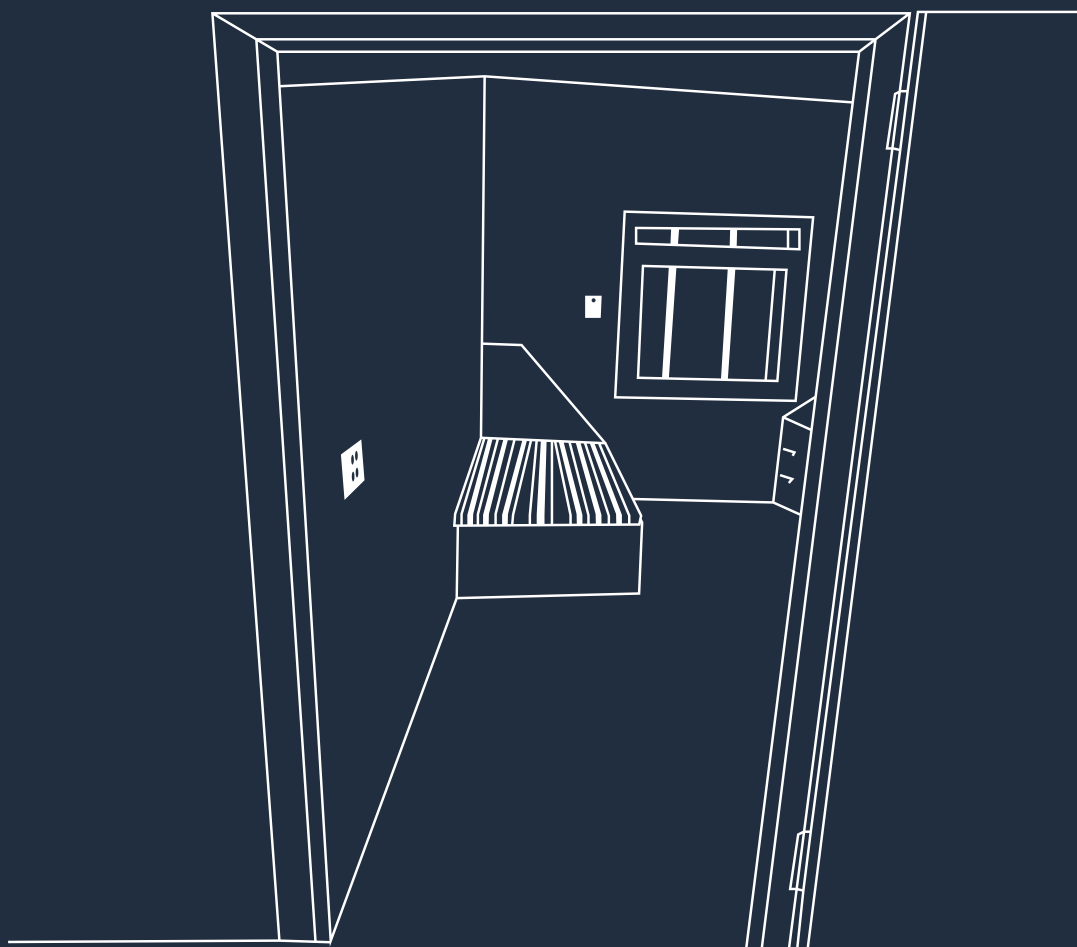




“You’ve got nothing else to do...”

Making Isolation Less Harmful:
Views from Young People at Ashley
Youth Detention Centre

Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas) 2026.

"You've got nothing else to do..." Making Isolation Less Harmful: Views from Young People at Ashley Youth Detention Centre

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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 Commissioner by emailing childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au or by telephoning +61 3 6166 1366.

For more information, visit: www.childcomm.tas.gov.au.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People acknowledges and pays respect to the Palawa of Lutruwita / Tasmania as the original and ongoing custodians of this Land who for more than 40,000 years have cared for their Country and their children.

Acknowledgement of young people's contribution

The Interim Commissioner thanks the young Tasmanians with experience in the youth justice system who have bravely shared their stories for this report. Their unique insight and views inform the advocacy of the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People on behalf of all children and young people in the state.



CONTENT WARNING:

This report discusses young people's experiences of isolation practices at Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Some young people have used strong language to describe these experiences. Some readers may find the content of this report distressing. The services listed below may be contacted for support:

- **1800 RESPECT:** 1800 737 732
- **13YARN for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** 13 92 76
- **Family Violence Counselling support service:** 1800 608 122
- **A Tasmanian Lifeline:** 1800 984 434
- **Blue Knot (childhood and complex trauma support):** 1300 657 380
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800

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 the Secretary of the Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) with a draft of this report on 15 June 2026. A response was received on 20 July 2026. Representations made by DECYP have been considered and incorporated into this report as appropriate. A 'for publication' response from the Department is also included as Appendix C.



Photo of a room inside Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Reproduced with permission from the Custodial Inspector (Tas) [Inspection of Ashley Youth Detention Centre in Tasmania: Health and Wellbeing Inspection Report, 2017](#).



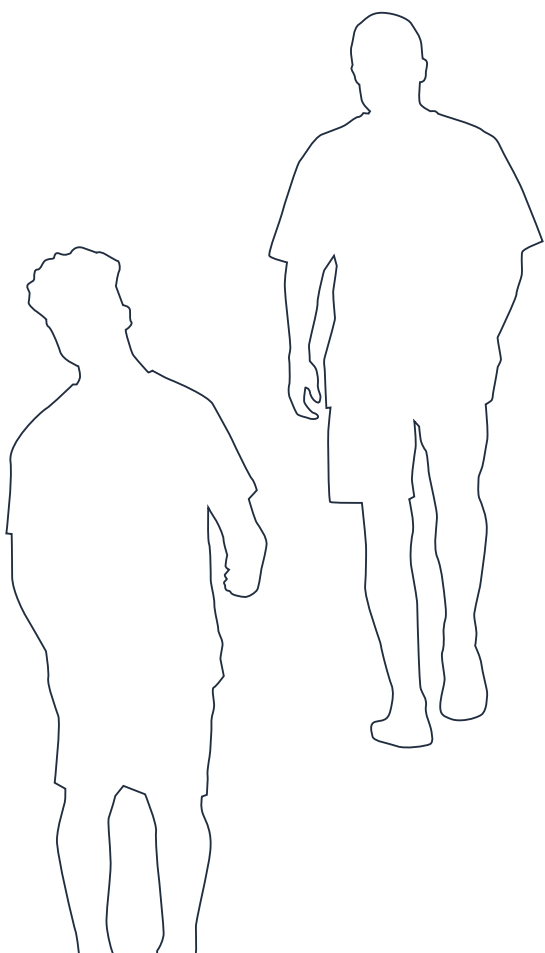
Interim Commissioner's Foreword

For young people at Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC), being locked in their rooms is a familiar part of daily life. Young people describe involuntary isolation as being “locked down” or “locked in”, but whatever term is used, the experience is much the same: separation from others, limited access to meaningful activity, and uncertainty about when the experience will end.

