provides that the prohibition only applies where it is in the child's best interest and that children have the right to maintain contact with their family. Australia is one of only seven countries to maintain a specific reservation to Article 37(c).

## Background: A significant gap in Tasmania's youth justice reforms

The Tasmanian Government's *Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034*<sup>25</sup> sets out a ten-year plan for 'whole-system reform of youth justice' with an 'integrated and therapeutic approach, focused on the rights of children'.<sup>26</sup> While these reforms signal an important shift towards a therapeutic model of care for children and young people who encounter the justice system, a harmful practice has been largely overlooked in the reform agenda - the detention of children and young people in adult custodial facilities.<sup>27</sup> The Youth Justice Model of Care, which was released in 2024, only briefly considers the experience of children in adult custodial facilities:

The experience of arrest can be traumatic for children and young people, with them often transitioning through watchhouses prior to being placed in custodial settings. This can be destabilising and heighten the risks of the child or young person. All interactions with children and young people throughout this period must be cognisant of this.<sup>28</sup>

In reality, and despite clear international standards,<sup>29</sup> children and young people are routinely held in adult custodial facilities in Tasmania, including children as young as 10. Adult custodial facilities are not developmentally appropriate spaces for any child or young person: they are harsh, counter-therapeutic spaces designed for adults. Children are often held in cells next to adults<sup>30</sup> and are often placed under the care of correctional officers with limited training<sup>31</sup> to support and respond to the needs of children and young people.<sup>32</sup> Currently, staff employed in adult custodial facilities are trained as adult correctional officers, leaving them ill-equipped to effectively support and respond to the needs of children and young people. Furthermore, neither police officers nor correctional officers are currently required to hold working with vulnerable people registration.<sup>33</sup>

The experiences shared by young people as part of the *Voices Project* highlight just how inappropriate these environments are for children and young people. Young people describe dirty and cold cells, their lack of privacy and dignity, proximity to and contact with adult prisoners, and feeling scared and alone. Many did not know their rights or what was happening to them.

**25.** Department for Education, Children and Young People, *Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2024* (Strategy, December 2023).

**26.** Minister for Children and Youth, 'Expert panel to oversee youth justice transition' (Media Release, 29 August 2024).

**27.** The Secretary, Department for Education, Children and Young People has noted that improving supports for children and young people in prison watch-houses aligns with existing commitments to provide child-centred, therapeutic support across the youth justice continuum. The Secretary advised that the *Youth Justice Blueprint Action Plan 2026-2027* is under development and will respond to children and young people's engagement with watch-houses (Letter from Department for Education, Children and Young People to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 27 January 2026). The Secretary, Department of Justice also noted that Government remains open to considering alternatives for detaining children and young people after arrest and the Department supports that position (Department of Justice to Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 27 January 2026).

**28.** State of Tasmania, *Youth Justice Model of Care* (Model of Care, December 2024) 37.

**29.** See Rights Insight above for further information on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and how it applies to children and young people detained in adult custodial facilities. Tasmania's *Youth Justice Act 1997* also requires that 'detaining a youth in custody should only be used as a last resort and should only be for as short a time as necessary'.

**30.** These adults may include people being held for serious crimes.

**31.** The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has stated that "States parties should establish separate facilities for children deprived of their liberty that are staffed by appropriately trained personnel and that operate according to child-friendly policies and practices".

**32.** The Secretary, Department of Justice provided information regarding training provided to reception prison staff, including full-day training delivered by the Australian Childhood Foundation focussed on trauma informed engagement with children and young people in custodial settings, and training on the reportable conduct scheme and child safety essentials. She also advised that plans are underway for prison watch-house staff to participate in training delivered to Ashley staff (Letter from Department of Justice to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 27 January 2026). However, the Tasmanian Custodial Inspector has highlighted that Tasmania Prison Staff are trained to manage adults in custody, not children and that staff did not feel adequately trained to manage and engage with young people. Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania's prisons* (Review Report, June 2025) 39.

**33.** See exemption for police officers and correctional officers: Department of Justice, 'Exemptions', <<https://www.justice.tas.gov.au/rwvp/apply-or-renew/exemptions#:~:text=Relevant%20content-Exemptions%20from%20RWVP,RWVP%20in%20your%20volunteer%20role>>.



