



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA,
Maggie Johns mobile 0419 831 576

Saturday 21 April 2018

UNITING CHURCH WA CALLS FOR URGENT REFORM AT WA'S BANKSIA HILL DETENTION CENTRE

Following the release of the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services' report into Banksia Hill Detention Centre, Rev Steve Francis, Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, today called on the West Australian Government to make urgent reforms to the centre.

The report found that, despite some improvements, Banksia continues to subject children to a range of harmful conditions and practices. The report found that:

- 12,813 strip searches were conducted over the two years 2015-2016, on children as young as 10 years old, despite finding only 10 items of contraband;
- the centre's Intensive Support Unit "created a highly inappropriate and counter-therapeutic environment to house young people who are, or had been, acutely mentally unwell";
- the children's detention centre is breaching international standards by subjecting all children to collective punishment;
- too many children are locked up in the controversial centre, highlighting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up seven out of 10 children in Banksia Hill, and almost all of the younger and regional children;
- there was inadequate support to connect Indigenous children to culture, or support for Indigenous staff members;
- there was inadequate support for children with diverse needs, citing a recent Telethon Institute study, which showed that 9 out of 10 of the children in Banksia have some form of brain injury; and
- girls in the centre were housed inappropriately, with less access to privileges than boys, such as being able to make food for themselves and access sports training sessions run by external sporting clubs.

Inspector Neil Morgan said, "Every period of crisis has been preceded by poor leadership and management, compounded by denial and spin."

Rev Francis emphasised, "WA Corrections Minister Fran Logan has a duty of care to these children and needs to implement an urgent overhaul of operations at Banksia Hill.

"These reports are difficult to read. These are some of the most vulnerable children in our community. Most of them have experienced trauma and require extra nurturing support and instead we read of harsh measures, inadequate support and demeaning strip searches. Is this really how we treat our children?"

Rev Francis recognized the efforts that had been made to improve in some areas in what is a challenging environment for both staff and young people, saying, “There have been some important efforts to address some concerns previously made by the Inspector but it is clear that this is a system under great stress and it’s not fair on the young people or the staff to have such an inadequate environment. A fundamentally new approach is required.”

Acting Chair of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, Rev Robert Jetta expressed his particular concern given that 70% of children detained at Banksia Hill are Aboriginal.

“When our young people are coming into contact with the law, it should be a warning sign that extra support is needed. Instead, our kids are getting locked up, losing connection to culture and missing out on a proper education. It’s not a time to be creating more trauma, it should be a chance to learn, connect and heal,” said Rev Jetta.

The Uniting Church WA believes that Western Australia’s high incarceration rate, particularly the persistent and growing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system necessitates an urgent overhaul of Western Australia’s policies relating to the criminal justice system, particularly for children detained at Banksia Hill.

The Uniting Church WA supports the [Social Reinvestment WA](#) campaign which advocates for a change in WA’s approach to criminal justice, to move towards a more holistic, prevention-based approach that prioritises cultural, social and emotional wellbeing for people at risk of incarceration.

For further comment, please contact Maggie Johns on 0419 831 576