As Interim Commissioner, I regularly talk with young people in AYDC as part of my role advocating for children and young people detained under the Youth Justice Act 1997 (YJA). Detention is already a profoundly isolating experience for young people. They are separated from family, friends, community, and the routines that shape everyday life. During my visits to AYDC, I have seen and heard about the additional impact that periodic isolation practices have on young people in detention.

Isolation can undermine a young person's dignity, negatively affect their wellbeing, and work against the broader purpose of youth justice. At its core, youth justice is intended to support young people to take responsibility for their actions, repair harm, develop in positive and socially responsible ways, and build the skills and relationships they need to move forward. These outcomes are not achieved when a young person is alone, isolated in their room.

Isolation is allowed under the YJA when a young person's behaviour presents an immediate risk to safety that cannot be managed in other ways, or



where it is necessary to maintain the security of the detention centre. Young people have a right to be safe, and so do the staff responsible for their care.

The need for safety does not, however, diminish the obligation to treat children and young people with dignity, humanity, and respect.

This report examines the use of isolation in AYDC between January and April 2026. Drawing on departmental data and, importantly, the experiences and views of young people themselves, it explores how isolation is used, how it is experienced, and what practical steps can be taken now to lessen the harms of isolation for young people in detention.

Young people told me and my team, in no uncertain terms, what isolation feels like, how it affects them, and what could make isolation less harmful for young people in detention.

There is currently a considerable program of youth justice reform underway in Tasmania, including reform relating to the Use of Isolation Procedure. This is welcome. However, the detail of those reforms is not yet available, meaning that out-dated procedures governing isolation at AYDC remain and young people continue to experience impacts on their wellbeing.

Uncertainty also persists about record keeping practices at AYDC, as the department works to improve their information systems. Although the data included in this report provides general insight into the pattern of isolation use at AYDC, further improvements are needed to support my oversight function for young people in detention.

While I welcome DECYP's commitment to several practical improvements suggested by young people in this report, I strongly encourage the department to commit to all suggestions identified by young people

in this report, and to work alongside young people experiencing detention to implement them.

I acknowledge the efforts made by staff at AYDC to improve outcomes for young people in their care. It is my hope that ongoing investment in recruitment, training and practice development at AYDC will see sustained reductions in the frequency of isolation.

I am grateful to the young people who generously shared their views for this report. Their insights remind us that meaningful reform is not only about policies and procedures. It is about improving the daily lives of children and young people. It is our responsibility to listen to those voices and to act on what they have told us.

Ros Cornish AM

Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People

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Abbreviations

AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ANZCCGA	Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates
AYDC	Ashley Youth Detention Centre
CCYP	Commissioner for Children and Young People
DECYP	Department for Education, Children and Young People
OSS	Operational Staff Shortage
YJA	<i>Youth Justice Act 1997 (Tas.)</i>
YP	Young Person



Background

The Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory officer whose primary role is to promote, protect and advocate for the rights, wellbeing and best interests of all young people, including those in detention.¹ Central to this role is ensuring the perspectives of young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or in custodial settings such as Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC), are heard, acknowledged, and acted upon.

The Advocate for Young People in Detention (the Advocate) plays a critical role in supporting the Commissioner by providing direct, individual advocacy to young people in detention. Together, the Commissioner and the Advocate engage with young people in detention and advocate on their behalf to ensure the youth justice system upholds their rights and acts in their best interests.

An ongoing and significant concern facing young people in AYDC is the use of isolation. Young people continue to report experiences of isolation that impact their mental health, wellbeing, and access to meaningful engagement. Data collected by the Advocate, and published by the Commissioner,² demonstrates a consistent pattern, with young people regularly seeking assistance from the Advocate in relation to isolation practices and conditions of confinement.

1. [Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2016 \(Tas\)](#) ('CCYP Act'). This Act will be replaced by the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2025*. Upon commencement of the new Act, the Commission will hold strengthened systemic oversight responsibilities, including enhanced powers to monitor and conduct investigations and inquiries into the systems and services relating to youth justice, and the safety and wellbeing of children and young people within this system; to make recommendations aimed at improving all services provided for, or in respect of, children and young people in detention; and to ensure that Tasmania satisfies its international obligations relating to children and young people.

2. CCYP (Tas) [Annual Report \(2023-2024\)](#), CCYP (Tas) [Annual Report \(2024-2025\)](#)

Successive Tasmanian Children's Commissioners have raised concerns about the harms of isolation for young people in detention.³ The Tasmanian Government's youth justice reform agenda represents an important shift toward embedding trauma-informed and rights-based approaches to youth detention settings. The [Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034](#) (the Blueprint) and the [Youth Justice Model of Care](#) (the Model of Care), both emphasise moving away from punitive and restrictive practices, and toward approaches that prioritise relationships, therapeutic engagement, and the holistic development of young people.

Youth detention serves a distinct purpose within the Tasmanian youth justice system. Consistent with international human rights standards, including the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*,⁴ detention should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time,⁵ while also supporting rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.⁶ The Blueprint and Model of Care reflect these principles by promoting a therapeutic approach that responds to children and young people's developmental, cultural and wellbeing needs.⁷ Within these frameworks, youth detention is intended to provide a safe environment that supports accountability, learning, healing and positive behaviour change.⁸

3. In 2024, former Commissioner Leanne McLean added her voice to a Joint Statement from the Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioner Guardians and Advocates (ANZCCGA). The statement argued that isolation of children should be prohibited except where necessary to prevent an imminent and serious risk of harm, and only after all alternatives have been exhausted. It also emphasised the need for time limits, independent oversight, and nationally consistent standards. See ANZCCGA [Joint Statement on Isolation in Youth Detention](#) (Statement, 21 February 2024) ('ANZCCGA Statement on Isolation').

4. [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), GA Res 44/25 (2 September 1990) ('UNCRC').

5. UNCRC (n 4) Article 37(b).

6. UNCRC (n 4) Article 40(1).

7. Department for Education, Children and Young People, [Youth Justice Blueprint 2024-2034](#) (Strategy, December 2023).