Their voices echo the findings of Tasmania's Custodial Inspector, who highlighted that in Tasmania's prison watch-houses "there is not and cannot be adequate separation from adult people in custody; they look, feel, smell, sound and function like maximum security adult prisons; they do not, and cannot operate as trauma-informed, therapeutic and child-focused places; the physical environment is poor; neither watch-house can be modified...to become appropriate."<sup>34</sup> The Custodial Inspector concluded that prison watch-houses "are wholly inappropriate for children and should be included in the reform agenda."<sup>35</sup>

Detaining children in any custodial environment has the potential for serious and lasting negative consequences upon their health, development and wellbeing.<sup>36</sup> This harm is further exacerbated when children are held in adult facilities, where they are particularly vulnerable to rights violations and care that does not meet their developmental needs. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasised that children should never be held in adult custodial facilities,<sup>37</sup> as it compromises their health, basic safety, and future ability to avoid reoffending.

The Tasmanian Government has acknowledged the importance of holding children and young people separately from adults.<sup>38</sup> It has stated that "options are being explored for a dedicated reception facility for young people that could be attached to the Hobart Reception Prison".<sup>39</sup> However, young people have reported consistent issues across all adult custodial facilities including in the North and North-West of the state. Without further commitments from the Tasmanian Government to phase out the use of adult custodial facilities for all children and young people, it is likely that children and young people will continue to be held in these facilities.

<sup>34</sup>. Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania's prisons* (Review Report, June 2025) 57.

<sup>35</sup>. The environments described by young people and the Custodial Inspector raise questions about Tasmania's compliance with at least two new oversight frameworks relating to child safety. The *Child and Youth Safe Standards* became mandatory for all government agencies on 1 January 2024, and the Tasmanian National Preventive Mechanism has been established as an independent statutory body to safeguard vulnerable Tasmanians and to meet Australia's requirements under the *Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

<sup>36</sup>. Human Rights Law Centre, '126 organisations call on Attorneys-General to #RaiseTheAge to 14', <<https://www.hrlc.org.au/news/2024-04-24-raise-the-age-scag/>>.

<sup>37</sup>. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child uses the term 'centre or prison for adults'.

<sup>38</sup>. Department for Education, Children and Young People, *Keeping Children Safe in Detention Action Plan 2024-26* (Action Plan, December 2024).

<sup>39</sup>. Madeleine Rojahn, 'Tasmanian child safety regulator inquiring into concerns prisoners with child abuse convictions could, until recently, work in reception prisons', ABC News (online, 29 August 2025) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-29/prisoners-with-child-abuse-conviction-reception-prisons/105697392>>.



## Data Insight

### **Number and age of young people entering adult custodial facilities**

Between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025, between 58 and 74 distinct young people aged 12 to 17 were admitted to Hobart and Launceston Reception Prisons, each quarter.<sup>40</sup>

During the same period, around 200 distinct children and young people aged between 10 and 17 were admitted to adult custodial facilities<sup>41</sup> managed by Tasmania Police across Tasmania, each quarter.<sup>42</sup>

This data also highlights that children as young as 10 are being detained in adult custodial facilities across Tasmania.

### **Aboriginal status of young people held in adult custodial facilities**

Between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025, around 2 in 5 (40%) young people admitted to an adult custodial facility identified as Aboriginal.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup>. Letter from the Department for Justice to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 16 July 2025.

<sup>41</sup>. Statistical information was not available on police custody facility types.

<sup>42</sup>. Letter from Tasmania Police to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 7 July 2025.

<sup>43</sup>. Letter from the Department of Justice to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 16 July 2025; Letter from Tasmania Police to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 7 July 2025.

## What we heard

Young people feel scared and unsafe inside adult custodial facilities.

Young people want to be cared for separately from adult detainees in child-friendly spaces supported by staff who know how to care for children and young people.

Young people want greater privacy, especially when using the toilet.

Young people want access to information and dedicated support staff so that they can understand custodial processes and feel supported.

## What needs to change

Children and young people should not be detained in adult custodial facilities. Placing children and young people in these facilities, even for short periods, exposes them to environments that are fundamentally unsuitable and actively harmful to their wellbeing.

When the Tasmanian Government raises the minimum age of detention to 16 years, this must be applied across all adult custodial facilities without exception.<sup>44</sup>

Where pre-court detention is an unavoidable last resort, it should occur in child or young person-specific spaces staffed by trained professionals providing developmentally appropriate care.

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<sup>44</sup>. Pleasingly, the Tasmanian Government has committed to delivering legislative amendments to increase the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years and the minimum age of detention to 16 years during the 2027 calendar year (Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Keeping Children Safe Quarterly Report - 1 August to 31 October 2025*). However, as noted by the Custodial Inspector, it is not clear whether the raised minimum age of detention will apply to pre-court detention.

## Spotlight on child safe spaces

All children and young people in Tasmania have the right to be safe and to feel safe.

