



28 March 2024

Media Statement

RESPONSES TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALICE SPRINGS

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) holds serious concerns regarding the declaration of an emergency situation in Alice Springs and the announcement of a curfew in the Alice Springs CBD for only children under 18 years old.

The issues experienced in Alice Springs are grounded in decades of neglect, through chronic underfunding and under-resourcing of practical and policy solutions that address the root causes of poverty; poor access to work and training opportunities, disengagement from education, chronic overcrowding and homelessness and unmet disability, mental health and trauma needs.

As detailed in our 2023 Report ["They Can't Go Back Home – Young people and homeless in Mparntwe Alice Springs"](#) many young people in Alice Springs don't feel safe at home, or even have a stable home to stay in. There is a desperate need for home like youth-specific accommodation in Alice Springs town.

Many community organisations and leaders have reached out to offer support and assistance to work through solutions to these complicated problems.

Disappointingly, neither the Commissioner nor OCC staff were consulted prior to the decision to declare an emergency situation and curfew. The OCC is yet to receive a full copy of the declaration or any action plan underpinning the service response of Police, including extended Police powers.

The OCC is concerned that the scope and terms of the emergency declaration has not been made clear. Equally, the new powers and what they mean for children, young people and their families has not been communicated in a way that can be easily understood.

A curfew that will increase contact between vulnerable Aboriginal children and the Police is not the answer to this heightened situation, which is underpinned by the tragic loss of a young person. We know vulnerable Aboriginal children are already overrepresented in the youth justice system in the Northern Territory, with Aboriginal children making up close to 100% of those in custody on any given day.

The Northern Territory Government must work with Aboriginal leaders to ensure the underlying factors behind recent incidents are addressed. This means working consistently with their commitments under Closing the Gap that embed respect, shared decision making and meaningful partnerships.

Quotes attributable to Shahleena Musk, Children's Commissioner:

- A blanket ban on all children in Alice Springs is unfair and unwarranted.

- The Northern Territory Government must work with Elders and community leaders to ensure a safe and workable solution to the current issues.
- Measures like curfews will in all likelihood increase contact between vulnerable Aboriginal children and the Police and may lead to their unnecessary criminalisation. These children are already overrepresented in the youth justice system.
- There is an urgent need for clear information on the nature and scope of the emergency declaration; including public information on what the declaration means for children and their families that is accessible and in an easy to understand format.



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