8. Department of Premier and Cabinet, [Youth Justice Model of Care](#) (Model of Care, December 2024).

Given its potential impact on young people's wellbeing, development and access to therapeutic supports, the use of isolation at AYDC has come under scrutiny in recent years. The *Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings*⁹ examined the use of isolation in depth and made a series of detailed recommendations aimed at reform. These included updating the definition and conditions of isolation in the [Youth Justice Act 1997](#) (YJA), revising the Department for Education, Children and Young People's (DECYP) Use of Isolation Procedure, and strengthening requirements for recording and reporting.¹⁰ While the Tasmanian Government has committed to these reforms,¹¹ key elements remain incomplete. Legislative amendments have been delayed until 2027,¹² and updated operational procedures have yet to be finalised,¹³ creating a gap between reform commitments and current practice.

While reforms continue, this report draws on young people's experience of isolation in detention and sets out three key priorities for immediate action by DECYP to lessen the harms of isolation on young people in detention.¹⁴

9. [Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) (Report, August 2023) ('*Commission of Inquiry*').

10. *Commission of Inquiry* (n 9) Recommendation 12.32. The Tasmanian Government has also committed to building a new youth detention centre at Pontville by late-2027.

11. According to [Keeping Kids Safe in Detention Action Plan 2024-2026](#), updating the Use of Isolation procedure is due by July 2026. The Action Plan also notes that "*it is vital to protect children and young people from inappropriate and excessive use of isolation, force, and invasive searches. Isolation must never be used as a form of punishment, and the use of force should only be permitted when strictly necessary to prevent imminent harm.*" (p 31)

12. Department of Premier and Cabinet [Keeping Children Safe: Quarterly Report 1 August to 31 October 2025](#) (Report).

13. In correspondence to the Interim Commissioner dated 21 July 2026, DECYP advised that a revised *Use of Isolation Procedure* will be implemented at AYDC by the end of December 2026.

14. This report focuses on immediate action that DECYP can take, as the Department with responsibility for the management and operation of AYDC.



Isolation at Ashley Youth Detention Centre

Isolation is one of the most restrictive practices used on young people in detention in Tasmania. The YJA defines isolation as *“locking a detainee in a room separate from others and from the normal routine of the detention centre.”*¹⁵ This definition captures a practice that removes a young person from meaningful human interaction and participation in daily activities.¹⁶ Isolation is different from the broader conditions of detention, where young people are housed in environments that are physically and socially separated from the community. Within detention centres, daily routines often include periods of time young people spend in their rooms. Some of these periods are structured, such as designated bedtimes or ‘quiet times’, while others may involve a young person choosing to spend time alone. Isolation involves additional involuntary restriction on a young person beyond daily schedules, routines, or choice.¹⁷

Across Australia there is no standardised definition of isolation,¹⁸ with various terms used interchangeably, including *“separation”, “night-mode”, “controlled cell operations”,* and *“segregation”*.¹⁹ At AYDC, isolation is referred to, and recorded under, a range of operational terms, such as *“rolling/rotating*

lockdowns”, “late unlocks” and *“early bed time”*.²⁰

Young people in detention also refer to isolation as being *“locked-down”* and *“locked-in”*, as described later (see page 19 of this report).

The use of isolation is not unique to Tasmania.²¹ The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has found that such practices remain widespread across Australia and are often used for extended periods, despite clear evidence of the harm they cause and their inconsistency with human rights standards.²²

The YJA specifies the *“only”* circumstances in which isolation, as defined in the Act, may be authorised by a detention centre manager.²³ These categories include *“behavioural”* (which requires that a young person’s behaviour presents an *“immediate threat to his or her safety”,* or the *“safety of any other person”* or *“property”* and stipulate that *“all other reasonable steps have been taken”* to prevent harm and that those steps have been *“unsuccessful”*)²⁴, or *“in the interests of the security of the centre”*.²⁵ In practice at AYDC, instances relating to the security of the centre are typically recorded and reported by DECYP as *“Operational Staff Shortage (OSS)”*.²⁶ For consistency, this report will use the terms *“behavioural”* and *“OSS”* when referring to each category of isolation.

15. *Youth Justice Act 1997* (Tas), s133 (‘YJA’).

16. The YJA does not specify the maximum duration of isolation.

17. *ANZCCGA Statement on Isolation* (n 3). Consistent with the joint statement on Isolation in Youth Detention published by the Australian and New Zealand Children’s Commissioners and Guardians (ANZCCGA), this report uses the term “isolation” to encompass all instances where a young person is confined to their room outside routine practices.

18. *ANZCCGA Statement on Isolation* (n 3).

19. *ANZCCGA Statement on Isolation* (n 3).

20. Department for Education, Children and Young People *Monthly Custodial Youth Justice Reports: Isolation* (Reports, January-April 2026) (‘DECYP Custodial Youth Justice Reports’).

21. In 2017, The Victorian Commission for Children and Young People, released its findings into the use of isolation, separation and lockdowns in the Victorian youth justice system. This report highlighted the serious harmful effects of isolation on highly vulnerable young people and called for significant reforms to the use of isolation in youth detention. Commission for Children and Young People, [The same four walls: inquiry into the use of isolation, separation and lockdowns in the Victorian youth justice system](#) (Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People, 2017).

22. Australian Human Rights Commission (2025). [Left Alone: A Review of Solitary Confinement and Similar Practices in Australia’s Youth Justice Systems](#). Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission. (‘AHRC Report’) p 6. This Report examines both solitary confinement and similar practices across Australia, including isolation, segregation, exclusion and separation.

23. Other specific roles within AYDC have received delegation from the Detention Centre Manager to authorise the use of isolation, with limitations.

24. YJA (n 15) s133 2(a-b).

25. YJA (n 15) s133 2(b).

26. *DECYP Custodial Youth Justice Reports* (n 20).

Demographic profile of young people in AYDC

Between January and April 2026, there were between 15 and 21 young people in detention on any given day. Young people in detention were aged between 13 and 19 years of age, and most young people were male (80% on average). At least 1 in 3 young people in detention were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (34% in January, 41% in April), and most young people were on remand (>80%).²⁷

27. Department for Education Children and Young People, Situation Reports and AYDC Daily Rolls.

Rates of isolation for behavioural and OSS reasons²⁸

Analysis of DECYP data contained in the isolation registers from January to April 2026²⁹ shows young people were subject to OSS isolation more often than behavioural isolation (see Figure 1).

In January, there were an average of 74 OSS isolations per young person, compared with 15 for behavioural reasons. Although the frequency of isolation declined across the period, OSS isolation continued to be applied daily in April, with an average of 37 instances per young person.

The data also indicates that in addition to OSS specific isolations

(5,467 instances), behavioural isolations were attributed to “security of the centre” (747 instances), with smaller numbers recorded for “the safety of others” (150 instances), “their own safety” (33 instances), and fewer than 10 instances each for “self-harm” and “threats to property”.