Insights from children and young people communicated to the *Commission of Inquiry* suggest that the design of a physical environment is important to a child's sense of safety, such as being clean and tidy, not damaged, and free from hazards.<sup>45</sup> While it is important for children to be adequately supervised, they also require access to privacy and freedom of movement to feel safe.<sup>46</sup>

Key features of child-centred and trauma-informed design include small, home-like environments, with soft surfaces to absorb sound, rather than institutional environments. However, young people with experience of the youth justice system have also told us that to feel safe, they need adults to truly listen to them, to understand how they are feeling, and to respect and value them and their rights. Young people have also said that they feel safest when they know what to expect from their environment. To achieve this, children and young people need clear, accessible information regarding their rights and responsibilities. They need to be involved in decisions affecting their care, and to be provided with sufficient information to make informed choices.

<sup>45</sup>. Tim Moore and Morag McArthur, *Take notice, believe us and act! Exploring the safety of children and young people in government run organisations* (Report, Tasmanian Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, 2022).

<sup>46</sup>. Tim Moore and Morag McArthur, *Take notice, believe us and act! Exploring the safety of children and young people in government run organisations* (Report, Tasmanian Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, 2022).

## Listen, learn and act: The views of young people

*“Lonely and scary and traumatising”* features the voices of young people who have spent time inside adult custodial facilities.<sup>47</sup> While these facilities may look different across Tasmania, the experiences that young people described were largely consistent across each region. During these interviews, every young person shared their ideas for improving the conditions in which they were held.

### “... It sort of feels like a prison... an absolute prison”: Young people’s views on what it’s like inside adult custodial facilities

Young people spoke about the harsh and uncomfortable conditions inside adult custodial facilities – describing dirty cells, exposed toilets, a lack of fresh air, poor quality food, extreme temperatures, high levels of noise, and limited natural light.

*Well, usually you’re locked in a cell. A very dirty cell that doesn’t get cleaned really. There’s always blood stains, bits of food chucked around. It’s smelly. (Mia, 17)*

*... It’s dark, it’s very dark, there’s no windows. There’s no sense of the outside world, what the time is. You can’t even check the time on the TV... unless it’s the news. When court’s coming up all you have to do is just sleep until it’s court, because otherwise you’ll literally just drive yourself insane in your cell. You’ll just drive yourself insane. (Reid, 16)*

*Well, you like get no sleep because everything is so loud. You’re in bed [you can’t turn the light off]. So you’re sitting there in a bright room just with nothing to do. You get fed, but the food is just not even for a kid or a teenager. You can’t stomach it. (Ollie, 16)*

*If you ask for food, they give you this shitty little container of food that’s always stale and shit. I know when I’m in the remand centre, I feel real sick because the food is horrible and I don’t eat. (Tyler, 17)*

*You could see people getting belted the fuck... you can see people getting strip searched sometimes, you can... you can see a lot of stuff really... you can see people like suicidal and that, and that ain’t the best place to be either. (Andy, 17)*

<sup>47</sup>. Please note that to protect their privacy, the real names of young people who shared their views with us as part of the *Voices Project* are not used.

Many young people said they did not have basic necessities in their cells, including warm clothes and blankets.

*Sometimes if you’re staying overnight in a police cell, you’ll get a mattress and a blanket, but they don’t have any pillows or anything... it’s just all cement, with a toilet and a sink and a camera and yeah. (Toby, 17)*

*It’s a bit shit, because the cells are cold. There’s no heaters in there, not nothing. No windows. Just sitting there with just a mattress looking at the walls. It’s fair enough no pillow but at least a blanket during the day, so you’re still warm [or] some more clothes. They’ll give you like a pair of trackies because you’re not allowed cords in them. Then they won’t give you a jumper just to be a smart ass. And then you’re sitting there saying, can I have this cause I’m cold. (Andy, 15)*

Ultimately, Andy described how being in a prison watch-house felt like being in an adult prison:

*...It sort of feels like a prison... an absolute prison. You’re in a box space up there 24 hours a day, for however long you’re in there. (Andy, 15)*



## “You don’t really feel safe”: Young people’s views on how it feels to be in an adult custodial facility.

Young people talked about feeling alone, scared, anxious, overwhelmed, unsafe and angry.

Describing how a young person might feel going into an adult custodial facility for the first time, Ryan reflected that it would be:

*Lonely and scary and traumatising. You’ve got nothing but your lonely thoughts in a cell at night, so you just guess how you feel... if you go into a Hobart Reception Prison, where there’s four or five guards putting you into a cell with nothing but the mattress, and then five minutes later, you look out your window and you see eight prison guards on top of people, taking their clothes off and putting them in gowns and stuff like that and putting in suicide cells with nothing and hearing people yell out, asking for toilet paper. They say shut up and wait. Then, when [security] come pick you up, two random people you don’t know put you in handcuffs and say, “Oh, come get in the car. I’m going to take you to Ashley.” It’s very scary, I think.*

**(Ryan, 17)**

Adding to this, Stevie said:

*Well, if it’s your first time it can be terrifying. Because you’re in a remand centre which is a prison and you’re a kid but there’s also adults in there and the guards are really shit in there. They can neglect you and get away with it because of who they are and because it’s a remand prison... [you might be feeling] scared, alone... you can’t contact anybody. They rarely allow phone calls.* **(Stevie, 15)**

Jack reflected on his experience in a police watch-house, and how waiting to find out what would happen might make a young person feel anxious.

