



NORTHERN TERRITORY
MENTAL HEALTH
COALITION

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MEDIA RELEASE

Young people's mental health must be the crucial component incorporated into the deliberations of the Royal Commission into child protection and youth detention in the Northern Territory set up by the Prime Minister this week.

"Young men and women" who drift into criminal activity have most often been socially and personally traumatized as young children and it is well established that unresolved childhood trauma will manifest into other behaviors that reach into adulthood", says Vanessa Harris, executive officer of the NT Mental Health Coalition based in Darwin.

Ms Harris says that is what stood out to her in watching the appalling mistreatment of the young men being held in the Don Dale Detention Centre in Darwin on the Four Corners program last Monday evening that prompted the Prime Minister to set up the royal commission the next day.

She said much recent psychological research around the world has been focusing on the mental health issues especially experienced by indigenous minorities attempting to cope and adapt to a life with a hardwiring of fear, hopelessness and disorganisation which fed high levels of depression, anxiety disorders and substance abuse.

The Royal Commission therefore must fully explore ways of assisting young offenders work through these traumas in the juvenile justice system.

Ms. Harris says this means providing culturally appropriate counselling programs based on each individual's mental needs, accompanied by psychological expertise, into a renovated juvenile justice system.

"This is the antithesis of what we saw those young kids were experiencing on the TV program. You cannot have extra traumas being piled onto these kids that are wrestling with severe traumas from their own lives".

The NT Mental Health Coalition has 35 non-government organizations across the Territory delivering mental health programs and not one of them has ever been invited to be part of the solution juvenile justice.

The Coalition demands collaboration with our experts to ensure that appropriate and safe healing can occur and young people, their families, workers at the coalface, and communities move forward from this highly distressing series of events.

Otherwise, Ms. Harris says, the cycle of intergenerational trauma continues, with unresolved childhood trauma manifesting into other behaviour in adulthood that affects the next generation. We must stop this now.

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