



MAKING JUSTICE WORK 2018 REPORT CARD

In 2016, Making Justice Work (MJW) presented six asks to the incoming Territory Government to make justice work better in the Northern Territory. A coalition of over 25 non-government organisations, MJW called for changes that would see fewer people in prison and more people feeling safe and connected in their communities.

Two years on, we have seen some important areas of progress, but there is much more to be done.

ASK 1: Aboriginal Justice Agreement	PROGRESS? Yes (but early stages)
ASK 2: Specialist And Therapeutic Courts	PROGRESS? Some (but not enough)
ASK 3: Rehabilitation And Reintegration	PROGRESS? Some (but not enough)
ASK 4: Reduce The Number Of Young People Being Locked Up	PROGRESS? Some (but not enough)
ASK 5: Abolish Mandatory Sentencing	PROGRESS? None
ASK 6: A Comprehensive Plan To Deal With Alcohol	PROGRESS? Yes (but not enough)

The Government's \$229 million investment in response to the Royal Commission and response to the Riley Review are to be commended for delivering major steps towards the reform of our youth justice system and a plan to address the harms from alcohol.

Yet we have seen no progress to abolish mandatory sentencing or paperless arrests.

Progress towards establishing specialist and therapeutic courts (including a Drug and Alcohol Court) is slow, and we continue to lack the programs in the community and detention that provide meaningful support to people to get their lives back on track.

While the Government is working hard to implement the change in youth justice, we are yet to see progress on critical areas of reform called for by the Royal Commission, including raising the age of criminal responsibility.

Certainly, progress is mixed. But in assessing the Government's progress towards a fairer justice system, we remind ourselves that the change we are calling for now are part of a much longer story.

For decades, Aboriginal people, communities and organisations and their supporters in the NT and around the country, have been calling on governments to implement the hundreds of the so far ignored recommendations from the multitude Royal Commissions, Reports and Inquires into the injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

From successive governments we have seen at best inertia, and at worst, explicit commitment to a destructive 'tough on crime' agenda that sees the Northern Territory jail more people per capita than any country in the world. And

knowing that as an Aboriginal person you are still 14.5 times more likely to end up in jail than a non-Aboriginal person (and 25 times more likely if you're an Aboriginal young person), it is hard to see the 'justice' in this system.

MJW was formed in 2012 to change this story. Organisations working across justice, health and social services came together to present government with evidence-based approaches to justice in the Northern Territory. We presented a vision for a justice system focused on prevention, early intervention and diversion, and therapeutic and restorative responses, rather than costly and counterproductive focus on punishment and prisons.

Under previous Territory Government, these calls were unheeded. We saw deep cuts to youth services in Alice Springs, the impacts of which are still being felt today. We saw conditions in youth detention deteriorate shamefully to the point of catalysing another Royal Commission.

In contrast, under the current Government, we have seen a willingness to set us on a new path and promising steps towards positive reform.

We are not under any illusion that this is an easy task. Reform takes time and there are no short cuts. The changes we implement now may take years to be fully realised – much longer than election cycles. And in a Territory with the tightest of budgets, we need the Commonwealth to come to the table.

But Territorians are ripe for change. As a community, we need a sophisticated conversation about our justice system that goes beyond the usual rhetoric of punitive solutions and engages with issues that underlie it: issues of entrenched disadvantage, community attitudes, access to health, education, housing and employment.

We call on government to lead the conversation that will take us forward to build a justice system that works – for everyone.

More details of Making Justice Work's assessment of the Territory Government's mid-term progress towards our 2016 election asks can be found on our website www.makingjusticework.com.