*Oh, the anxiety in wanting to get done now, for me was horrible, so I imagine it would be the same for any other kid who cares about that kind of thing. I don’t know of how many of them do, but I hated it.* **(Jack, 19)**

Similarly, many young people described how waiting in adult custodial facilities without knowing what would happen affected their sense of safety and made them feel isolated and anxious.

*Well, you get to the realisation that you got to stay here for a while, but like you’re terrified the whole time. The scariest part about it is you don’t know what to expect... like you just have to sit there and you’re stuck alone just thinking, thinking and thinking. If you’re going to get out or if you’re not going to get out. Because you’re not guaranteed to be safe. No-one says nothing is going to happen down there. So you just have to kind of think nothing is going to happen, but no-one ever says, oh... no-one is going to touch you, no-one is going to do anything... you don’t know if you’re going to be there all night or just a couple of hours or you’re never going to leave. You don’t know what to think.* **(Ollie, 16)**

*You’re not sure if you get put with people that are a lot older or bigger than you or you’re not sure who’s in there for doing what. You’re just not 100 per cent sure what’s going to happen. (Bailey, 18)*

*You don’t really feel safe because like these people have the keys to get into your room and you can’t get out. You feel trapped. Like you can’t escape, you can’t - if someone came in there to hurt you, you can’t do nothing about it. You can’t go anywhere. (Tyler, 14)*

*Like when you first get locked up, it’s very scary because everything is so loud and sort of echoey... you don’t know what to think. You don’t know what to expect like on my first ever time. (Ollie, 16)*

Ollie also described how going into an adult custodial facility with another young person helped to reassure him.

*There’s no reason you should be going in, but if you’re going with someone that’s been there before, it’s a lot - I wouldn’t say easier, but it’s better. You know nothing is going to happen because they can reassure that nothing is going to happen... but when you’re by yourself, it’s just shit. You don’t - no-one has ever been like, it’s going to be fine or like nothing is going to happen. (Ollie, 16)*

For some, the isolation and stressful environment deeply affected their wellbeing, including leading to feelings of suicidal distress.<sup>48</sup>

*Some people can feel suicidal. I felt suicidal one time... real scared, like what’s going to happen to you, [especially] if it’s your first time. You never know. (Tyler, 14)*

*It just feels like you’re unwanted, like no one wants you... Because it fucks with your head when you’re in there because they don’t come to your cell, they don’t give you a drink, they don’t do anything. It makes you angry... You just sit in a cell with four walls, and you have nothing... You just think about everything, you think about stuff on the outside and you can’t help anything. (Harry, 18 )*

Nathan shared the top three things that he felt were the worst experiences for him in a prison watch-house.

*Getting ignored. Feeling alone. The screws<sup>49</sup> not being there for you and like speaking to you disrespectfully. And also mocking me. (Nathan, 17)*

While some young people felt that the staff in adult custodial facilities were trying to be helpful, other young people described interactions with correctional officers that made them feel worthless, scared and angry.

*It’s just terrible. The guards, they don’t make it easier. They don’t treat you like people, they treat you like you’re nothing. (Ollie, 16)*

*Ashley’s way better than the remand centre. They treat you better, treat you like you’re not just a prisoner. You have stuff to do for an hour. They treat you like you’re not even worth it in there. (Andy, 15)*

<sup>48</sup>. Tasmania Prison Service staff follow a SASH (Suicide and Self-Harm) Protocol, a confidential protocol to manage the risk of people in custodial facilities, which young people have described as confrontational.

<sup>49</sup>. It is acknowledged that the term ‘screw’ may be considered disrespectful. However, in the interests of accurately reflecting the views and experiences of the young people interviewed, their quotes have been presented without alteration.