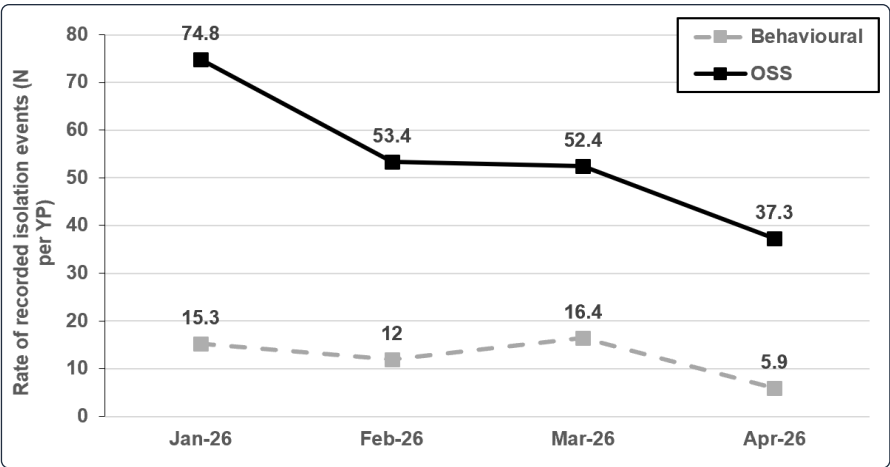


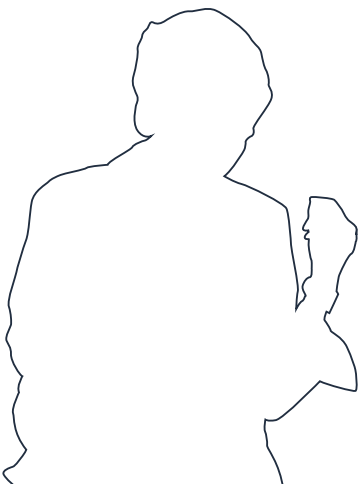
Figure 1: Monthly average rate of recorded isolation events per young person at AYDC between January 2026 to April 2026. Isolations recorded for OSS reasons occurred at a greater frequency compared with isolations recorded for behavioural reasons. Data Source: DECYP Custodial Youth Justice Reports (n 20).

28. It is the view of the Interim Commissioner that the data provided by the department in relation to isolation at time of publication supports count analyses only. The Interim Commissioner further acknowledges that counting isolation events does not account for the duration of individual isolation events which may provide an additional insight into a young person's experience of isolation. The department notes that it is “[c]ontinuing to drive the development of operational information systems to provide appropriate record keeping of young people's experience at AYDC” see Appendix C 29. DECYP Custodial Youth Justice Reports (n 20), the CCYP receives monthly data from DECYP relating to isolation of young people in AYDC.

Behavioural Isolations

According to DECYP data, behavioural isolations were described in terms of risk associated with the young person, including generalised characterisations such as “behaviour”, “high risk residents”, and “security risk.” These broad descriptors were supplemented by more immediate and situational concerns including general perceived threats to others or property, including instances where “the young person’s behaviour presents an immediate risk,” or where imminent escalation in behaviours were anticipated, such as a young person “almost [getting] into a physical altercation.” Records also identify specific conduct, including “attempting to pop sprinklers, refusing staff directives and making physical contact,” as triggers for isolation. In addition, isolation is used in response to non-approved behaviours (e.g., “due to smoking in [location]”) and is at times informed by historical patterns, including references to “recent behaviours” or “previous incident[s] and behavioural concerns.” There was one recorded instance where isolation was used after de-escalation efforts proved unsuccessful:

“[Young Person] has been antagonising other YPs and not following instructions from staff. [Young person was] reminded about [their] behaviour a number of times but continued in [their] aroused state. Staff felt that is (sic) was safer for [Young Person] to be isolated”.



OSS Isolations

While the circumstances for behavioural isolation under the YJA restrict its use to situations where the young person’s behaviour presents an immediate safety threat, the YJA also permits isolation to be authorised in the “interests of the security of the centre”.³⁰ Analysis of DECYP data appears to indicate a pattern of using isolation in response to operational constraints, such as low staffing and competing demands on staff capacity, centre-wide safety breaches, and anticipated security risks following serious incidents. These isolations cite staff shortages, including reduced availability during shift transitions (e.g., “[time period] due to staff leaving at [time]”) or limited staffing capacity necessitating modified routines such as: “[time am] unlock due to low staff” and “OSS isolation [time period], inadequate staffing numbers in unit due to morning meetings and operational requirements across centre”. In other instances, conditions are further framed as presenting direct risks to centre security, with some isolation records explicitly noting: “operational staff shortage, not enough staff [are available] onsite to manage centre safely.”

Other isolation events suggest factors beyond staffing pressures, such as incident response, behavioural concerns, and centre-wide risk management, are also significant considerations. Examples include: “due to previous incident and behavioural concerns”, “rolling isolation procedures for the security of the centre”, and “rolling [isolation] due to prevent the risk (sic) and in the interest of the centre”. Other entries point to co-ordinated operational responses, including “centre-wide lockdown at [time]” and isolation linked to “increased risk of [behaviours]...after recent incident”.

30. YJA (n 15) s133.

Links between behavioural and OSS isolations

The classification of isolation as either behavioural or OSS isolations can be inter-dependent. For example, OSS isolations can establish conditions that may heighten frustration or resistance among young people, which in turn are reinterpreted by staff through a behavioural lens when non-compliance occurs. Illustrating this, the register includes instances where refusal to comply with OSS isolation leads directly to a young person being placed in behavioural isolation:

“YP [Young person] isolated after YP refused to go into room and comply with rolling restrictions (due to OSS), threatened staff physically and verbally.”



Spotlight: Data quality

The quantitative data presented in this report is based on reports provided by DECYP to the Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People to support her role as an independent advocate for young people in detention.

In mid 2025, DECYP introduced “YJPLUS”, a new integrated recording and reporting system at AYDC, replacing previous paper based processes.³¹ The first monthly report generated through this system was received in September 2025.

Since transitioning to the new reporting processes, concerns have been raised regarding the accuracy and completeness of the data provided.³² While there have been notable improvements in the overall completeness of monthly reports provided by DECYP to the Interim Commissioner, some aspects of the Interim Commissioner’s oversight remain limited, while DECYP works to improve appropriate “record keeping of young people’s experiences at AYDC” (see Appendix C).

31. As part of adverse comment process the department recognises “the value of DECYP sharing key data related to young people’s experience of AYDC and affirms our collective commitment to promoting improved outcomes for young people in remand or in youth detention. Ongoing improvements in data analysis and views directly supports these outcomes” see Appendix C for more detail.

