

# SAFEST STATE



## Safest State Briefing

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**Crime in the community is made worse when young people who have drug and alcohol problems are not given the support they need to recover.**

We can make Queensland the safest state in Australia, by giving young people the help they need to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

If we give young people the treatment they need, we not only help them, but they will give back to local communities and we all benefit.

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## **The Safest State Plan: we need to intervene, engage and treat.**

- 1 Intervention:** 'Safer Streets Unit' to divert young people away from petty crime and the criminal justice system to health and community services.
  - 2 Engagement:** Roll out new 'Street Universities' to engage disadvantaged youth, starting with a new centre in Townsville.
  - 3 Treatment:** Specific residential care facilities for young people, starting in high needs areas in outer metropolitan Brisbane.
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# The problem

**The link between disadvantage and excessive use of alcohol and illicit drugs is well established, leading to the perpetuation of crime, poor health outcomes and deeper inequality.**

Drugs and alcohol are a significant contributor to crime and antisocial behaviour. In 2012 the Australian Institute of Criminology found nearly half of detainees in Australia attributed their current offending to drugs or alcohol. Just this year, the Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into recidivism observed that drug offences were among the greatest contributors to the rise in petty crime between 1997 and 2018, with possession being the most common.

This link between substance abuse and crime means disadvantaged young people are entering the criminal justice system early in life, which in turn increases their risk of reoffending and severely damages their future prospects.

Problematic addiction is almost always the symptom of a deeper underlying cause. It's those causes we need to address to make an impact.

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# The solution

## **Engage** Street University

**Street Universities are innovative therapeutic centres for young people aged 12-25, with an emphasis on fostering social inclusion, creativity, and real-world skills.**

Trained facilitators use skills drawn from youth work, counselling and community development techniques in order to combine progressive approaches to social work with grassroots community participation. Programs specialise in channelling young people away from personally destructive and anti-social behaviours to improve self-esteem, co-operation and social engagement.

The Street University program creates positive outcomes for disadvantaged, displaced youth and their communities, with a special, culturally sensitive approach to helping ATSI youth. There are currently eight Street Universities in operation: three in Queensland, four in New South Wales, and one in the ACT.

## **Treat** Residential facilities for young people

**Young people who are already experiencing drug or alcohol problems need somewhere to go; somewhere safe and affordable where they can receive treatment from experienced professionals.**

The Ted Noffs Foundation runs two tailored, residential drug and alcohol treatment programs for young people aged 13-17: the Adolescent Drug Withdrawal Unit (ADWU), which provides 14 days of non-medicated support for withdrawal, and Program for Adolescent Life Management (PALM), which provides up to three months of residential rehabilitation.

After leaving PALM, we see a significant reduction in crime, drug use and mental illness.

## **Intervene** Safer Streets Unit

**Noffs' Safer Streets Unit would work in partnership with police to provide referral pathways for young people, so rather than arresting them, law enforcement can divert them to a Street University or rehabilitation centre.**

In a pilot program, Noffs supplied a youth worker or counsellor to patrol the Logan railway lines with police officers to talk to young people who were "chroming", or inhaling household chemicals. Instead of resulting in arrest, the Noffs worker could then invite the person to Street University to provide the engagement and social support they need.

This intervention program was extremely successful, with a 60% drop in arrests of young people on that stretch of railway line in the peak month. Queensland Police's engagements with young people using inhalants dropped from 80 to just 28 the following month by implementing a solution-based program.

Rolling out the Safer Streets Unit as a statewide intervention program would catch young people engaging in antisocial behaviour before they commit a serious crime, easing the burden on police resources and improving the relationship between officers and vulnerable people in the community.

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### **For more information, please contact:**

**Matt Noffs**  
**CEO, Ted Noffs Foundation**  
matt@noffs.org.au  
0403 185 335