Several young people felt like they had been ignored and neglected while they were in an adult custodial facility, and that staff had chosen not to listen to them by turning off the intercom to their cells.<sup>50</sup>

*They don't really listen to you. Like, if you ask for something, like ask for a phone call or something - they don't really listen. I've called out to them for an hour one time, and they just still didn't answer me. They turned off them... the beeper thing [the intercom]. (Sophie, 14)*

*If you just need someone to talk to or something like that it's basically fuck off mate. (Reid, 16)*

*Oh, you've got times they'll turn your intercom off so you can't buzzer, so they won't come to your door at all. There's been times when they won't give over toilet paper. They turn your toilet off so you can't flush it. (Mia, 17)*

*Then there's places like Launceston [Reception Prison], the only time you buzz up and get response is when it's cups or toilet paper, that's the only time you'll get a response. (Reid, 16)*

**50.** The Custodial Inspector observed in *Children in Tasmania's prisons* that Tasmania Prison staff who work at prison watch-houses do not feel adequately trained to manage and engage with young people. He noted that they felt “frustrated and ill at ease managing the children. Areas of concern included the poor physical infrastructure, the risks of self-harm, and concern that they might face allegations of abuse”. He also observed that staff “appear genuinely concerned for the welfare of children and well-attuned to their duty of care”.

## Data Insight

### Length of detention in adult custodial facilities

Between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025, most young people (91.5%) admitted to a prison watch-house were detained for more than an hour,<sup>51</sup> and 1 in 6 (16%) were held for 24 hours or more.<sup>52</sup>

**51.** In contrast, most young people (90%) admitted to a police watch-house between 1 July 2024 and 31 March 2025 were detained for one hour or less (data obtained from Letter from Tasmania Police to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 7 July 2025).

**52.** Letter from the Department of Justice to Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas), 16 July 2025.

## “You feel violated”: Young people’s views on the lack of privacy in adult custodial settings

Young people identified features of adult custodial facilities that challenged their privacy and dignity. They recounted feeling vulnerable because of cameras in their cells and not knowing who was watching them, and the distress caused by having to use the toilet without privacy.

*There’s a camera watching from a corner that sees everything you do. As a kid, they’re watching you on the camera going to the toilet. You feel violated. (Ollie, 16)*

*They’re watching you on camera naked. You can be underage and they - that’s just uncomfortable knowing that there’s guards sitting there watching a naked child in a cell. (Stevie, 15)*

*It’s literally a complete invasion of... your privacy. Like, fair enough, I understand it’s in there for your safety in case you try to do something to yourself or something, but they shouldn’t have it so the camera can see you on the toilet. (Bailey, 18)*

*It is kind of scary that there is a camera watching you the whole time while you sleep or go to the toilet. Because they can see you while you’re going to the toilet... when I’m in there I don’t really go to the toilet... feel like disgusted or whatever, embarrassed because there’s someone watching... especially because you know it’s like elder people as well, looking at you as well. You don’t know who they are or anything. (Tyler, 14)*

Tyler also observed that vulnerable children and young people expressing feelings of self-harm can be placed in a room without clothing, though he hadn’t experienced this himself.

*There is another thing, there’s one called... isolation room or something. It’s see-through, like all windows, and if you say you’re going to self-harm they rip - take all your clothes off and give you a blanket and throw you in this room that has see-through windows and cameras. No TV, no mattress, or anything like that. (Tyler, 14)*

Conversely, Toby noted that the level of privacy available differed between adult custodial facilities.

*The Court cells in Burnie are actually not too bad. They have been painted recently and stuff. And where the camera is there’s like a little wall, so you can do your business in private, but in the police cells there’s not. (Toby, 17)*

## “Some of them say pretty bad, disgusting things to you”: Young people’s contact with adult prisoners

During their time in adult custodial facilities, many young people were held next to, or exposed in other ways, to adult prisoners.<sup>53</sup> Young people shared experiences where their proximity to adult prisoners made them feel unsafe or compromised their wellbeing.

Ethan, Nathan and Tyler spoke of feeling afraid of the adult prisoners, including those working in prison watch-houses.<sup>54</sup>

*Like I’ve walked through there before, and like adults are standing there, adults standing there, all in prison clothes and that, and there’s still prisoners there cleaning shit. People that are in protection there... you’re walking past and you’re seeing all these murderers and rapists, and you don’t know what they’re going to do, don’t know what they’re thinking, they could come up and start grabbing you or whatever. Because normally there’s only two or three guards on at a time. They could do anything. There’s like 10 people out probably. (Ethan, 15)*

*Well, while you’re in there, it’s like a big hallway and there’s cells all the way across from each other, and young people are always seeing the prisoners and always I can hear the prisoners... it’s a bit scary considering they’re like prisoners. You don’t know what charges they’re on. You don’t know anything about them, and they’re just a random person that’s in pretty much the same circumstance as you. (Nathan, 17)*

*It’s all right that we’re in different cells but if [like they could be] talking dirty or being - making young people feel really uncomfortable. Especially because they’re elderly people and they’re already in the remand centre, you don’t know what they are capable of or who they are, or whatever. (Tyler, 14)*

<sup>53</sup>. According to Tasmania’s Custodial Inspector, in Hobart Reception Prison the cells designated for children are on a separate lower floor, however the watch-house is cramped and too small to allow adequate separation from adults. In Launceston Reception Prison, watch-house cells are not in a separate location from the rest of the prison, making adequate separation impossible and ‘loud, combative, and aggressive shouting reverberates through the complex’. We have also heard that communication between adults and young people in custody can occur through the drains in the sinks within cells in the prison watch-houses. See Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania’s Prisons* (Review Report, June 2025) for more information.