32. Letter from Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People to Deputy Secretary DECYP, 31 July 2025.

The impact of isolation on the rights and wellbeing of young people in detention

The use of isolation at AYDC continues to raise significant concerns regarding the rights and wellbeing of young people in detention. In addition to risking a young person's sense of dignity and self-worth, isolation can cause significant psychological harm, including anxiety, depression, and increased risk of self-harm and suicide.³³ Isolation can also disrupt cognitive and emotional development, impair a young person's ability to regulate behaviour, and distort their perception of time and reality.³⁴ These impacts are particularly acute for young people, whose developmental needs depend on appropriate social interaction through consistent relationships, and engagement with the outside world.³⁵

While detention may lawfully deprive a young person of their liberty,³⁶ it does not diminish their fundamental human rights, or their dignity and worth. International human rights standards recognise that deprivation of liberty must be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time.³⁷ Isolation raises particular concerns because it imposes additional restrictions beyond detention itself, including limiting meaningful human contact,

social interaction, recreation and engagement in activities that are essential to healthy adolescent development. The fact that a child or young person is already deprived of their liberty does not, by itself, justify further restrictions that increase the risk of physical or psychological harm.

Isolation in youth detention and the impacts on children's rights

Young people in detention retain their fundamental rights, and governments have a corresponding obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil those rights³⁸ while they are deprived of their liberty. International human rights instruments play a central role in defining the nature and extent of these obligations. Key frameworks include the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#),³⁹ the [Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture \(OPCAT\)](#), the [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice](#) (the 'Beijing Rules'), and the [United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty](#) (the 'Havana Rules'). Together, these instruments require that all children deprived of their liberty be treated with humanity, respect for their inherent dignity,⁴⁰ and in a manner that takes account of their age and developmental stage.

The use of isolation at AYDC undermines young people's ability to enjoy their rights to protection, provision, and participation.⁴¹ Isolation can expose young people to psychological harm and emotional distress, limit their access to therapeutic supports

33. *AHRC Report* (n 22).

34. *AHRC Report* (n 22) p 13-15.

35. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [Social determinants of health](#) (Report, 2 July 2024).

36. Children and young people at AYDC who are on remand and have not been found guilty of an offence experience the same deprivations of liberty associated with detention and isolation.

37. *UNCRC* (n 4); [United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice](#) A/RES 40/33 (29 November 1985).

38. Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas) [Making Rights Real](#) (Conceptual Plan, 2025) ('*Making Rights Real*').

39. See Appendix A for a Child Friendly Version of the UNCRC published by UNICEF.

40. *UNCRC* (n 4) Article 40(1).

41. *Making Rights Real* (n 38).

and services, and restrict their ability to participate in decisions,⁴² education and training,⁴³ and leisure programs.⁴⁴ As a result, even where supports remain generally available, isolation can significantly impede young people's access to these supports, which are essential to fostering recovery,⁴⁵ developing self-worth, preserving dignity and reducing recidivism.

42. *UNCRC* (n 4) Articles 12, 13.

43. *UNCRC* (n 4) Articles 28, 29.

44. *UNCRC* (n 4) Article 31.

45. *UNCRC* (n 4) Article 39.



At a glance: Engagement with young people at AYDC about isolation

In May 2026, the Advocate, together with a staff member from the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, held in-depth, semi-structured discussions with three young people detained at AYDC. This engagement captured recent lived experience of isolation and provided young people with a meaningful opportunity to express their views. Their experiences illustrate the harms of current isolation practices on young people and are used to identify three key priorities for immediate action by DECYP. Further detail on the methodology for this engagement is provided in Appendix B.

Young people's views on the behavioural and wellbeing impacts of isolation

Young people described isolation as negatively impacting both their behaviour and emotional wellbeing, and described isolation as something that increased their frustration, anger, and distress. Illustrating this, young people explained that extended periods in isolation, without meaningful activity or interaction, can intensify negative thinking and emotional responses:

"It sort of makes it worse... it's just like sitting in your room, thinking about, like, more things you can do [to act up or escalate behaviour] and that." (Male, 16)

This sense of being left alone with thoughts, without distraction or support, was described as contributing to impulsivity and behavioural escalation. Some young people reflected that isolation could shift thinking in ways that made disengagement and further behavioural issues more likely:

"...they just wanna keep fucking up, I guess."
(Male, 16)

"I don't know, 'cause they get treated like dogs and that sometimes, so they just act up."
(Male, 16)

Young people also described how repeated isolation periods escalate tensions across the detention centre, particularly when multiple young people are isolated for extended periods:

"To be honest, what I've seen, being locked down, it just makes them angry. They just want to kick off. I've seen that many people kick off because they've had to move units, or they've been locked down for ages or something [like that]. After the escape⁴⁶ happened and everyone was locked down, it was just kick-off after kick-off, because they were in their rooms all day." (Male, 15)

"It's not very good just being [in all day], because you go nuts, and shit ends up getting broken, or end up just trash[ing] the unit."
(Male, 15)

Within this environment, young people described how conflict can quickly escalate, even between peers, because of boredom and frustration:

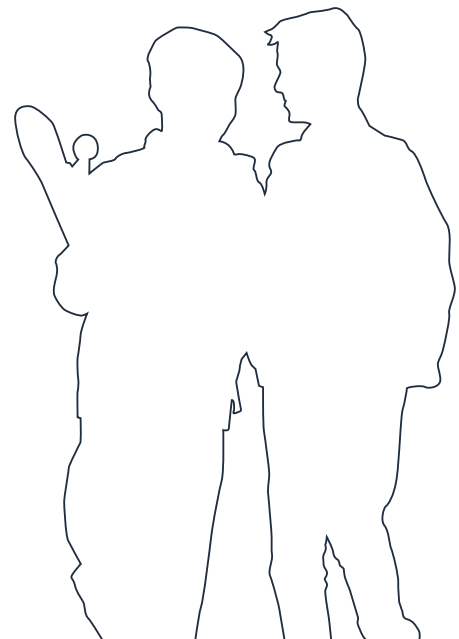
"You've got nothing else to do... so we just sit down and scream at each other." (Male, 15)

"You should hear the shit that goes on when locked in. You walk down one wing, and it's just yelling and screaming like a bunch of mad cats... It was getting to the point where me and one of the boys - it was pissing one of the other boys off that much, he was buzzing up, like go and move me sides, I need to go [to a different room further down the hall in the unit]."
(Male, 15)

Consistent with previous reports⁴⁷, young people's experiences show how isolation contributes to deteriorating emotional regulation, increased agitation, and escalating behaviours, both at an individual and group level. Rather than resolving incidents, isolation may intensify the conditions that lead to further disruption underlining the need for immediate action.

47. AHRC Report (n 22) p13-15.

46. Tasmania Police, ['Ashley Youth Detention Centre Update'](#) (Media Release, 19 December 2025).



Priorities and actions to lessen the harms of isolation for young people in AYDC

Drawing on the experiences of young people, three priority areas requiring immediate action by DECYP are identified below.

