



AASW

**Australian Association
of Social Workers**

20 November 2014

The Honourable Will Hodgman MP
Premier of Tasmania
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Dear Premier,

The Wilderness Program

Jenny Forward's recent article (Opinion 11th November 2014) in The Mercury highlights the power of Tasmania's wilderness experience for transforming lives. Many members of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Tasmanian Branch have similar accounts of the therapeutic benefits of The Wilderness Program. Many lives have been transformed by young people experiencing their own personal mastery when confronting wilderness challenges. They come to recognise the value of cooperation, encouragement and persistence when facing shared adversity, and typically find their own, previously hidden, personal strengths and resources.

The AASW Tasmanian Branch is concerned that current investment and responses to child welfare and youth justice in Australia are disproportionately focused on tertiary intervention (such as child protection and criminal justice responses). The AASW strongly believes that significant investment in prevention and early intervention is desperately needed to tackle the issues of child abuse, neglect and youth disaffection at a societal level. Strategies of family support and personal development are proven strategies and ultimately much more cost effective in financial and social terms.

The Liberal Party's election manifesto contained the following commitment:

"Tasmania has the highest youth offender rate in Australia, the highest youth unemployment rate in Australia, and the worst retention rate for young people in senior secondary education.

There is a strong and direct correlation between offending and unemployment and an "absolute correlation" between a young person failing at school and entering the youth justice system.

A majority Hodgman Liberal Government will invest \$5.3 million over three years into a state-wide network of youth justice programs to break the cycle of youth crime.

Investing in early intervention youth justice programs aimed at breaking the cycle of youth crime and diverting young offenders, or those at risk of offending, into programs that re-engage them with education, training, employment and positive influences, will deliver improved outcomes for –

- *The young person, in getting their lives back on track;*
- *Our community, with safer communities and less crime; and*
- *Our economy, with more productive, educated and skilled young people.”*

Tasmanian Liberal Party Policy Statement on Breaking the Cycle of Youth Crime (2014).

The AASW applauds such a focus. It is concerning, therefore, to note the Liberal Government’s apparent abandonment of The Wilderness Program, as it is a proven effective early intervention strategy. Without a strong commitment to prevention and early intervention across all of the health and well-being challenges that are growing daily, we are bound to pay a hefty social and financial cost in the longer term. This is a cost we are clearly unable to afford socially or financially.

The AASW Tasmanian Branch implores the Tasmanian Government to reconsider abandoning such a proven resource.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ally Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ally Smith

Branch President

AASW Tasmania Branch