<sup>54</sup>. Another young person described a prisoner walking around with the correctional officers to hand out food. Media reports have raised allegations that prisoners convicted of child sexual abuse have worked in reception prisons where children were detained, raising significant child safety concerns. Following these allegations, the Minister for Justice, Corrections and Rehabilitation directed the Department of Justice to immediately stop prisoners with convictions for sexual offences against children working in prisons. See Madeleine Rojahn, ‘Tasmanian child safety regulator inquiring into concerns prisoners with child abuse convictions could, until recently, work in reception prisons’, *ABC News* (online, 29 August 2025) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-29/prisoners-with-child-abuse-conviction-reception-prisons/105697392>>

Many young people explained how being subject to verbal abuse by adults, including through sexualised comments, is a common experience.

*In the remand centre, you’re locked in. There’s about six cells, I think, that’s meant to be the youth side but isn’t always. You’ve got other six cells on the other side – on the other end that the adults are in. So you have to put up with the adults and some of them... say pretty bad, disgusting things to you, can make comments about you or say sexual things to you. Yes, some of them are pretty crazy and probably shouldn’t be in there. (Mia, 17)*

*Getting abused by the old cunts, getting threatened. Everyone starts mouthing off, the screws will mouth off... Some in there think they’re ‘terry toughnuts’ and then they’ll see a kid, and they’ll start [verbally] abusing them to try and act hard to all the other people in there, so everyone thinks they’re this big person. (Ethan, 15)*

*... Adults just sit there mouthing off to you, saying they’re going to do some putrid stuff... (Andy, 15)*

Many adults detained in adult custodial facilities are volatile, highly distressed, experiencing mental health issues, or trying to “make their presence known”.<sup>55</sup> Andy and Ollie shared how the noise from adults had further contributed to the stress of being in an adult custodial facility.

*Because like they just sit there and mouth off to you, all day, every day. Then you’ve got people that are drunk, off their heads, just screaming all night. People are just fried, just doing stupid shit and that. It’s hard to get to sleep sometimes. (Andy, 15 )*

*Well, it’s like most people in there are adults... and if they’ve been on drugs, they’re going to be angry. You experience a lot of angry people yelling. Just banging on their doors and kicking. It’s just terrible. (Ollie, 16)*

Reflecting on her experiences near adult prisoners, Lily spoke about why she felt youth detention was a safer place for children and young people.

*I don’t know. Just because everything here [in Ashley] is better. They don’t put - not that there’s really fully grown men here anyway. But when you do it there [in a prison watch-house], they put you like near - just weird people that kids - especially they should have a section to keep girls and boys separate or even just a different section for the kids and the adults, but it’s just everyone is all in together. (Lily, 15)*

<sup>55</sup>. Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania’s prisons* (Review Report, June 2025) 35.

## “It gets them off the streets”: Young people shared very few positive experiences of adult custodial facilities

Young people were asked about any positive aspects of adult custodial facilities. Some young people pointed out the opportunity to detox from drugs and alcohol, or to have somewhere to stay.

*It gets them off the streets. At least their parents know that they're safe... get away from everyone else, like out in the world... (Ethan, 15)*

*Probably the only good part is that drugs are coming out of your system, if you have drugs in your system and that, like while you're sitting in there. (Nathan, 17)*

*You're going to have, like I guess the bed in there and blanket... for the night. (Andy, 15)*

*We do get a lot of sleep, well sometimes, when people aren't screaming. (Sophie, 14 )*

James spoke about how prison watch-house staff were nice to him and worked to get him transferred to youth detention as quickly as possible.

*... The workers in the remand centre actually are nice. They're nice to you. They say, let's get you out of this shithole, mate. This is for the shit prisoners, let's go, get you to Ashley's where it's better. You get fed good food. (James, 15)*

Another young person found the only positive part of his experience was when he left the adult custodial facility.

*The only good part about being arrested in remand, is the part where you go to court. That's like the best part. Getting out of remand is the best part about remand. (Ollie, 16)*

## “Well, you don’t put 10-year-olds in Risdon Prison so why should they be in a remand centre with [adults]?”: What needs to change

When asked what needs to change with current adult custodial facilities, many young people identified the importance of housing children and young people separately to adults and the importance of being cared for by staff with experience of working with young people.