Priority 1: Young people must have access to, and participate in, structured programs and meaningful activities, with support

Young people have a right to participate in structured programs, meaningful activities and have access to support.⁴⁸ When asked what a “good day” at Ashley would look like for a young person⁴⁹, young people consistently described the importance of having structures and active daily routine with opportunities for engagement. As they explained:

“If you’re being good, to do maintenance around the centre... programs and that after school, so then we’re not bored and we’re not sitting in the unit and don’t get in trouble.”
(Male, 16)

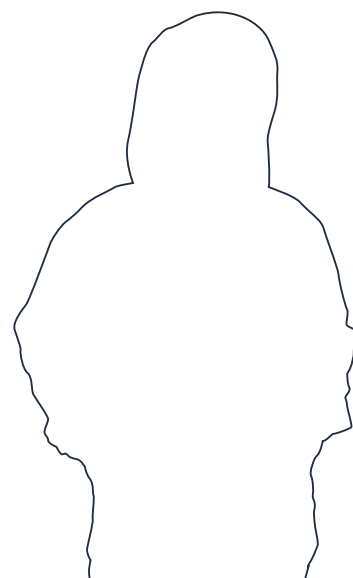
48. These programs are consistent with various articles of the UNCRC including: the Right and Aims of Education (Articles 28 and 29) and the Right to Rest, Play, Culture and Arts (Article 31).
49. See Appendix B: Methodology.

“Wake up. Go gym in the morning... maybe an extra art lesson... then go to school... after school, go for outside time... sometimes there’s cooking.” (Male, 16)

Young people explained that accessing a full and engaging daily schedule is strongly associated with improved wellbeing and reduced behavioural incidents. However, they also recognised that program availability is closely tied to staffing capacity. Young people observed that staff shortages can limit their access to activities:

“Because if there’s not enough people to facilitate it, you can’t go into the outdoor gym... so you’re stuck in your unit and in your courtyard all day.” (Male, 15)

This highlights a key systemic issue: when staffing levels are insufficient, young people spend more time disengaged, which can increase frustration, boredom, and the potential for conflict. In turn, this can contribute to a greater use of isolation. On the other hand, records show that on at least one occasion, detention staff were able to work flexibly to support participation in programs, despite these constraints. For example, the timing of a young person’s isolation was adjusted to enable attendance at a fitness program: “[young person will be isolated] until [time] to attend FitGym”.



In addition to structured programs, young people identified improved case management and relational supports as critical. While young people recognised the value of these supports, they spoke about need for greater consistency and follow-through:

"We have good support but it sort of happens for a little bit, and then it goes away... they need to catch up more, like, ask what we want more."
(Male, 16)

"Probably more case management team (sic)."
(Male, 16)

Action: Ensure access and participation in structured programs, activities and case-management

Strengthening day-to-day engagement through access to education, recreation and therapeutic supports is critical to lessen harms of isolation on young people. Access to existing programs and supports must be prioritised wherever possible, including during periods of OSS.

Priority 2: Young people must be provided with clear, respectful and timely communication before and during isolation

Young people have a right to clear, respectful and timely communication about the use of isolation.⁵⁰ They said that communication before, during, and after isolation significantly reduced distress, supported understanding, and maintained positive relationships. Young people described situations where they were placed in isolation without a clear explanation, or where information was inconsistent or unavailable:

"...if you get locked down randomly, being able to actually know what's happening and why, instead of just being told, 'oh, nothing, nothing.'" (Male, 15)

Young people acknowledged that some operational staff make genuine efforts to communicate and provide support. For example, young people described examples of staff taking time to check in, listen, and respond to their needs:

"Some staff are all right. They listen to you... they'll come in and have a conversation, or if you ask them to do something, they'll be like, yep, on it." (Male, 16)

These interactions were highly valued and demonstrate the positive impact of relational, responsive practice. Young people particularly

50. There are also impacts on young people's right to information (UNCRC, Article 17).



appreciated when staff were proactive and consistent in their engagement, noting that it helps them feel respected and less isolated:

When staff “... always come down and [are] talking to us when we’re in our room.”
(Male, 16)

When staff “... actually try to... get us out as much as they can.” (Male, 16)

When staff clearly “... tell you when you’re gonna get out.” (Male, 16)

At the same time, young people highlighted that staff capacity to communicate effectively is often limited by broader systemic issues, particularly the flow of information from management. Recognising that frontline staff are not always provided with the information they need, young people told us:

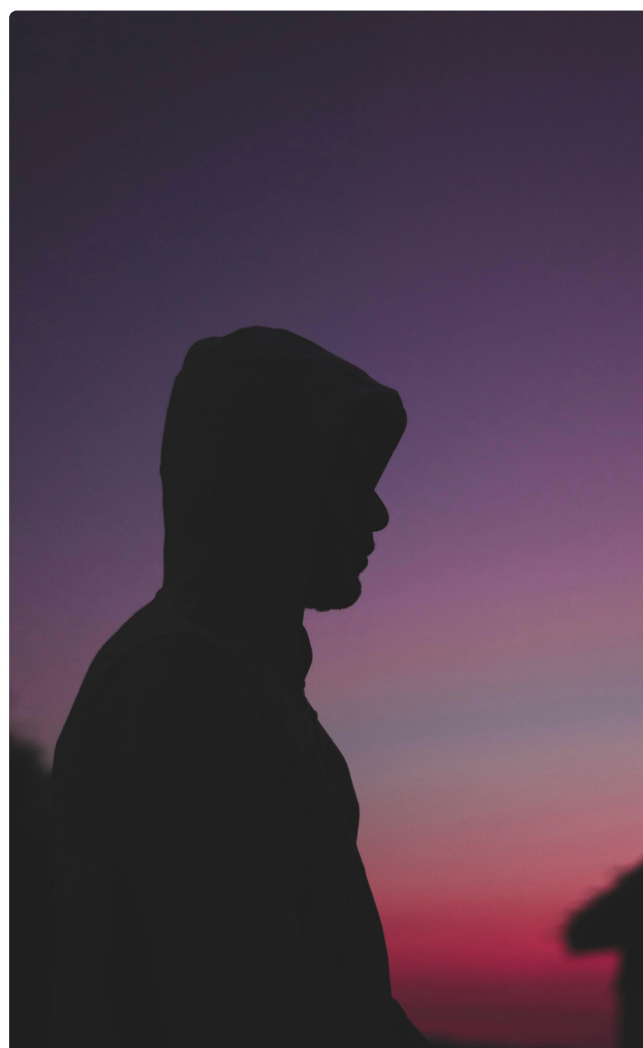
“Staff do try and tell us everything they know, but they don’t get told everything... management don’t tell ‘em everything.”
(Male, 16)

“Workers are trying for us, but management just don’t tell ‘em...” (Male, 16)

These insights suggest that challenges with communication are not solely about individual practice and highlight the need for improved organisational systems and information-sharing processes.

