



OPEN LETTER

NO MORE DEATHS OF CHILDREN IN WA PRISONS— CLOSE UNIT 18, REFORM YOUTH JUSTICE NOW

Dear Premier Cook,

We represent leaders and experts from across the state.

The evidence revealed in the Coronial Inquest into the death of 16-year-old Cleveland Dodd inside Unit 18 has been both astonishing and damning.

It has exposed massive failings in the management of youth detention.

It has been revealed that Unit 18 was *never* able to provide children the support they needed. **Instead, these young people were locked down for more than 22 hours a day, in filthy cells with soiled clothes.**

And the public servants who oversaw its opening *knew* it would be unable to provide basic care, including observation cells, access to services, and education.

The government was warned by WA's own prison inspector as far back as 2021 that they were breaching human rights conventions. That conditions inside detention amounted to 'cruel, inhuman, and degrading' forms of punishment.

The former Director-General of Justice gave **testimony that conditions in WA's youth detention facilities were a form of 'institutional abuse of children.'**

Senior public servants admitted Unit 18 was **founded on 'a series of grievous lies.'** Lies that Unit 18 would or could be safe.

Lies that were told to the Minister, to the children, to the families, and to the public.

But Unit 18 wasn't safe. It never could be.

And in October 2023, a child inside Unit 18 took his own life.

The practice of keeping WA children inside a maximum-security adult prison must stop. The cycle of abuse and irreparable harm to children in government institutions must stop. WA's youth justice system is a stain upon the character of our state.

We call on you to heed the words of Coroner Urquhart and close Unit 18 as a matter of urgency, immediately.

We call on you to commit to a transformation and overhaul of the entire youth justice system, which is failing on every possible measure.

We stand in support of the [proven solutions](#) like Social Reinvestment WA's *Blueprint for a Better Future*. Experts have been advocating for evidence-based and practical solutions transform our youth justice system into one that works.

The abuse of children in state government institutions should not be politicised.

The lives of young people should not be politicised.

Closing Unit 18 and investing in evidence-based alternatives across our youth justice system is an investment in community safety. In children's wellbeing. In future health and mental health. For generations to come.

We call on you Premier, to right this wrong.

We ask you to act now to end the abuse of children happening on your watch, at the hands of your government, in a suburb of our capital city.

Your government has the power to change this story. To save more young people from a fate like Cleveland's.

Signed by,

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8.	Stella Tarrant	Assoc Professor	UWA Law School
9.	Fiona McGaughey	Associate Professor	UWA Law School
10.	Dr Hayley Passmore	Lecturer	UWA Law School
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14.	Darren Munday	CEO	Consumers of Mental Health WA
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21.	Dawn Smith	Acting CEO	Palmerston Association
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24.	Peter Dowding	Former WA Premier and Barrister	
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27.	Chris Lewis	Former consultant & NFP board member	Retiree
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33.	Adjunct Professor George Newhouse	CEO	National Justice Project

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37.	Louise Lamont	CEO	Phoenix Support & Advocacy Service
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39.	Debra Barnes	CEO	Sexual Health Quarters
40.	Ashleigh Dickson	CEO	Hello Initiative
41.	Sharon Gough	CEO	Indigo Junction
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65.	Wyatt Teakle	CRSW	SUSD
66.	Alicia Keenan	Policy and Project Support Officer	YHAC
67.	Sarah Quinton	Development Executive	Valuing Children Initiative
68.	Dylan Storer	President	UN Youth WA
69.	Chloe Collard	CEO	Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation
70.	Kylie Wrigley	Researcher	Climate Justice Union and Edith Cowan University
71.	Claudia Bedford	Senior Educator	The YEP Project (YACWA)
72.	Melissa Porter	Area Manager Youth Services.	Mission Australia
73.	Laurel Sellers	CEO	Yorgum Healing Services
74.	Wayne Nannup	CEO	ALSWA
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76.	Zoe Sullivan	Coordinator	Youth Educating Peers Project (YACWA)
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79.	Alex Hughes	Lead	The Equity Project
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81.	Justine Colyer	CEO	Rise
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84.	Larissa Muir	CEO	12 Buckets inc
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111.	Kate O'Hara	CEO	Foodbank WA

112.	Debra Zanella	CEO	Ruah Community Services
113.	Damien Parriman	CEO	KRED Enterprises Pty Ltd
114.	Daniel Pisani	WA State Manager	Kids First Australia/Whitelion Youth
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122.	Tanya Sim	CEO	Block Branding and CoChair CAMHS Lived Experience Advisory Group
123.	Jody Nunn	CEO	Reconciliation WA
124.	Nolan Hunter	Reconciliation WA Co-Chair	Reconciliation WA
125.	Jo Sadler	CEO	Wanslea
126.	Jacqueline McGowan-Jones	Community Member	

127.	Tim Grey-Smith	Executive Director	Community Employers WA
128.	Raffaella Fecondi	Co-Head	Port Senior School
129.	Roxy Moore	Noongar Lawyer And Activist	
130.		Foundation for Young Australians	