*Well, I'd have an adult remand centre and a youth remand centre, so then youths are just with youths and adults are just with adults and have youth workers work in the youth one. Like people that have worked with youth in the past, and then just have the adult remand centre screws or the reception prison, whatever you want to call it, screws, working with adults. (Nathan, 17)*

*Oh, for the youths, I'd make a whole new section... you feel more safe. If youths were put with other youths instead of full-grown men and people, they're just yelling you're going to jail and all that. If youths were put with other youths, it'd be a lot more - everyone would be feeling the same, so it'd make you feel a bit better knowing you're not the only one going through it... because at the end of the day, we're still kids or teenagers. We'd rather be with people our age, instead of people that are double our age, triple our age that are going to jail, just showing up and going to jail... and all that. (Ollie, 16)*

*Well, you don't put 10-year-olds in Risdon Prison so why should they be in a remand centre with [adults]? (Stevie, 15)*

Building on this, young people shared their ideas on what a youth-specific remand centre should look like and include.

*... It'd be like just rooms with like TVs and that in there. You'd have stuff to look at on your walls like posters and that, so you're not just looking at blank walls. (Nathan, 17)*

*Well in remand, I'd put at least a shower in there. In your room. And I'd let kids have phone calls in there. You only get one phone call at the police station and then that's all. You don't get a phone call until you come up here [to Ashley]. (Ethan, 15)*

*It's where you ask for something to eat, they actually get it for you... especially like young people, they should have blankets and food and stuff, when they like need it. (Sophie, 14)*

*Everyone deserves a bit of privacy, especially young people, that’s what I think... there shouldn’t be a camera there. It should be the same sort of room, but you should have a toilet you can go to without being watched. (Ollie, 16)*

*Yeah, a television or a courtyard, something to go outside... so that would be good to have a courtyard, so young people can get a bit of fresh air. Because when you’re locked up for 48 hours in a cell... Even having like a window or something in the cells would be good. (Toby, 17)*

*Got different screws and that like that can work with kids. (Andy, 15)*

Tyler’s suggestions included more comfortable clothes, privacy,<sup>56</sup> seeing sunlight, better blankets and pillows, better food, people to talk to and being able to connect with family.

*I reckon being able to talk to someone. Being able to have a call or something, be able to call someone. Like, have phones like that or something, in the rooms so you can talk to your family. It would be way easier I reckon... better comfortability, phones in there, better TVs, better things to do. More sunlight and fresh air. Being able to go out into a courtyard or something and have fresh air. (Tyler, 14)*

Reid spoke about how being held in a clean, comfortable environment can change how a young person feels or behaves.

*It just makes all the difference. Because if you’re in a clean environment you feel respected as a normal human being. Also, if you’re not underground, you’re not treated like a monster. If you’re just not in places that look creepy and are just very remote and basic and scary, then you don’t feel like you’re being treated unfairly or like a menace to society and you won’t be, act like one, basically. (Reid, 16)*

Young people also suggested that better support systems and clearer communication from police and correctional officers, including on the likelihood of bail and the expected time in custody, could make the experience easier.

*I know they’re [police officers] just doing their job and they’ve - we’ve been naughty or whatever, but they should really like - especially for kids for their first times - like tell them that everything is going to be okay and whatever and that they’re just making mistakes and stuff. Not just being like completely rude and talk down to them. (Tyler, 14)*

*A young person might need a lot of things. Like, he might be going through a very hard time because he’s getting locked up. Not just because he’s getting locked up, the reason he got locked up. So, he might need something to take his mind off things... [and to be] regularly reassured that he’s not alone in this situation. There is people there to help. That is what they are there for. (Reid, 16)*

<sup>56</sup> Including having the camera in a place where there is privacy on the toilet, so “you can feel more comfortable going to the toilet whenever you need and not feel like you have to hide”.

*Probably the guards saying, you’re going to be fine, instead of not saying anything. I think it should be part of their job to tell people that’s there for the first time, and especially teenagers, that the food is not as good as you think and this is what to expect. As a part of their job, they should tell you what to expect...*

**(Ollie, 16)**

Adding to this, Nathan and Andy thought having access to dedicated support staff would help children and young people in adult custodial facilities.

*... Like someone that’s like a safe adult that you feel safe with... They need like – I reckon, remand centres should get like a youth worker kind of person to be on site at all times for like the young people that are going in and out of there... Someone that could walk around and ask you how you are, instead of someone that just comes up, checks on you, doesn’t really talk to you and just walks off.<sup>57</sup> **(Nathan, 17)***

*Like, say someone’s like bad with their mental health, like some people needed to talk to someone, to clear their mind and that. **(Andy, 15)***

Reid suggested that there should be a quicker system for transferring children and young people to youth detention, while Ethan thought that they should be brought straight to youth detention, instead of being held in an adult custodial facility if they were being remanded.