Action: Improve communication with young people before, during and after isolation

At a minimum, young people in isolation must be provided with clear, respectful and timely communication, as appropriate, about why isolation is occurring, and how long it will last. Frontline staff must be equipped with accurate information and have clear guidance about the impacts on young people’s normal routine.



Priority 3: Young people must have appropriate and individualised activities and resources while in isolation

Young people have a right to have access to appropriate and individualised activities and resources while locked in their rooms during periods of isolation. Limited access to in-room activities and resources contribute to boredom, frustration, and behavioural escalation. While young people acknowledge that they have access to books, television and drawing materials, some reported that these activities and resources did not reflect their interests or needs. For example, a young person said:

“Just not being able to do anything. The only thing you’ve got to do is fucking watch TV or draw something, or read a book or something. Not many kids want to fucking read.” (Male, 15)

Young people identified a range of activities and resources that would lessen the impact of isolation, including more games, creative materials, sensory items, and basic comforts:

“We already have, like, a Switch but more games and that would be good, a stress ball and that, a comfortable chair, art supplies, MP3 [players]. We did have MP3s, but they took it off and then, like, only one person has it.” (Male, 16)

“... more games and stuff. There needs to be less restrictions, because nothing - they don’t have anything that’s wood, plastic, metal, nothing like that, so more stuff like that, I suppose. You need to be trusted to be able to do that sort of stuff, though.” (Male, 15)

Access to personal care items was also raised, reflecting young people’s desire to maintain dignity and individual self-expression:

“I wish we could have, just like a plastic spray bottle, where you can put cologne in, and have that... even though people say... why do we wanna smell good.” (Male, 16)

Young people identified the importance of predictability and orientation to time while in isolation. Young people identified things like clocks and accessible daily schedules:

“We somewhat have a plan for the day, but it would be better if, like, we knew what was gonna go on for the whole day.” (Male, 16)

“We should get a proper clock... you can check it on some TVs, but not many.” (Male, 16)

“Definitely a clock. It sucks, because some of the TVs will tell you the time, but others won’t, and then you’ve got to buzz up every five minutes. What’s the time? When do I come out? That’d be handy. Especially if you’ve got a visit or something, there’s no way you can just look at a clock and, like, tell the time. You’ve got to ask the next person. But lots of times, they’re like, ‘you asked me three fucking minutes ago’, and I’m like, ‘shut the fuck up’.” (Male, 15)

Young people spoke about the importance of digital access for connection and engagement during isolation. This identifies a need for safe and controlled ways to communicate with family and the importance of structured digital access, such as supervised tablet use or curated content platforms.

About communicating with family, young people explained:

"I honestly reckon we should be able to email people, like, message people too." (Male, 16)

"Having a phone in your room would be good, because then you're not just sitting there fucking talking to yourself or whatever. You can call your parents." (Male, 15)

"I reckon that be good, instead of just phone calls and Zoom visits and that, just be able to message people... I reckon, like, if you're green, you should be allowed to have a tablet with, like, messenger or something, like, something you can do." (Male, 16)⁵¹

In relation to digital access, young people said:

"I know we're not allowed to have the internet and that, but they should be able to find a way." (Male, 16)

"I think you should be able to have, like, one hour... YouTube time, like, choose what you wanna watch... Particularly if you're going to bed and, like, for evening and then you're not out till the morning, and you wanna watch a movie you haven't seen before." (Male, 16)

"Yeah, just more shit to do, I guess, an iPad with some Netflix or something like that. That'd be all right, because you've got TV. There's not much on TV that you want to watch, really, and even Foxtel and stuff like that, it's a limited amount of movies, and you just flip through, like I've already seen all of them. You can only watch the same movie so many times before you get sick of it." (Male, 15)

Action: Work with young people to improve their access to appropriate and individualised activities and resources while in isolation

Work with young people to identify and access appropriate and individualised activities and resources for use while in isolation. This could include games, creative materials, sensory items, and basic comforts together with safe, monitored digital connection.

51. The word 'green' in this quote refers to the colour-based Behaviour Development System used at AYDC. This colour system corresponds to "the perceived level of risk demonstrated by the child or young person". A detailed analysis of the Behaviour Development System, including definitions of each colour, are found in section 5.4 of the [Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#) final report.



Concluding remarks

The current isolation of young people at AYDC is a serious issue. This report reinforces longstanding concerns about young people's experience of isolation at AYDC and the impact of isolation on their rights and wellbeing.

Despite ongoing reforms to youth justice, the daily reality of young people's experience makes it clear that changes cannot wait. Their experiences are inconsistent with human rights standards and the Tasmanian Government's policy intent.

Changes to isolation practices must be immediate to lessen the harms of isolation on young people and cannot be deferred pending broader systemic reform, or the construction of a new detention facility.

Appendix A: Child Friendly Version of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



This version of the UNCRC has been developed by UNICEF and is available at the following address: <https://www.unicef.org/media/56661/file>.

Appendix B: Methodology

This report adopts a mixed methods approach to examine the use of isolation at AYDC between January and April 2026. It uses two complementary sources of information: (1) quantitative administrative data provided by DECYP and (2) qualitative data from direct engagement with young people in detention.

Departmental data reports

Quantitative data were sourced from DECYP administrative records, including monthly reports on the use of isolation at AYDC and daily roll and situation reports. These data were analysed to identify the population of young people in detention, determine rates of recorded isolation events within the behavioural and OSS isolation registers, and examine recorded reasons for isolation during the reporting period.

Engagement with young people

In May 2026, the Advocate, together with a staff member of the Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, conducted in depth, semi structured discussions with three young people detained at AYDC. This engagement was an opportunity for young people to share their views about and experience of isolation while in detention.

Child rights-based approach

The engagement was grounded in a rights-based framework, recognising young people as rights holders and active agents in matters that affect them.⁵² Consistent with the principles of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC), the approach prioritised young people's right to be heard and to have their views given due weight (Article 12) and to share their thoughts (Article 13).

This was reflected in the design and delivery of the engagement through:

- voluntary participation, supported by clear, age-appropriate information about the purpose of the discussions and how information would be used
- respect for young people's dignity, autonomy and privacy
- opportunities for young people to share their experiences and recommendations in their own words
- transparency about the role of the Commissioner and the limits of influence or follow-up action.

A child rights-based approach is particularly important in a custodial setting, where power imbalances are inherent and where young people may have limited opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives.

52. *Making Rights Real* (n 38).

