



Goldfields Youth Justice Services

Working with the community to address the causes of youth offending

Juvenile Justice Team fact sheet



The Department of Corrective Services has introduced a number of new justice services in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, targeting young people at risk of entering the justice system, as well as those already in the system.

The Goldfields Youth Justice Services include a range of mostly outreach programs to support these young people and their families and help them break the offending cycle.

The following services are now available in Kalgoorlie-Boulder under the new Goldfields Youth Justice Services. Where applicable, they will be rolled-out to other centres in the region:

- **The Youth and Family Support Service** – an after-hours outreach service for young people who are at risk of coming to the attention of police, providing practical support to them and their families to help tackle problems before they become serious;
- **The Youth Bail Service** – an after-hours seven-day-a-week bail service to help police identify responsible adults to provide bail for young people. The Youth Bail Service also provides limited short-term bail accommodation as a last resort for young people who are granted bail but do not have anywhere suitable to stay before their court appearance.
- **An expanded Juvenile Justice Team** – a dedicated team, including juvenile justice officers and a police officer, to target young people in the early stages of offending and steer them away from the formal justice system.
- **The Intensive Supervision Program (ISP)** – an internationally-renowned program which is producing outstanding results with some of the State's most difficult young offenders and their families.

This fact sheet explains how the **expanded juvenile justice team** helps young people in Kalgoorlie-Boulder who are in the early stages of offending and diverts them from the formal justice system.

The Department of Corrective Services' juvenile justice teams (JITs) have been operating in the Perth metropolitan area and in regional WA since the 1990s. The teams are an important way of diverting young offenders from the courts and a future of crime.

Metropolitan teams are structured differently to those in regional areas. There are eight juvenile justice teams across the metropolitan area, staffed to exclusively operate the JIT process. In regional areas, JITs have operated within the Department's Community Justice Services offices.

Under the new Goldfields Youth Justice Service, an independently resourced juvenile justice team has been established in Kalgoorlie-Boulder to deal exclusively with juvenile justice team referrals.

Benefits of early intervention and diversion programs

- Research strongly indicates early intervention programs that steer young people away from a cycle of offending and the formal criminal justice system offer greater long-term benefits to the community.
- There are significant flow-on benefits for families of young offenders in involving parents, and sometimes brothers and sisters, in early intervention and diversion programs, which are proven to help break the offending cycle.
- There is growing evidence that early intervention is a far more cost-effective strategy than conventional approaches to reducing youth offending.



What are juvenile justice teams?

Juvenile justice teams are an alternative to the court process for young offenders who have committed minor offences or are in the early stages of offending. The teams are a very real solution to a problem encountered by the justice system for many years – too many young people who have committed minor offences entering the court system at a very young age.

The teams ask that young offenders take responsibility for their actions by encouraging them to face up to their problems. They provide the opportunity for the victim, the offender and the offender's family to discuss the best way to deal with the young person and the offence. This is achieved through family group meetings. Young offenders are sent to a JJT by the police or the Children's Court. More serious offences are usually handled by the courts. The teams offer young offenders a choice – they can choose to go through a meeting process and possibly face the victim of their crime or they may choose to have the matter dealt with in court.

If the young offender chooses to proceed, they must accept responsibility for their actions. If they are not willing to do this, the matter must be referred back to the police or courts. Professional JJT support comes from a juvenile justice team coordinator, a police officer, cultural and ethnic group representatives and sometimes an education officer.

How do the teams work?

Parents or caregivers, along with victims, play an important role in helping young people to understand how their actions can affect themselves and others. The JJT meeting or conferencing process involves the young offender, their parents, the juvenile justice team coordinator, a police officer and sometimes the victim.

At the meeting, everyone has an opportunity to sit down face-to-face, talk things through and agree on a penalty. Other people such as a representative from the young person's school or an Aboriginal community member may also be present. The victim is given the opportunity of being involved in the JJT meeting, either in person or by writing a letter to make their views known, but they don't have to.

What is an 'action plan'?

At the end of a meeting, all participants work out and agree on a contract known as an 'action plan' for the young person. The action plan will take into account the young person's age and maturity. The young person may also have had conditions set by their family, such as being grounded, which can be taken into account when deciding upon the action plan.

If an action plan cannot be agreed upon, the offender must be referred back to the referring police officer or court. The action plan may be something as simple as a formal apology, agreeing to an assessment for counselling, a voluntary work task, or some type of monetary payment if there is a capacity for it.

The commitments made by the young person in the action plan are recorded and monitored through to completion by the JJT coordinator. If the young person complies with all conditions of the action plan, the matter is dismissed and no conviction is recorded against the young person. If the young person fails to comply with the action plan, the matter will be referred back to the referring police officer or court.

What are the results of the juvenile justice team process?

Since the teams were established, there has been a dramatic reduction in the number of young offenders involved in the formal criminal justice system. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of cases needing to be processed by the courts.

Why does the JJT process work?

For a young person who has committed an offence, coming face-to-face with the consequences of their crime is tough. The juvenile justice team process shows that crime harms people. It is a way that young offenders can face the victims of their crimes and the consequences of their actions. It also enables the young person to look at the reasons for their offending behaviour and do something about it. The process also involves the young person's family or carers, so they can help the young person to stop offending.

What are the long-term benefits of this service for the community?

The long-term benefits of this service include:

- young person taking responsibility for their offending actions
- fewer young people entering the formal justice system
- safer communities.



Recent research backs local approach

A 2007 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states there is a clear link between age and future contact with the justice system. This shows that the younger someone enters the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to end up back in it.

The report found over 40% of young people who began their first ever criminal justice supervision when they were aged 12 had completed at least four supervision periods by the time they were 18, compared with less than 10% for those whose initial supervision didn't begin until they were 15.

CASE EXAMPLE – Sarah (14 years old)

(Names and locations have been changed to ensure protection of identity).

Saturday night

Sarah is picked up in Kalgoorlie by police at 9pm, when she was seen throwing a rock at the windscreen of a parked car. The police officer decides to refer Sarah to the Juvenile Justice Team (JJT) where she will have to explain why she damaged the car.

Monday

The JJT coordinator arranges a team meeting with Sarah, her mum, the JJT police officer and the victim, Mrs Smith. Everyone agrees to attend the meeting, which is scheduled for the following week.

The JJT meeting

At the JJT meeting, Sarah comes face-to-face with Mrs Smith, the lady whose car she damaged. Sarah admits she threw the rock and apologises to Mrs Smith. Sarah explains she was feeling very angry at the time and didn't mean to hit her car with the rock. Mrs Smith says she is relieved to hear it was an accident.

Sarah's mum says she is worried her daughter is mixing with the wrong crowd. Everyone agrees to a one-month action plan so Sarah can make up for what she did.

As well as the action plan, Sarah agrees to pay the excess on Mrs Smith's insurance claim on the broken windscreen from the money she earns at her part-time job.

Mrs Smith says she is very happy with the outcome of the meeting and Sarah promises to complete the action plan.

One month later

Sarah completes her action plan and no criminal record is recorded. The JJT police officer contacts the officer who referred Sarah to the team to advise the outcome of the JJT meeting.