*... they might get locked up in remand and think, is it going to be like this for the last - for the next seven months? Is it going to be like this for the next month? Whatever they think they’re going to have in their head, they might think that’s what they’re going to have. They might think it’s a little box like this and they might just overthink and drive themselves crazy. So, if every time a youth was arrested, have the [transport provider] on speed dial for coming up Ashley’s... just a quicker system so you’re not in remand for two to three days... there just needs to be a quicker system when it comes to being remanded. **(Reid, 16)***

*Bring them straight here [to Ashley]... [that would be] better, I reckon. **(Ethan, 15)***

<sup>57</sup>. Nathan also spoke about how having someone safe to talk to would allow young people to ask questions to help with the uncertainty of being in custody.



## Conclusion

*“Lonely and scary and traumatising”* shares the views of young people about what it is like being held in adult custodial facilities across Tasmania, and how the experiences of children and young people could be improved both in these facilities and through the development of stand-alone youth-specific facilities.

We heard that young people felt scared, anxious, degraded and unsafe while detained in adult custodial facilities. They shared stories of stark, cold, creepy conditions where they were exposed to invasions of privacy, threats from adult prisoners, a loss of dignity, and regularly had their basic human rights denied.

The Tasmanian Government has committed to nation-leading youth justice reform; however, there are no firm plans to phase out the use of adult custodial facilities to detain children. This means that a key entry point for children into the custodial system is not currently being addressed with the same principles and scrutiny as the rest of the youth justice system. It is acknowledged that the Secretary of the Department for Education, Children and Young People has advised the *Youth Justice Blueprint Action Plan 2026-2027* will respond to children and young people’s engagement with watch-houses.

As the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* outlines, all children and young people have a right to be separated from adults while in detention, unless it is not in their best interests.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the Government has the responsibility to detain children and young people in separate custodial facilities that operate according to child-friendly policies and practices.

To meet the Government’s commitment to improve community safety and deliver a therapeutic model of youth justice, ending the use of adult custodial facilities to detain children must be explicitly included in the youth justice reform agenda, including through developing safe, child-centred alternatives.

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<sup>58</sup>. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed the view that this caveat should be interpreted narrowly and that the convenience of the States parties should not override the best interests of children.

# A message from the Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People

*“Lonely and scary and traumatising”* makes for difficult reading.

Through this project, young people have described appalling conditions within adult custodial facilities, highlighted serious risks associated with being detained alongside adults, and emphasised the need for staff to have the right skills and experience to care for children and young people in custody.

The routine practice of detaining children and young people in adult custodial facilities in Tasmania is entirely inconsistent with child rights standards, the child and youth safe organisations framework, and the trauma-informed child-rights based policy objectives of the government’s progressive youth justice system reforms. Adult custodial facilities are not appropriate environments in which to hold a child even for a short period of time.

This position is shared by the Tasmanian Custodial Inspector, whose detailed June 2025 report outlined serious concerns about the conditions and treatment of children held in prison watch-houses.<sup>59</sup> In my response to the release of the Custodial Inspector’s report, I challenged any member of our community calling for harsher, more punitive responses to children’s offending behaviours to read the Custodial Inspector’s report. I expect most Tasmanians would be shocked to learn that children are routinely held in adult custodial facilities alongside adults charged with serious offences.

*“Lonely and scary and traumatising”* shares first-hand experiences of young people, offering powerful insight into the realities of the current system, which they have bravely shared with the hope that change will come.

The youth justice reform agenda must include urgent and dedicated focus on ending the use of adult custodial facilities to detain children, including by ensuring appropriately resourced and developmentally appropriate community-based alternatives to pre-court custody.

Any detention of a child or young person should only ever be a last resort and for the shortest possible time, and when it is used, it must be child-centred, trauma-informed, and grounded in a genuine commitment to better outcomes. It is essential that Tasmania’s youth justice reforms retain their focus on the rights and wellbeing of young people, and that they embrace all aspects of youth custody. I strongly encourage exploration of an alternative therapeutic and more developmentally appropriate approach to caring for children and young people who are detained while police investigations are carried out or to appear in court. Continuing to place children and young people in adult custodial facilities fundamentally contradicts Tasmania’s child rights based commitments.

We have an opportunity to make Tasmania a leader in youth justice reform and ensure a truly therapeutic and effective system for all children.

**Isabelle Crompton**

***Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People***

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<sup>59</sup>. Office of the Custodial Inspector Tasmania, *Children in Tasmania’s prisons* (Review Report, June 2025).





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