Trauma-informed approach

Recognising that experiences of isolation, detention and previous life events may be distressing or triggering, this engagement was also trauma informed. This was reflected through:

- short, carefully structured discussions designed to minimise fatigue and distress
- an emphasis on emotional and physical safety, as well as choice and control during participation
- sensitive questioning practices, with clear options for participants to decline questions or stop at any time
- supportive, non-judgemental communication using plain language
- co-ordination with relevant AYDC staff, including health staff, to ensure appropriate supports were available if required.

To further reduce the risk of distress and avoid requiring personal disclosure, questions were framed to invite general reflections about “*young people*” rather than requiring participants to speak about their own experiences. This approach allowed participants to:

- share insights without feeling pressure to disclose personal or traumatic experiences
- maintain control over how much they chose to share
- draw on a range of perspectives, including observations of peers and broader experiences within AYDC.

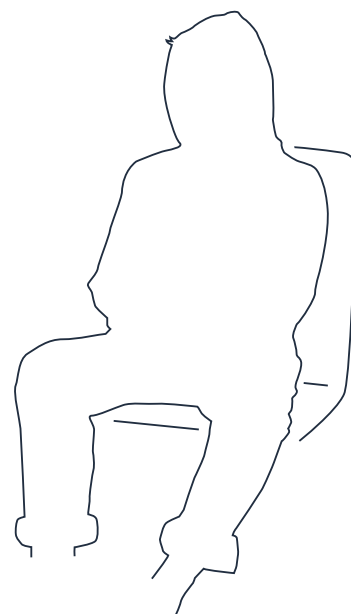
Young people were reminded that they could speak generally, hypothetically or from personal experience, and that there was no expectation to disclose anything they did not wish to share.

Focus of discussions

The discussions explored young people’s perspectives on daily life in detention, with a particular focus on isolation practices. Key questions included:

- what would make a young person’s time at AYDC better or easier
- what a “*good day*” at AYDC might look like
- when it is fair or appropriate for a young person to be in their room
- what can make isolation more difficult
- how isolation may affect how young people feel or behave afterwards
- when and how isolation is sometimes managed in ways that work better
- what staff do in those moments that makes a positive difference
- what additional supports would help during time spent in a room.

Young people were also invited to raise any other matters they wished to share.



Activity on in-room conditions

As part of the engagement, participants completed a short activity exploring what items young people should have access to while confined to their rooms. Young people were provided with cards depicting a range of objects, alongside blank cards to contribute their own ideas.

This activity supported participation by:

- providing a concrete and accessible way for young people to express their views,
- enabling discussion about material conditions without requiring personal disclosure,
- encouraging young people to identify practical changes that could improve wellbeing during isolation.

Consent, confidentiality, and remuneration

Participation in this engagement was voluntary and guided by a strong commitment to informed consent, confidentiality, and ethical practice. Young people were provided with a written, child-friendly information sheet prior to participation, which was also explained verbally to ensure understanding regardless of literacy level. This information outlined what participation involved, the type of data that would be collected, how that data would be used, and the young person's rights throughout the process. Young people were informed that they could decline to answer any question, opt-out of audio recording, or withdraw from the engagement at any time without consequence. All participants completed a consent form prior to their involvement.

Data collection focused on qualitative insights into young people's experiences. This included audio recordings of interviews where consent was provided, written transcripts derived from these recordings, and de-identified thematic notes capturing key issues and recommendations. No images or video recordings were collected. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to authorised staff. All identifying information was removed from transcripts and reporting to protect the privacy of participants. Direct quotes are included in this report in a way that ensures individuals cannot be identified.

Young people who participated in the engagement were offered a \$40 gift voucher in recognition of their time and contribution. The vouchers are non-cash incentives appropriate to the custodial setting and are held with personal belongings for use upon release, with long expiry dates to support access in the community. The provision of a voucher was not conditional on answering specific questions or completing the engagement and this was clearly explained as part of the consent process. The intent of this recognition was to acknowledge participation and contribution, not to influence or coerce involvement.



Appendix C: Response from the Department for Education, Children and Young People

Department for Education, Children and Young People

Office of the Secretary



20 July 2026

Dear Interim Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP),

Re: “You’ve got nothing else to do...” Report on the use of Isolation in Ashley Youth Detention Centre

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on your draft report entitled ‘*You’ve got nothing else to do...*’ *Prioritising change to the use of isolation in Ashley Youth Detention Centre*’.

The Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) values this chance to contribute to this important piece of advocacy that focuses on the experience of the young people on remand or in detention at Ashley Youth Detention Centre (AYDC).

As Secretary, I would also like to reiterate the department’s commitment to improving the experience of young people in AYDC, which can be seen in the significant body of work DECYP is undertaking in line with the recommendations made by the *Commission of Inquiry (COI) into the Tasmanian Government’s Response to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings* (amongst other actions).

Relevant to your report, as part of its commitment to meeting COI Recommendation 12.32, DECYP is currently producing a revised version of its *Use of Isolation Procedure* to guide operational practice in the best interests of the safety and wellbeing of young people and staff at AYDC, reviewing the *Youth Justice Act 1997* and provides the CCYP with monthly data reports detailing any instances of the isolation of a young person at AYDC.

Additionally, in response to the Priorities identified in your report, and as a result of internal review processes, DECYP is committing to:

- Continuing to prioritise AYDC recruitment processes to provide for a stable workforce
- Updating centre routine documentation so that young people and staff have a clear understanding of daily parameters
- Updating practice advice to operational staff regarding isolation practice, communication and data entry requirements
- Continuing to drive the development of operational information systems to provide appropriate record keeping of young people’s experience at AYDC
- Revising young people’s induction information to ensure they have a clear understanding of what to expect if they are subject to a period of isolation in the interests of the safety and security of young people and staff at the centre
- Make the date/time available for young people without the need for staff intervention
- Undertaking a review and working with young people to identify alternative, appropriate activities and resources that could be made available during periods of isolation

This report produced by the CCYP highlights the value of DECYP sharing key data related to young people’s experience of AYDC and affirms our collective commitment to promoting improved outcomes for young people on remand or in youth detention.

Ongoing improvements in data analysis and views directly supports these outcomes. For instance, complementary analysis of counts of ‘individual isolation events’ alongside ‘the total time spent in

isolation' provides an improved understanding of the differing experience young people may have over the same reporting period.

The work that has been done by DECYP and AYDC staff throughout the report period, has seen a reduction in both isolation events, and the time spent in isolation for young people. This work is ongoing and as workforce stabilises, we anticipate further continued improvement.

Thank you for your advocacy on these issues. DECYP looks forward to continuing to work in partnership with you in the best interests of young people.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ginna Webster', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ginna Webster
Secretary

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